

WILLARD HUNTINGTON WRIGHT (S. S. VAN DUNE)

PHILO VANCE & THE MURDER CASES

INTRODUCTORY

If you will refer to the municipal statistics of the City of New York, you will find that the number of unsolved major crimes during the four years that John F.-X. Markham was district attorney, was far smaller than under any of his predecessors' administrations. Markham projected the district attorney's office into all manner of criminal investigations; and, as a result, many abstruse crimes on which the police had hopelessly gone aground were eventually disposed of.

But although he was personally credited with the many important indictments and subsequent convictions that he secured, the truth is that he was only an instrument in many of his most famous cases. The man who actually solved them and supplied the evidence for their prosecution was in no way connected with the city's administration and never once came into the public eye.

At that time I happened to be both legal advisor and personal friend of this other man, and it was thus that the strange and amazing facts of the situation became known to me. But not until recently have I been at liberty to make them public. Even now I am not permitted to divulge the man's name, and for that reason I have chosen, arbitrarily, to refer to him throughout these *ex officio* reports as Philo Vance.

It is, of course, possible that some of his acquaintances may, through my revelations, be able to guess his identity; and if such should prove the case, I beg of them to guard that knowledge; for though he has now gone to Italy to live and has given me permission to record the exploits of which he was the unique central character, he has very emphatically imposed his anonymity upon me; and I should not like to feel that, through any lack of discretion or delicacy, I have been the cause of his secret becoming generally known.

The present chronicle has to do with Vance's solution of the notorious Benson murder which, due to the unexpectedness of the crime, the prominence of the persons involved, and the startling evidence adduced, was invested with an interest rarely surpassed in the annals of New York's criminal history.

This sensational case was the first of many in which Vance figured as a kind of *amicus curiae* in Markham's investigations.

S. S. VAN DUNE

New York

## 01. BENSON

### 1. PHILO VANCE AT HOME

(Friday, June 14; 8:30 A.M.)

It happened that, on the morning of the momentous June the fourteenth when the discovery of the murdered body of Alvin H. Benson created a sensation which, to this day, has not entirely died away, I had breakfasted with Philo Vance in his apartment. It was not unusual for me to share Vance's luncheons and dinners, but to have breakfast with him was something of an occasion. He was a late riser, and it was his habit to remain incommunicado until his midday meal.

The reason for this early meeting was a matter of business—or, rather, of aesthetics. On the afternoon of the previous day Vance had attended a preview of Vollard's collection of Cézanne watercolors at the Kessler Galleries and, having seen several pictures he particularly wanted, he had invited me to an early breakfast to give me instructions regarding their purchase.

A word concerning my relationship with Vance is necessary to clarify my role of narrator in this chronicle. The legal tradition is deeply imbedded in my family, and when my preparatory-school days were over, I was sent, almost as a matter of course, to Harvard to study law. It was there I met Vance, a reserved, cynical, and caustic freshman who was the bane of his professors and the fear of his fellow classmates. Why he should have chosen me, of all the students at the university, for his extrascholastic association, I have never been able to understand fully. My own liking for Vance was simply explained: he fascinated and interested me, and supplied me with a novel kind of intellectual diversion. In his liking for me, however, no such basis of appeal was present. I was (and am now) a commonplace fellow, possessed of a conservative and rather conventional mind. But, at least, my mentality was not rigid, and the ponderosity of the legal procedure did not impress me greatly—which is why, no doubt, I had little taste for my inherited profession—; and it is possible that these traits found certain affinities in Vance's unconscious mind. There is, to be sure, the less consoling explanation that I appealed to Vance as a kind of foil, or anchorage, and that he sensed in my nature a complementary antithesis to his own. But whatever the explanation, we were much together; and, as the years went by, that association ripened into an inseparable friendship.

Upon graduation I entered my father's law firm—Van Dine and Davis—and after five years of dull apprenticeship I was taken into the firm as the junior partner. At present I am the second Van Dine of Van Dine, Davis, and Van Dine, with offices at 120 Broadway. At about the time my name first appeared on the letterheads of the firm, Vance returned from Europe, where he had been living during my legal novitiate, and, an aunt of his having died and made him her principal beneficiary, I was called upon to discharge the technical obligations involved in putting him in possession of his inherited property.

This work was the beginning of a new and somewhat unusual relationship between us. Vance had a strong distaste for any kind of business transaction, and in time I became the custodian of all his monetary interests and his agent at large. I found that his affairs were various enough to occupy as much of my time as I cared to give to legal matters, and as Vance was able to indulge the luxury of having a personal legal factotum, so to speak, I permanently closed my desk at the office and devoted myself exclusively to his needs and whims.

If, up to the time when Vance summoned me to discuss the purchase of the Cézannes, I had harbored any secret or repressed regrets for having deprived the firm of Van Dine, Davis, and Van Dine of my modest legal talents, they were permanently banished on that eventful morning; for, beginning with the notorious Benson murder, and extending over a period of nearly four years, it was my privilege to be a spectator of what I believe was the most amazing series of criminal cases that ever passed before the eyes of a young lawyer. Indeed, the grim dramas I witnessed during that period constitute one of the most astonishing secret documents in the police history of this country.

Of these dramas Vance was the central character. By an analytical and interpretative process which, as far as I know, has never before been applied to criminal activities, he succeeded in solving many of the important crimes on which both the police and the district attorney's office had hopelessly fallen down.

Due to my peculiar relations with Vance it happened that not only did I participate in all the cases with which he was connected but I was also present at most of the informal discussions concerning them which took place between him and the district attorney; and, being of methodical temperament, I kept a fairly complete record of them. In addition, I noted down (as accurately as memory permitted) Vance's unique psychological methods of determining guilt, as he explained them from time to time. It is fortunate that I performed this gratuitous labor of accumulation and transcription, for now that circumstances have unexpectedly rendered possible my making the cases public, I am able to present them in full detail and with all their various sidelights and succeeding steps—a task that would be impossible were it not for my numerous clippings and *adversaria*.

Fortunately, too, the first case to draw Vance into its ramifications was that of Alvin Benson's murder. Not only did it prove one of the most famous of New York's *causes célèbres*, but it gave Vance an excellent opportunity of displaying his rare talents of deductive reasoning, and, by its nature and magnitude, aroused his interest in a branch of activity which heretofore had been alien to his temperamental promptings and habitual predilections.

The case intruded upon Vance's life suddenly and unexpectedly, although he himself had, by a casual request made to the district attorney over a month before, been the involuntary agent of this destruction of his normal routine. The thing, in fact, burst upon us before we had quite finished our breakfast on that mid-June morning, and put an end temporarily to all business connected with the purchase of the Cézanne paintings. When, later in the day, I visited the Kessler Galleries, two of the watercolors that Vance had particularly desired had been sold; and I am convinced that, despite his success in the unraveling of the Benson murder mystery and his saving of at least one innocent person from arrest, he has never to this day felt entirely compensated for the loss of those two little sketches on which he had set his heart.

As I was ushered into the living room that morning by Currie, a rare old English servant who acted as Vance's butler, valet, majordomo and, on occasions, specialty cook, Vance was sitting in a large armchair, attired in a surah silk dressing gown and gray

suede slippers, with Vollard's book on Cézanne open across his knees.

"Forgive my not rising, Van." He greeted me casually. "I have the whole weight of the modern evolution in art resting on my legs. Furthermore, this plebeian early rising fatigues me, y'know."

He rifled the pages of the volume, pausing here and there at a reproduction.

"This chap Vollard," he remarked at length, "has been rather liberal with our art-fearing country. He has sent a really goodish collection of his Cézannes here. I viewed 'em yesterday with the proper reverence and, I might add, unconcern, for Kessler was watching me; and I've marked the ones I want you to buy for me as soon as the gallery opens this morning."

He handed me a small catalog he had been using as a bookmark.

"A beastly assignment, I know," he added, with an indolent smile. "These delicate little smudges with all their blank paper will prob'ly be meaningless to your legal mind—they're so unlike a neatly typed brief, don't y' know. And you'll no doubt think some of 'em are hung upside-down—one of 'em is, in fact, and even Kessler doesn't know it. But don't fret, Van old dear. They're very beautiful and valuable little knickknacks, and rather inexpensive when one considers what they'll be bringing in a few years. Really an excellent investment for some money-loving soul, y' know—infnitely better than that Lawyer's Equity Stock over which you grew so eloquent at the time of my dear Aunt Agatha's death."<sup>[1]</sup>

Vance's one passion (if a purely intellectual enthusiasm may be called a passion) was art—not art in its narrow, personal aspects, but in its broader, more universal significance. And art was not only his dominating interest but his chief diversion. He was something of an authority on Japanese and Chinese prints; he knew tapestries and ceramics; and once I heard him give an impromptu *causerie* to a few guests on Tanagra figurines, which, had it been transcribed, would have made a most delightful and instructive monograph.

Vance had sufficient means to indulge his instinct for collecting, and possessed a fine assortment of pictures and *objets d'art*. His collection was heterogeneous only in its superficial characteristics: every piece he owned embodied some principle of form or line that related it to all the others. One who knew art could feel the unity and consistency in all the items with which he surrounded himself, however widely separated they were in point of time or *métier* or surface appeal. Vance, I have always felt, was one of those rare human beings, a collector with a definite philosophic point of view.

His apartment in East Thirty-eighth Street—actually the two top floors of an old mansion, beautifully remodeled and in part rebuilt to secure spacious rooms and lofty ceilings—was filled, but not crowded, with rare specimens of oriental and occidental, ancient and modern, art. His paintings ranged from the Italian primitives to Cézanne and Matisse; and among his collection of original drawings were works as widely separated as those of Michelangelo and Picasso. Vance's Chinese prints constituted one of the finest private collections in this country. They included beautiful examples of the work of Ririomin, Rianchu, Jinkomin, Kakei, and Mokkei.

"The Chinese," Vance once said to me, "are the truly great artists of the East. They were the men whose work expressed most intensely a broad philosophic spirit. By contrast the Japanese were superficial. It's a long step between the little more than decorative *souci* of a Hokusai and the profoundly thoughtful and conscious artistry of a Ririomin. Even when Chinese art degenerated under the Manchus, we find in it a deep philosophic quality—a spiritual *sensibilité*, so to speak. And in the modern copies of copies—what is called the *bunjinga* style—we still have pictures of profound meaning."

Vance's catholicity of taste in art was remarkable. His collection was as varied as that of a museum. It embraced a black-figured amphora by Amasis, a proto-Corinthian vase in the Aegean style, Koubatcha and Rhodian plates, Athenian pottery, a sixteenth-century Italian holywater stoup of rock crystal, pewter of the Tudor period (several pieces bearing the double-rose hallmark), a bronze plaque by Cellini, a triptych of Limoges enamel, a Spanish retable of an altarpiece by Vallfogona, several Etruscan bronzes, an Indian Greco Buddhist, a statuette of the Goddess Kuan Yin from the Ming Dynasty, a number of very fine Renaissance woodcuts, and several specimens of Byzantine, Carolingian, and early French ivory carvings.

His Egyptian treasures included a gold jug from Zakazik, a statuette of the Lady Nai (as lovely as the one in the Louvre), two beautifully carved steles of the First Theban Age, various small sculptures comprising rare representations of Hapi and Amset, and several Arrentine bowls carved with Kalathiskos dancers. On top of one of his embayed Jacobean bookcases in the library, where most of his modern paintings and drawings were hung, was a fascinating group of African sculpture—ceremonial masks and statuette fetishes from French Guinea, the Sudan, Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, and the Congo.

A definite purpose has animated me in speaking at such length about Vance's art instinct, for, in order to understand fully the melodramatic adventures which began for him on that June morning, one must have a general idea of the man's penchants and inner promptings. His interest in art was an important—one might almost say the dominant—factor in his personality. I have never met a man quite like him—a man so apparently diversified and yet so fundamentally consistent.

Vance was what many would call a dilettante. But the designation does him injustice. He was a man of unusual culture and brilliance. An aristocrat by birth and instinct, he held himself severely aloof from the common world of men. In his manner there was an indefinable contempt for inferiority of all kinds. The great majority of those with whom he came in contact regarded him as a snob. Yet there was in his condescension and disdain no trace of spuriousness. His snobbishness was intellectual as well as social. He detested stupidity even more, I believe, than he did vulgarity or bad taste. I have heard him on several occasions quote Fouché's famous line: *C'est plus qu'un crime; c'est une faute*. And he meant it literally.

Vance was frankly a cynic, but he was rarely bitter; his was a flippant, Juvenalian cynicism. Perhaps he may best be described as a bored and supercilious, but highly conscious and penetrating, spectator of life. He was keenly interested in all human reactions; but it was the interest of the scientist, not the humanitarian. Withal he was a man of rare personal charm. Even people who found it difficult to admire him found it equally difficult not to like him. His somewhat quixotic mannerisms and his slightly English accent and inflection—a heritage of his postgraduate days at Oxford—impressed those who did not know him well as affectations. But the truth is, there was very little of the *poseur* about him.

He was unusually good-looking, although his mouth was ascetic and cruel, like the mouths on some of the Medici portraits<sup>[2]</sup>; moreover, there was a slightly derisive hauteur in the lift of his eyebrows. Despite the aquiline severity of his lineaments, his face was highly sensitive. His forehead was full and sloping—it was the artist's, rather than the scholar's, brow. His cold gray eyes were widely spaced. His nose was straight and slender, and his chin narrow but prominent, with an unusually deep cleft. When I saw John

Barrymore recently in *Hamlet*, I was somehow reminded of Vance; and once before, in a scene of *Caesar and Cleopatra* played by Forbes-Robertson, I received a similar impression.<sup>[3]</sup>

Vance was slightly under six feet, graceful, and giving the impression of sinewy strength and nervous endurance. He was an expert fencer and had been the captain of the university's fencing team. He was mildly fond of outdoor sports and had a knack of doing things well without any extensive practice. His golf handicap was only three; and one season he had played on our championship polo team against England. Nevertheless, he had a positive antipathy to walking and would not go a hundred yards on foot if there was any possible means of riding.

In his dress he was always fashionable—scrupulously correct to the smallest detail—yet unobtrusive. He spent considerable time at his clubs; his favorite was the Stuyvesant, because, as he explained to me, its membership was drawn largely from the political and commercial ranks, and he was never drawn into a discussion which required any mental effort. He went occasionally to the more modern operas and was a regular subscriber to the symphony concerts and chamber music recitals.

Incidentally, he was one of the most unerring poker players I have ever seen. I mention this fact not merely because it was unusual and significant that a man of Vance's type should have preferred so democratic a game to bridge or chess, for instance, but because his knowledge of the science of human psychology involved in poker had an intimate bearing on the chronicles I am about to set down.

Vance's knowledge of psychology was indeed uncanny. He was gifted with an instinctively accurate judgment of people, and his study and reading had coordinated and rationalized this gift to an amazing extent. He was well grounded in the academic principles of psychology, and all his courses at college had either centered about this subject or been subordinated to it. While I was confining myself to a restricted area of torts and contracts, constitutional and common law, equity, evidence, and pleading, Vance was reconnoitering the whole field of cultural endeavor. He had courses in the history of religions, the Greek classics, biology, civics, and political economy, philosophy, anthropology, literature, theoretical and experimental psychology, and ancient and modern languages.<sup>[4]</sup> But it was, I think, his courses under Münsterberg and William James that interested him the most.

Vance's mind was basically philosophical—that is, philosophical in the more general sense. Being singularly free from the conventional sentimentalities and current superstitions, he could look beneath the surface of human acts into actuating impulses and motives. Moreover, he was resolute both in his avoidance of any attitude that savored of credulousness and in his adherence to cold, logical exactness in his mental processes.

"Until we can approach all human problems," he once remarked, "with the clinical aloofness and cynical contempt of a doctor examining a guinea pig strapped to a board, we have little chance of getting at the truth."

Vance led an active, but by no means animated, social life—a concession to various family ties. But he was not a social animal—I cannot remember ever having met a man with so undeveloped a gregarious instinct—and when he went forth into the social world, it was generally under compulsion. In fact, one of his "duty" affairs had occupied him on the night before that memorable June breakfast; otherwise, we would have consulted about the Cézannes the evening before; and Vance grouched a good deal about it while Currie was serving our strawberries and eggs *Bénédictine*. Later on I was to give profound thanks to the God of Coincidence that the blocks had been arranged in just that pattern; for had Vance been slumbering peacefully at nine o'clock when the district attorney called, I would probably have missed four of the most interesting and exciting years of my life; and many of New York's shrewdest and most desperate criminals might still be at large.

Vance and I had just settled back in our chairs for our second cup of coffee and a cigarette when Currie, answering an impetuous ringing of the front door bell, ushered the district attorney into the living room.

"By all that's holy!" he exclaimed, raising his hands in mock astonishment. "New York's leading *flâneur* and art connoisseur is up and about!"

"And I am suffused with blushes at the disgrace of it," Vance replied.

It was evident, however, that the district attorney was not in a jovial mood. His face suddenly sobered. "Vance, a serious thing has brought me here. I'm in a great hurry and merely dropped by to keep my promise. . . . The fact is, Alvin Benson has been murdered."

Vance lifted his eyebrows languidly. "Really, now," he drawled. "How messy! But he no doubt deserved it. In any event, that's no reason why you should repine. Take a chair and have a cup of Currie's incomp'rabable coffee." And before the other could protest, he rose and pushed a bell-button.

Markham hesitated a second or two.

"Oh, well. A couple of minutes won't make any difference. But only a gulp." And he sank into a chair facing us.



## 2. AT THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

(Friday, June 14; 9 A.M.)

John F.-X. Markham, as you remember, had been elected district attorney of New York County on the Independent Reform Ticket during one of the city's periodical reactions against Tammany Hall. He served his four years and would probably have been elected to a second term had not the ticket been hopelessly split by the political juggling of his opponents. He was an indefatigable worker and projected the district attorney's office into all manner of criminal and civil investigations. Being utterly incorruptible, he not only aroused the fervid admiration of his constituents but produced an almost unprecedented sense of security in those who had opposed him on partisan lines.

He had been in office only a few months when one of the newspapers referred to him as the Watch Dog; and the sobriquet clung to him until the end of his administration. Indeed, his record as a successful prosecutor during the four years of his incumbency was such a remarkable one that even today it is not infrequently referred to in legal and political discussions.

Markham was a tall, strongly built man in the middle forties, with a clean-shaven, somewhat youthful face which belied his uniformly gray hair. He was not handsome according to conventional standards, but he had an unmistakable air of distinction, and was possessed of an amount of social culture rarely found in our latter-day political officeholders. Withal he was a man of brusque and vindictive temperament; but his brusqueness was an incrustation on a solid foundation of good breeding, not—as is usually the case—the roughness of substructure showing through an inadequately superimposed crust of gentility.

When his nature was relieved of the stress of duty and care, he was the most gracious of men. But early in my acquaintance with him I had seen his attitude of cordiality suddenly displaced by one of grim authority. It was as if a new personality—hard, indomitable, symbolic of eternal justice—had in that moment been born in Markham's body. I was to witness this transformation many times before our association ended. In fact, this very morning, as he sat opposite to me in Vance's living room, there was more than a hint of it in the aggressive sternness of his expression; and I knew that he was deeply troubled over Alvin Benson's murder.

He swallowed his coffee rapidly and was setting down the cup, when Vance, who had been watching him with quizzical amusement, remarked, "I say, why this sad preoccupation over the passing of one Benson? You weren't, by any chance, the murderer, what?"

Markham ignored Vance's levity. "I'm on my way to Benson's. Do you care to come along? You asked for the experience, and I dropped in to keep my promise."

I then recalled that several weeks before at the Stuyvesant Club, when the subject of the prevalent homicides in New York was being discussed, Vance had expressed a desire to accompany the district attorney on one of his investigations, and that Markham had promised to take him on his next important case. Vance's interest in the psychology of human behavior had prompted the desire, and his friendship with Markham, which had been of long standing, had made the request possible.

"You remember everything, don't you?" Vance replied lazily. "An admirable gift, even if an uncomfortable one." He glanced at the clock on the mantel, it lacked a few minutes of nine. "But what an indecent hour! Suppose someone should see me."

Markham moved forward impatiently in his chair. "Well, if you think the gratification of your curiosity would compensate you for the disgrace of being seen in public at nine o'clock in the morning, you'll have to hurry. I certainly won't take you in dressing gown and bedroom slippers. And I most certainly won't wait over five minutes for you to get dressed."

"Why the haste, old dear?" Vance asked, yawning. "The chap's dead, don't y' know; he can't possibly run away."

"Come, get a move on, you orchid," the other urged. "This affair is no joke. It's damned serious, and from the looks of it, it's going to cause an ungodly scandal. What are you going to do?"

"Do? I shall humbly follow the great avenger of the common people," returned Vance, rising and making an obsequious bow.

He rang for Currie and ordered his clothes brought to him.

"I'm attending a levee which Mr. Markham is holding over a corpse and I want something rather spiffy. Is it warm enough for a silk suit? . . . And a lavender tie, by all means."

"I trust you won't also wear your green carnation," grumbled Markham.

"Tut! Tut!" Vance chided him. "You've been reading Mr. Hitchens. Such heresy in a district attorney! Anyway, you know full well I never wear boutonnières. The decoration has fallen into disrepute. The only remaining devotees of the practice are roués and saxophone players. . . . But tell me about the departed Benson."

Vance was now dressing, with Currie's assistance, at a rate of speed I had rarely seen him display in such matters. Beneath his bantering pose I recognized the true eagerness of the man for a new experience and one that promised such dramatic possibilities for his alert and observing mind.

"You knew Alvin Benson casually, I believe," the district attorney said. "Well, early this morning his housekeeper phoned the local precinct station that she had found him shot through the head, fully dressed and sitting in his favorite chair in his living room. The message, of course, was put through at once to the telegraph bureau at headquarters, and my assistant on duty notified me immediately. I was tempted to let the case follow the regular police routine. But half an hour later Major Benson, Alvin's brother, phoned me and asked me, as a special favor, to take charge. I've known the major for twenty years and I couldn't very well refuse. So I took a hurried breakfast and started for Benson's house. He lived in West Forty-eighth Street; and as I passed your corner I remembered your request and dropped by to see if you cared to go along."

"Most consid'rate," murmured Vance, adjusting his four-in-hand before a small polychrome mirror by the door. Then he turned to me. "Come, Van. We'll all gaze upon the defunct Benson. I'm sure some of Markham's sleuths will unearth the fact that I detested the boulder and accuse me of the crime; and I'll feel safer, don't y' know, with legal talent at hand. . . . No objections—eh, what, Markham?"

"Certainly not," the other agreed readily, although I felt that he would rather not have had me along. But I was too deeply interested

in the affair to offer any ceremonious objections and I followed Vance and Markham downstairs.

As we settled back in the waiting taxicab and started up Madison Avenue, I marveled a little, as I had often done before, at the strange friendship of these two dissimilar men beside me—Markham forthright, conventional, a trifle austere, and overserious in his dealings with life; and Vance casual, mercurial, debonair, and whimsically cynical in the face of the grimmest realities. And yet this temperamental diversity seemed, in some wise, the very cornerstone of their friendship; it was as if each saw in the other some unattainable field of experience and sensation that had been denied himself. Markham represented to Vance the solid and immutable realism of life, whereas Vance symbolized for Markham the carefree, exotic, gypsy spirit of intellectual adventure. Their intimacy, in fact, was even greater than showed on the surface; and despite Markham's exaggerated deprecations of the other's attitudes and opinions, I believe he respected Vance's intelligence more profoundly than that of any other man he knew.

As we rode uptown that morning Markham appeared preoccupied and gloomy. No word had been spoken since we left the apartment; but as we turned west into Forty-eighth Street Vance asked: "What is the social etiquette of these early-morning murder functions, aside from removing one's hat in the presence of the body?"

"You keep your hat on," growled Markham.

"My word! Like a synagogue, what? Most int'restin'! Perhaps one takes off one's shoes so as not to confuse the footprints."

"No," Markham told him. "The guests remain fully clothed—in which the function differs from the ordinary evening affairs of your smart set."

"My *dear* Markham!"—Vance's tone was one of melancholy reproof—"The horrified moralist in your nature is at work again. That remark of yours was positively Epworth Leaguish."

Markham was too abstracted to follow up Vance's badinage. "There are one or two things," he said soberly, "that I think I'd better warn you about. From the looks of it, this case is going to cause considerable noise, and there'll be a lot of jealousy and battling for honors. I won't be fallen upon and caressed affectionately by the police for coming in at this stage of the game; so be careful not to rub their bristles the wrong way. My assistant, who's there now, tells me he thinks the inspector has put Heath in charge. Heath's a sergeant in the homicide bureau and is undoubtedly convinced at the present moment that I'm taking hold in order to get the publicity."

"Aren't you his technical superior?" asked Vance.

"Of course; and that makes the situation just so much more delicate. . . . I wish to God the major hadn't called me up."

"Eheu!" sighed Vance. "The world is full of Heaths. Beastly nuisances."

"Don't misunderstand me," Markham hastened to assure him. "Heath is a good man—in fact, as good a man as we've got. The mere fact that he was assigned to the case shows how seriously the affair is regarded at headquarters. There'll be no unpleasantness about my taking charge, you understand; but I want the atmosphere to be as halcyon as possible. Heath'll resent my bringing along you two chaps as spectators, anyway; so I beg of you, Vance, emulate the modest violet."

"I prefer the blushing rose, if you don't mind," Vance protested. "However, I'll instantly give the hypersensitive Heath one of my choicest Régie cigarettes with the rose-petal tips."

"If you do," smiled Markham, "he'll probably arrest you as a suspicious character."

We had drawn up abruptly in front of an old brownstone residence on the upper side of Forty-eighth Street, near Sixth Avenue. It was a house of the better class, built on a twenty-five foot lot in a day when permanency and beauty were still matters of consideration among the city's architects. The design was conventional, to accord with the other houses in the block, but a touch of luxury and individuality was to be seen in its decorative copings and in the stone carvings about the entrance and above the windows.

There was a shallow paved areaway between the street line and the front elevation of the house; but this was enclosed in a high iron railing, and the only entrance was by way of the front door, which was about six feet above the street level at the top of a flight of ten broad stone stairs. Between the entrance and the right-hand wall were two spacious windows covered with heavy iron grilles.

A considerable crowd of morbid onlookers had gathered in front of the house; and on the steps lounged several alert-looking young men whom I took to be newspaper reporters. The door of our taxicab was opened by a uniformed patrolman who saluted Markham with exaggerated respect and ostentatiously cleared a passage for us through the gaping throng of idlers. Another uniformed patrolman stood in the little vestibule and, on recognizing Markham, held the outer door open for us and saluted with great dignity.

"Ave, Caesar, te salutamus," whispered Vance, grinning.

"Be quiet," Markham grumbled. "I've got troubles enough without your garbled questions."

As we passed through the massive carved-oak front door into the main hallway we were met by Assistant District Attorney Dinwiddie, a serious, swarthy young man with a prematurely lined face, whose appearance gave one the impression that most of the woes of humanity were resting upon his shoulders.

"Good morning, Chief," he greeted Markham, with eager relief. "I'm damned glad you've got here. This case'll rip things wide open. Cut-and-dried murder, and not a lead."

Markham nodded gloomily and looked past him into the living room. "Who's here?" he asked.

"The whole works, from the chief inspector down," Dinwiddie told him, with a hopeless shrug, as if the fact boded ill for all concerned.

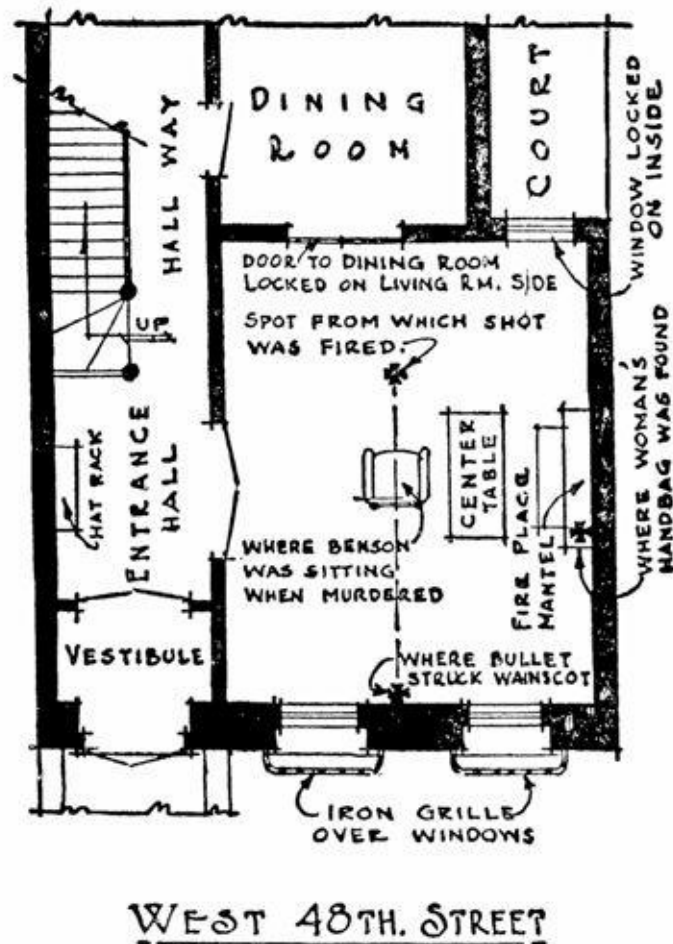
At that moment a tall, massive, middle-aged man with a pink complexion and a closely cropped white moustache, appeared in the doorway of the living room. On seeing Markham he came forward stiffly with outstretched hand. I recognized him at once as Chief Inspector O'Brien, who was in command of the entire police department. Dignified greetings were exchanged between him and Markham, and then Vance and I were introduced to him. Inspector O'Brien gave us each a curt, silent nod and turned back to the living room, with Markham, Dinwiddie, Vance, and myself following.

The room, which was entered by a wide double door about ten feet down the hall, was a spacious one, almost square, and with high ceilings. Two windows gave on the street; and on the extreme right of the north wall, opposite to the front of the house, was another window opening on a paved court. To the left of this window were the sliding doors leading into the dining room at the rear.

The room presented an appearance of garish opulence. About the walls hung several elaborately framed paintings of race horses and a number of mounted hunting trophies. A highly colored oriental rug covered nearly the entire floor. In the middle of the east wall,

facing the door, was an ornate fireplace and carved marble mantel. Placed diagonally in the corner on the right stood a walnut upright piano with copper trimmings. Then there was a mahogany bookcase with glass doors and figured curtains, a sprawling tapestried davenport, a squat Venetian tabouret with inlaid mother-of-pearl, a teakwood stand containing a large brass samovar, and a buhl-topped center table nearly six feet long. At the side of the table nearest the hallway, with its back to the front windows, stood a large wicker lounge chair with a high, fan-shaped back.

In this chair reposed the body of Alvin Benson.



Though I had served two years at the front in the World War and had seen death in many terrible guises, I could not repress a strong sense of revulsion at the sight of this murdered man. In France death had seemed an inevitable part of my daily routine, but here all the organisms of environment were opposed to the idea of fatal violence. The bright June sunshine was pouring into the room, and through the open windows came the continuous din of the city's noises, which, for all their cacophony, are associated with peace and security and the orderly social processes of life.

Benson's body was reclining in the chair in an attitude so natural that one almost expected him to turn to us and ask why we were intruding upon his privacy. His head was resting against the chair's back. His right leg was crossed over his left in a position of comfortable relaxation. His right arm was resting easily on the center table, and his left arm lay along the chair's arm. But that which most strikingly gave his attitude its appearance of naturalness was a small book which he held in his right hand with his thumb still marking the place where he had evidently been reading.<sup>[5]</sup>

He had been shot through the forehead from in front; and the small circular bullet mark was now almost black as a result of the coagulation of the blood. A large dark spot on the rug at the rear of the chair indicated the extent of the hemorrhage caused by the grinding passage of the bullet through his brain. Had it not been for these grisly indications, one might have thought that he had merely paused momentarily in his reading to lean back and rest.

He was attired in an old smoking jacket and red felt bedroom slippers but still wore his dress trousers and evening shirt, though he was collarless, and the neckband of the shirt had been unbuttoned as if for comfort. He was not an attractive man physically, being almost completely bald and more than a little stout. His face was flabby, and the puffiness of his neck was doubly conspicuous without

its confining collar. With a slight shudder of distaste I ended my brief contemplation of him and turned to the other occupants of the room.

Two burly fellows with large hands and feet, their black felt hats pushed far back on their heads, were minutely inspecting the iron grillwork over the front windows. They seemed to be giving particular attention to the points where the bars were cemented into the masonry; and one of them had just taken hold of a grille with both hands and was shaking it, simian-wise, as if to test its strength. Another man, of medium height and dapper appearance, with a small blond moustache, was bending over in front of the grate looking intently, so it seemed, at the dusty gas logs. On the far side of the table a thickset man in blue serge and a derby hat, stood with arms akimbo scrutinizing the silent figure in the chair. His eyes, hard and pale blue, were narrowed, and his square prognathous jaw was rigidly set. He was gazing with rapt intensity at Benson's body, as though he hoped, by the sheer power of concentration, to probe the secret of the murder.

Another man, of unusual mien, was standing before the rear window, with a jeweler's magnifying glass in his eye, inspecting a small object held in the palm of his hand. From pictures I had seen of him I knew he was Captain Carl Hagedorn, the most famous firearms expert in America. He was a large, cumbersome, broad-shouldered man of about fifty; and his black, shiny clothes were several sizes too large for him. His coat hitched up behind, and in front hung halfway down to his knees; and his trousers were baggy and lay over his ankles in grotesquely comic folds. His head was round and abnormally large, and his ears seemed sunken into his skull. His mouth was entirely hidden by a scraggly, gray-shot moustache, all the hairs of which grew downward, forming a kind of lambrequin to his lips. Captain Hagedorn had been connected with the New York Police Department for thirty years, and though his appearance and manner were ridiculed at headquarters, he was profoundly respected. His word on any point pertaining to firearms and gunshot wounds was accepted as final by headquarters men.

In the rear of the room, near the dining room door, stood two other men talking earnestly together. One was Inspector William M. Moran, commanding officer of the detective bureau; the other, Sergeant Ernest Heath of the homicide bureau, of whom Markham had already spoken to us.

As we entered the room in the wake of Chief Inspector O'Brien everyone ceased his occupation for a moment and looked at the district attorney in a spirit of uneasy, but respectful, recognition. Only Captain Hagedorn, after a cursory squint at Markham, returned to the inspection of the tiny object in his hand, with an abstracted unconcern which brought a faint smile to Vance's lips.

Inspector Moran and Sergeant Heath came forward with stolid dignity; and after the ceremony of handshaking (which I later observed to be a kind of religious rite among the police and the members of the district attorney's staff), Markham introduced Vance and me and briefly explained our presence. The inspector bowed pleasantly to indicate his acceptance of the intrusion, but I noticed that Heath ignored Markham's explanation and proceeded to treat us as if we were nonexistent.

Inspector Moran was a man of different quality from the others in the room. He was about sixty, with white hair and a brown moustache, and was immaculately dressed. He looked more like a successful Wall Street broker of the better class than a police official.<sup>[6]</sup>

"I've assigned Sergeant Heath to the case, Mr. Markham," he explained in a low, well-modulated voice. "It looks as though we are in for a bit of trouble before it's finished. Even the chief inspector thought it warranted his lending the moral support of his presence to the preliminary rounds. He has been here since eight o'clock."

Inspector O'Brien had left us immediately upon entering the room and now stood between the front windows, watching the proceedings with a grave, indecipherable face.

"Well, I think I'll be going," Moran added. "They had me out of bed at seven thirty, and I haven't had any breakfast yet. I won't be needed anyway now that you're here. . . . Good morning." And again he shook hands.

When he had gone, Markham turned to the assistant district attorney.

"Look after these two gentlemen, will you, Dinwiddie? They're babes in the wood and want to see how these affairs work. Explain things to them while I have a little confab with Sergeant Heath."

Dinwiddie accepted the assignment eagerly. I think he was glad of the opportunity to have someone to talk to by way of venting his pent-up excitement.

As the three of us turned rather instinctively toward the body of the murdered man—he was, after all, the hub of this tragic drama—I heard Heath say in a sullen voice:

"I suppose you'll take charge now, Mr. Markham."

Dinwiddie and Vance were talking together, and I watched Markham with interest after what he had told us of the rivalry between the police department and the district attorney's office.

Markham looked at Heath with a slow, gracious smile and shook his head. "No, Sergeant," he replied. "I'm here to work with you, and I want that relationship understood from the outset. In fact, I wouldn't be here now if Major Benson hadn't phoned me and asked me to lend a hand. And I particularly want my name kept out of it. It's pretty generally known—and if it isn't, it will be—that the major is an old friend of mine; so, it will be better all round if my connection with the case is kept quiet."

Heath murmured something I did not catch, but I could see that he had, in large measure, been placated. He, in common with all other men who were acquainted with Markham, knew his word was good; and he personally liked the district attorney.

"If there's any credit coming from this affair," Markham went on, "the police department is to get it; therefore I think it best for you to see the report. . . . And, by the way," he added good-naturedly, "if there's any blame coming, you fellows will have to bear that, too."

"Fair enough," assented Heath.

"And now, Sergeant, let's get to work," said Markham.

### 3. A LADY'S HANDBAG

(Friday, June 14; 9:30 A.M.)

The district attorney and Heath walked up to the body and stood regarding it.

"You see," Heath explained; "he was shot directly from the front. A pretty powerful shot, too, for the bullet passed through the head and struck the woodwork over there by the window." He pointed to a place on the wainscot a short distance from the floor near the drapery of the window nearest the hallway. "We found the expelled shell, and Captain Hagedorn's got the bullet."

He turned to the firearms expert. "How about it, Captain? Anything special?"

Hagedorn raised his head slowly and gave Heath a myopic frown. Then, after a few awkward movements, he answered with unhurried precision. "A forty-five army bullet—Colt automatic."

"Any idea how close to Benson the gun was held?" asked Markham.

"Yes, sir, I have," Hagedorn replied, in his ponderous monotone. "Between five and six feet—probably."

Heath snorted. "Probably," he repeated to Markham with good-natured contempt. "You can bank on it if the captain says so. . . . You see, sir, nothing smaller than a forty-four or forty-five will stop a man, and these steel-capped army bullets go through a human skull like it was cheese. But in order to carry straight to the woodwork the gun had to be held pretty close; and, as there aren't any powder marks on the face, it's a safe bet to take the captain's figures as to distance."

At this point we heard the front door open and close, and Dr. Doremus, the chief medical examiner, accompanied by his assistant, bustled in. He shook hands with Markham and Inspector O'Brien, and gave Heath a friendly salutation.

"Sorry I couldn't get here sooner," he apologized.

He was a nervous man with a heavily seamed face and the manner of a real estate salesman.

"What have we got here?" he asked, in the same breath, making a wry face at the body in the chair.

"You tell us, Doc," retorted Heath.

Dr. Doremus approached the murdered man with a callous indifference indicative of a long process of hardening. He first inspected the face closely. He was, I imagine, looking for powder marks. Then he glanced at the bullet hole in the forehead and at the ragged wound in the back of the head. Next he moved the dead man's arm, bent the fingers, and pushed the head a little to the side. Having satisfied himself as to the state of *rigor mortis*, he turned to Heath.

"Can we get him on the settee there?"

Heath looked at Markham inquiringly. "All through, sir?"

Markham nodded, and Heath beckoned to the two men at the front windows and ordered the body placed on the davenport. It retained its sitting posture, due to the hardening of the muscles after death, until the doctor and his assistant straightened out the limbs. The body was then undressed, and Dr. Doremus examined it carefully for other wounds. He paid particular attention to the arms; and he opened both hands wide and scrutinized the palms. At length he straightened up and wiped his hands on a large colored silk handkerchief.

"Shot through the left frontal," he announced. "Direct angle of fire. Bullet passed completely through the skull. Exit wound in the left occipital region—base of skull. You found the bullet, didn't you? He was awake when shot, and death was immediate—probably never knew what hit him. . . . He's been dead about—well, I should judge, eight hours, maybe longer."

"How about twelve thirty for the exact time?" asked Heath.

The doctor looked at his watch.

"Fits O.K. . . . Anything else?"

No one answered, and after a slight pause the chief inspector spoke. "We'd like a postmortem report today, Doctor."

"That'll be all right," Dr. Doremus answered, snapping shut his medical case and handing it to his assistant. "But get the body to the mortuary as soon as you can."

After a brief handshaking ceremony, he went out hurriedly.

Heath turned to the detective who had been standing by the table when we entered. "Burke, you phone headquarters to call for the body, and tell 'em to get a move on. Then go back to the office and wait for me."

Burke saluted and disappeared.

Heath then addressed one of the two men who had been inspecting the grilles of the front windows. "How about that ironwork, Snitkin?"

"No chance, Sergeant," was the answer. "Strong as a jail—both of 'em. Nobody never got in through those windows."

"Very good," Heath told him. "Now you two fellows chase along with Burke."

When they had gone, the dapper man in the blue serge suit and derby, whose sphere of activity had seemed to be the fireplace, laid two cigarette butts on the table.

"I found these under the gas logs, Sergeant," he explained unenthusiastically. "Not much, but there's nothing else laying around."

"All right, Emery." Heath gave the butts a disgruntled look. "You needn't wait, either. I'll see you at the office later."

Hagedorn came ponderously forward. "I guess I'll be getting along, too," he rumbled. "But I'm going to keep this bullet awhile. It's got some peculiar rifling marks on it. You don't want it specially, do you, Sergeant?"

Heath smiled tolerantly. "What'll I do with it, Captain? You keep it. But don't you dare lose it."

"I won't lose it," Hagedorn assured him, with stodgy seriousness; and, without so much as a glance at either the district attorney or the chief inspector, he waddled from the room with a slightly rolling movement which suggested that of some huge amphibious mammal.

Vance, who was standing beside me near the door, turned and followed Hagedorn into the hall. The two stood talking in low tones



for several minutes. Vance appeared to be asking questions, and although I was not close enough to hear their conversation, I caught several words and phrases—"trajectory," "muzzle velocity," "angle of fire," "impetus," "impact," "deflection," and the like—and wondered what on earth had prompted this strange interrogation.

As Vance was thanking Hagedorn for his information Inspector O'Brien entered the hall. "Learning fast?" he asked, smiling patronizingly at Vance. Then, without waiting for a reply: "Come along, Captain; I'll drive you downtown."

Markham heard him. "Have you got room for Dinwiddie, too, Inspector?"

"Plenty, Mr. Markham."

The three of them went out.

Vance and I were now left alone in the room with Heath and the district attorney, and, as if by common impulse, we all settled ourselves in chairs, Vance taking one near the dining room door directly facing the chair in which Benson had been murdered.

I had been keenly interested in Vance's manner and actions from the moment of his arrival at the house. When he had first entered the room he had adjusted his monocle carefully—an act which, despite his air of passivity, I recognized as an indication of interest. When his mind was alert and he wished to take on external impressions quickly, he invariably brought out his monocle. He could see adequately enough without it, and his use of it, I had observed, was largely the result of an intellectual dictate. The added clarity of vision it gave him seemed subtly to affect his clarity of mind.<sup>[7]</sup>

At first he had looked over the room incuriously and watched the proceedings with bored apathy; but during Heath's brief questioning of his subordinates, an expression of cynical amusement had appeared on his face. Following a few general queries to Assistant District Attorney Dinwiddie, he had sauntered, with apparent aimlessness, about the room, looking at the various articles and occasionally shifting his gaze back and forth between different pieces of furniture. At length he had stooped down and inspected the mark made by the bullet on the wainscot; and once he had gone to the door and looked up and down the hall.

The only thing that had seemed to hold his attention to any extent was the body itself. He had stood before it for several minutes, studying its position, and had even bent over the outstretched arm on the table as if to see just how the dead man's hand was holding the book. The crossed position of the legs, however, had attracted him most, and he had stood studying them for a considerable time. Finally, he had returned his monocle to his waistcoat pocket and joined Dinwiddie and me near the door, where he had stood, watching Heath and the other detectives with lazy indifference, until the departure of Captain Hagedorn.

The four of us had no more than taken seats when the patrolman stationed in the vestibule appeared at the door. "There's a man from the local precinct station here, sir," he announced, "who wants to see the officer in charge. Shall I send him in?"

Heath nodded curtly, and a moment later a large red-faced Irishman, in civilian clothes, stood before us. He saluted Heath, but on recognizing the district attorney, made Markham the recipient of his report.

"I'm Officer McLaughlin, sir—West Forty-seventh Street station," he informed us; "and I was on duty on this beat last night. Around midnight, I guess it was, there was a big gray Cadillac standing in front of this house—I noticed it particular, because it had a lot of fishing tackle sticking out the back, and all of its lights were on. When I heard of the crime this morning, I reported the car to the station sergeant, and he sent me around to tell you about it."

"Excellent," Markham commented; and then, with a nod, referred the matter to Heath.

"May be something in it," the latter admitted dubiously. "How long would you say the car was here, Officer?"

"A good half hour anyway. It was here before twelve, and when I come back at twelve thirty or thereabouts, it was still here. But the next time I come by, it was gone."

"You saw nothing else? Nobody in the car, or anyone hanging around who might have been the owner?"

"No, sir, I did not."

Several other questions of a similar nature were asked him; but nothing more could be learned, and he was dismissed.

"Anyway," remarked Heath, "the car story will be good stuff to hand the reporters."

Vance had sat through the questioning of McLaughlin with drowsy inattention—I doubt if he even heard more than the first few words of the officer's report—and now, with a stifled yawn, he rose and, sauntering to the center table, picked up one of the cigarette butts that had been found in the fireplace. After rolling it between his thumb and forefinger and scrutinizing the tip, he ripped the paper open with his thumbnail and held the exposed tobacco to his nose.

Heath, who had been watching him gloweringly, leaned suddenly forward in his chair.

"What are you doing there?" he demanded, in a tone of surly truculence.

Vance lifted his eyes in decorous astonishment.

"Merely smelling of the tobacco," he replied, with condescending unconcern. "It's rather mild, y' know, but delicately blended."

The muscles in Heath's cheeks worked angrily. "Well, you'd better put it down, sir," he advised. Then he looked Vance up and down. "Tobacco expert?" he asked, with ill-disguised sarcasm.

"Oh, dear no." Vance's voice was dulcet. "My specialty is scarab-cartouches of the Ptolemaic dynasties."

Markham interposed diplomatically. "You really shouldn't touch anything around here, Vance, at this stage of the game. You never know what'll turn out to be important. Those cigarette stubs may quite possibly be significant evidence."

"Evidence?" repeated Vance sweetly. "My word! You don't say, really! Most amusin'!"

Markham was plainly annoyed; and Heath was boiling inwardly but made no further comment; he even forced a mirthless smile. He evidently felt that he had been a little too abrupt with this friend of the district attorney's, however much the friend might have deserved being reprimanded.

Heath, however, was no sycophant in the presence of his superiors. He knew his worth and lived up to it with his whole energy, discharging the tasks to which he was assigned with a dogged indifference to his own political wellbeing. This stubbornness of spirit, and the solidity of character it implied, were respected and valued by the men over him.

He was a large, powerful man but agile and graceful in his movements, like a highly trained boxer. He had hard blue eyes, remarkably bright and penetrating, a small nose, a broad, oval chin, and a stern, straight mouth with lips that appeared always compressed. His hair, which, though he was well along in his forties, was without a trace of grayness, was cropped about the edges and



stood upright in a short bristly pompadour. His voice had an aggressive resonance, but he rarely blustered. In many ways he accorded with the conventional notion of what a detective is like. But there was something more to the man's personality, an added capability and strength, as it were; and as I sat watching him that morning I felt myself unconsciously admiring him, despite his very obvious limitations.

"What's the exact situation, Sergeant?" Markham asked. "Dinwiddie gave me only the barest facts."

Heath cleared his throat. "We got the word a little before seven. Benson's housekeeper, a Mrs. Platz, called up the local station and reported that she'd found him dead, and asked that somebody be sent over at once. The message, of course, was relayed to headquarters. I wasn't there at the time, but Burke and Emery were on duty, and after notifying Inspector Moran, they came on up here. Several of the men from the local station were already on the job doing the usual nosing about. When the inspector had got here and looked the situation over, he telephoned me to hurry along. When I arrived, the local men had gone, and three more men from the homicide bureau had joined Burke and Emery. The inspector also phoned Captain Hagedorn—he thought the case big enough to call him in on it at once—and the captain had just got here when you arrived. Mr. Dinwiddie had come in right after the inspector and phoned you at once. Chief Inspector O'Brien came along a little ahead of me. I questioned the Platz woman right off, and my men were looking the place over when you showed up."

"Where's this Mrs. Platz now?" asked Markham.

"Upstairs being watched by one of the local men. She lives in the house."

"Why did you mention the specific hour of twelve thirty to the doctor?"

"Platz told me she heard a report at that time, which I thought might have been the shot. I guess now it *was* the shot—it checks up with a number of things."

"I think we'd better have another talk with Mrs. Platz," Markham suggested. "But first: did you find anything suggestive in the room here—anything to go on?"

Heath hesitated almost imperceptibly; then he drew from his coat pocket a woman's handbag and a pair of long white kid gloves, and tossed them on the table in front of the district attorney.

"Only these," he said. "One of the local men found them on the end of the mantel over there."

After a casual inspection of the gloves Markham opened the handbag and turned its contents out onto the table. I came forward and looked on, but Vance remained in his chair, placidly smoking a cigarette.

The handbag was of fine gold mesh with a catch set with small sapphires. It was unusually small and obviously designed only for evening wear. The objects which it had held, and which Markham was now inspecting, consisted of a flat watered-silk cigarette case, a small gold phial of Roger and Gallet's Fleurs d'Amour perfume, a *cloisonné* vanity compact, a short delicate cigarette holder of inlaid amber, a gold-cased lipstick, a small embroidered French-linen handkerchief with "M. St.C." monogrammed in the corner, and a Yale latchkey.

"This ought to give us a good lead," said Markham, indicating the handkerchief. "I suppose you went over the articles carefully, Sergeant."

Heath nodded. "Yes, and I imagine the bag belongs to the woman Benson was out with last night. The housekeeper told me he had an appointment and went out to dinner in his dress clothes. She didn't hear Benson when he came back, though. Anyway, we ought to be able to run down 'M. St.C.' without much trouble."

Markham had taken up the cigarette case again, and as he held it upside down a little shower of loose dried tobacco fell onto the table.

Heath stood up suddenly. "Maybe those cigarettes came out of that case," he suggested. He picked up the intact butt and looked at it. "It's a lady's cigarette, all right. It looks as though it might have been smoked in a holder, too."

"I beg to differ with you, Sergeant," drawled Vance. "You'll forgive me, I'm sure. But there's a bit of lip rouge on the end of the cigarette. It's hard to see, on account of the gold tip."

Heath looked at Vance sharply; he was too much surprised to be resentful. After a closer inspection of the cigarette, he turned again to Vance.

"Perhaps you could also tell us from these tobacco grains, if the cigarettes came from this case," he suggested, with gruff irony.

"One never knows, does one?" Vance replied, indolently rising.

Picking up the case, he pressed it wide open and tapped it on the table. Then he looked into it closely, and a humorous smile twitched the corners of his mouth. Putting his forefinger deep into the case, he drew out a small cigarette which had evidently been wedged flat along the bottom of the pocket.

"My olfact'ry gifts won't be necess'ry now," he said. "It is apparent even to the naked eye that the cigarettes are, to speak loosely, identical—eh what, Sergeant?"

Heath grinned good-naturedly. "That's one on us, Mr. Markham." And he carefully put the cigarette and the stub in an envelope, which he marked and pocketed.

"You now see, Vance," observed Markham, "the importance of those cigarette butts."

"Can't say that I do," responded the other. "Of what possible value is a cigarette butt? You can't smoke it, y' know."

"It's evidence, my dear fellow," explained Markham patiently. "One knows that the owner of this bag returned with Benson last night and remained long enough to smoke two cigarettes."

Vance lifted his eyebrows in mock amazement. "One does, does one? Fancy that, now."

"It only remains to locate her," interjected Heath.

"She's a rather decided brunette, at any rate—if that fact will facilitate your quest any," said Vance easily; "though why you should desire to annoy the lady, I can't for the life of me imagine—really I can't, don't y' know."

"Why do you say she's a brunette?" asked Markham.

"Well, if she isn't," Vance told him, sinking listlessly back in his chair, "then she should consult a cosmetician as to the proper way to make up. I see she uses 'Rachel' powder and Guerlain's dark lipstick. And it simply isn't done among blondes, old dear."

"I defer, of course, to your expert opinion," smiled Markham. Then, to Heath: "I guess we'll have to look for a brunette, Sergeant." "It's all right with me," agreed Heath jocularly. By this time, I think, he had entirely forgiven Vance for destroying the cigarette butt.

#### 4. THE HOUSEKEEPER'S STORY

(Friday, June 14; 11 A.M.)

"Now," suggested Markham, "suppose we take a look over the house. I imagine you've done that pretty thoroughly already, Sergeant, but I'd like to see the layout. Anyway, I don't want to question the housekeeper until the body has been removed."

Heath rose. "Very good, sir. I'd like another look myself."

The four of us went into the hall and walked down the passageway to the rear of the house. At the extreme end, on the left, was a door leading downstairs to the basement; but it was locked and bolted.

"The basement is only used for storage now," Heath explained; "and the door which opens from it into the street areaway is boarded up. The Platz woman sleeps upstairs—Benson lived here alone, and there's plenty of spare room in the house—and the kitchen is on this floor."

He opened a door on the opposite side of the passageway, and we stepped into a small, modern kitchen. Its two high windows, which gave into the paved rear yard at a height of about eight feet from the ground, were securely guarded with iron bars, and, in addition, the sashes were closed and locked. Passing through a swinging door, we entered the dining room, which was directly behind the living room. The two windows here looked upon a small stone court, really no more than a deep airwell between Benson's house and the adjoining one; and these also were iron-barred and locked.

We now reentered the hallway and stood for a moment at the foot of the stairs leading above.

"You can see, Mr. Markham," Heath pointed out, "that whoever shot Benson must have gotten in by the front door. There's no other way he could have entered. Living alone, I guess Benson was a little touchy on the subject of burglars. The only window that wasn't barred was the rear one in the living room; and that was shut and locked. Anyway, it only leads into the inside court. The front windows of the living room have that ironwork over them; so they couldn't have been used even to shoot through, for Benson was shot from the opposite direction. . . . It's pretty clear the gunman got in the front door."

"Looks that way," said Markham.

"And pardon me for saying so," remarked Vance, "but Benson let him in."

"Yes?" retorted Heath unenthusiastically. "Well, we'll find all that out later, I hope."

"Oh, doubtless," Vance drily agreed.

We ascended the stairs and entered Benson's bedroom, which was directly over the living room. It was severely but well furnished and in excellent order. The bed was made, showing it had not been slept in that night; and the window shades were drawn. Benson's dinner jacket and white piqué waistcoat were hanging over a chair. A winged collar and a black bowtie were on the bed, where they had evidently been thrown when Benson had taken them off on returning home. A pair of low evening shoes were standing by the bench at the foot of the bed. In a glass of water on the night table was a platinum plate of four false teeth; and a toupee of beautiful workmanship was lying on the chiffonier.

This last item aroused Vance's special interest. He walked up to it and regarded it closely.

"Most int'restin'," he commented. "Our departed friend seems to have worn false hair; did you know that, Markham?"

"I always suspected it," was the indifferent answer.

Heath, who had remained standing on the threshold, seemed a little impatient.

"There's only one other room on this floor," he said, leading the way down the hall. "It's also a bedroom—for guests, so the housekeeper explained."

Markham and I looked in through the door, but Vance remained lounging against the balustrade at the head of the stairs. He was manifestly uninterested in Alvin Benson's domestic arrangements; and when Markham and Heath and I went up to the third floor, he sauntered down into the main hallway. When at length we descended from our tour of inspection he was casually looking over the titles in Benson's bookcase.

We had just reached the foot of the stairs when the front door opened and two men with a stretcher entered. The ambulance from the Department of Welfare had arrived to take the corpse to the Morgue; and the brutal, businesslike way in which Benson's body was covered up, lifted onto the stretcher, carried out and shoved into the wagon, made me shudder. Vance, on the other hand; after the merest fleeting glance at the two men, paid no attention to them. He had found a volume with a beautiful Humphrey-Milford binding, and was absorbed in its Roger Payne tooling and powdering.

"I think an interview with Mrs. Platz is indicated now," said Markham; and Heath went to the foot of the stairs and gave a loud, brisk order.

Presently a gray-haired, middle-aged woman entered the living room accompanied by a plainclothesman smoking a large cigar. Mrs. Platz was of the simple, old-fashioned, motherly type, with a calm, benevolent countenance. She impressed me as highly capable, and as a woman given little to hysteria—an impression strengthened by her attitude of passive resignation. She seemed, however, to possess that taciturn shrewdness that is so often found among the ignorant.

"Sit down, Mrs. Platz," Markham greeted her kindly. "I'm the district attorney, and there are some questions I want to ask you."

She took a straight chair by the door and waited, gazing nervously from one to the other of us. Markham's gentle, persuasive voice, though, appeared to encourage her; and her answers became more and more fluent.

The main facts that transpired from a quarter-of-an-hour's examination may be summed up as follows:

Mrs. Platz had been Benson's housekeeper for four years and was the only servant employed. She lived in the house, and her room was on the third, or top, floor in the rear.

On the afternoon of the preceding day Benson had returned from his office at an unusually early hour—around four o'clock—announcing to Mrs. Platz that he would not be home for dinner that evening. He had remained in the living room, with the hall door closed, until half past six and had then gone upstairs to dress.

He had left the house about seven o'clock but had not said where he was going. He had remarked casually that he would return in fairly good season but had told Mrs. Platz she need not wait up for him—which was her custom whenever he intended bringing guests home. This was the last she had seen him alive. She had not heard him when he returned that night.

She had retired about half past ten and, because of the heat, had left the door ajar. She had been awakened some time later by a loud detonation. It had startled her, and she had turned on the light by her bed, noting that it was just half past twelve by the small alarm clock she used for rising. It was, in fact, the early hour which had reassured her. Benson, whenever he went out for the evening, rarely returned home before two, and this fact, coupled with the stillness of the house, had made her conclude that the noise which had aroused her had been merely the backfiring of an automobile in Forty-ninth Street. Consequently, she had dismissed the matter from her mind, and gone back to sleep.

At seven o'clock the next morning she came downstairs as usual to begin her day's duties and, on her way to the front door to bring in the milk and cream, had discovered Benson's body. All the shades in the living room were down.

At first she thought Benson had fallen asleep in his chair, but when she saw the bullet hole and noticed that the electric lights had been switched off, she knew he was dead. She had gone at once to the telephone in the hall and, asking the operator for the police station, had reported the murder. She had then remembered Benson's brother, Major Anthony Benson, and had telephoned him also. He had arrived at the house almost simultaneously with the detectives from the West Forty-seventh Street station. He had questioned her a little, talked with the plainclothesmen, and gone away before the men from headquarters arrived.

"And now, Mrs. Platz," said Markham, glancing at the notes he had been making, "one or two more questions, and we won't trouble you further. . . . Have you noticed anything in Mr. Benson's actions lately that might lead you to suspect that he was worried—or, let us say, in fear of anything happening to him?"

"No sir," the woman answered readily. "It looked like he was in special good humor for the last week or so."

"I notice that most of the windows on this floor are barred. Was he particularly afraid of burglars, or of people breaking in?"

"Well—not exactly," was the hesitant reply. "But he did use to say as how the police were no good—begging your pardon, sir—and how a man in this city had to look out for himself if he didn't want to get held up."

Markham turned to Heath with a chuckle. "You might make a special note of that for your files, Sergeant." Then to Mrs. Platz: "Do you know of anyone who had a grudge against Mr. Benson?"

"Not a soul, sir," the housekeeper answered emphatically. "He was a queer man in many ways, but everybody seemed to like him. He was all the time going to parties or giving parties. I just can't see why anybody'd want to kill him."

Markham looked over his notes again. "I don't think there's anything else for the present. . . . How about it, Sergeant? Anything further you want to ask?"

Heath pondered a moment. "No, I can't think of anything more just now. . . . But you, Mrs. Platz," he added, turning a cold glance on the woman, "will stay here in this house till you're given permission to leave. We'll want to question you later. But you're not to talk to anyone else—understand? Two of my men will be here for a while yet."

Vance, during the interview, had been jotting down something on the fly-leaf of a small pocket address book and as Heath was speaking he tore out the page and handed it to Markham. Markham glanced at it frowningly and pursed his lips. Then after a few moments' hesitation, he addressed himself again to the housekeeper.

"You mentioned, Mrs. Platz, that Mr. Benson was liked by everyone. Did you yourself like him?"

The woman shifted her eyes to her lap. "Well, sir," she replied reluctantly, "I was only working for him and I haven't got any complaint about the way he treated me."

Despite her words, she gave the impression that she either disliked Benson extremely or greatly disapproved of him. Markham, however, did not push the point.

"And, by the way, Mrs. Platz," he said next, "did Mr. Benson keep any firearms about the house? For instance, do you know if he owned a revolver?"

For the first time during the interview, the woman appeared agitated, even frightened.

"Yes, sir, I—think he did," she admitted, in an unsteady voice.

"Where did he keep it?"

The woman glanced up apprehensively and rolled her eyes slightly as if weighing the advisability of speaking frankly. Then she replied in a low voice, "In that hidden drawer there in the center table. You—you use that little brass button to open it with."

Heath jumped up, and pressed the button she had indicated. A tiny, shallow drawer shot out; and in it lay a Smith and Wesson thirty-eight revolver with an inlaid pearl handle. He picked it up, broke the carriage, and looked at the head of the cylinder.

"Full," he announced laconically.

An expression of tremendous relief spread over the woman's features, and she sighed audibly.

Markham has risen and was looking at the revolver over Heath's shoulder.

"You'd better take charge of it, Sergeant," he said; "though I don't see exactly how it fits in with the case."

He resumed his seat and, glancing at the notation Vance had given him, turned again to the housekeeper.

"One more question, Mrs. Platz. You said Mr. Benson came home early and spent his time before dinner in this room. Did he have any callers during that time?"

I was watching the woman closely, and it seemed to me that she quickly compressed her lips. At any rate, she sat up a little straighter in her chair before answering.

"There wasn't no one, as far as I know."

"But surely you would have known if the bell rang," insisted Markham. "You would have answered the door, wouldn't you?"

"There wasn't no one," she repeated, with a trace of sullenness.

"And last night—did the doorbell ring at all after you had retired?"

"No, sir."

"You would have heard it, even if you'd been asleep?"

"Yes, sir. There's a bell just outside my door, the same as in the kitchen. It rings in both places. Mr. Benson had it fixed that way."

Markham thanked her and dismissed her. When she had gone, he looked at Vance questioningly. "What idea did you have in your mind when you handed me those questions?"

"I might have been a bit presumptuous, y' know," said Vance; "but when the lady was extolling the deceased's popularity, I rather felt she was overdoing it a bit. There was an unconscious implication of antithesis in her eulogy, which suggested to me that she herself was not ardently enamored of the gentleman."

"And what put the notion of firearms into your mind?"

"That query," explained Vance, "was a corollary of your own questions about barred windows and Benson's fear of burglars. If he was in a funk about housebreakers or enemies, he'd be likely to have weapons at hand—eh, what?"

"Well, anyway, Mr. Vance," put in Heath, "your curiosity unearthed a nice little revolver that's probably never been used."

"By the bye, Sergeant," returned Vance, ignoring the other's good-humored sarcasm, "just what do you make of that nice little revolver?"

"Well, now," Heath replied, with ponderous facetiousness, "I deduct that Mr. Benson kept a pearl-handled Smith and Wesson in a secret drawer of his center table."

"You don't say—really!" exclaimed Vance in mock admiration. "Pos'tively illuminatin'!"

Markham broke up this raillery. "Why did you want to know about visitors, Vance? There obviously hadn't been anyone here."

"Oh, just a whim of mine. I was assailed by an impulsive yearning to hear what La Platz would say."

Heath was studying Vance curiously. His first impressions of the man were being dispelled, and he had begun to suspect that beneath the other's casual and debonair exterior there was something of a more solid nature than he had at first imagined. He was not altogether satisfied with Vance's explanations to Markham and seemed to be endeavoring to penetrate to his real reasons for supplementing the district attorney's interrogation of the housekeeper. Heath was astute, and he had the worldly man's ability to read people; but Vance, being different from the men with whom he usually came in contact, was an enigma to him.

At length he relinquished his scrutiny and drew up his chair to the table with a spirited air.

"And now, Mr. Markham," he said crisply, "we'd better outline our activities so as not to duplicate our efforts. The sooner I get my men started, the better."

Markham assented readily. "The investigation is entirely up to you, Sergeant. I'm here to help wherever I'm needed."

"That's very kind of you, sir," Heath returned. "But it looks to me as though there'd be enough work for all parties. . . . Suppose I get to work on running down the owner of the handbag, and send some men out scouting among Benson's night-life cronies—I can pick up some names from the housekeeper, and they'll be a good starting point. And I'll get after that Cadillac, too. . . . Then we ought to look into his lady friends—I guess he had enough of 'em."

"I may get something out of the major along that line," supplied Markham. "He'll tell me anything I want to know. And I can also look into Benson's business associates through the same channel."

"I was going to suggest that you could do that better than I could," Heath rejoined. "We ought to run into something pretty quick that'll give us a line to go on. And I've got an idea that when we locate the lady he took to dinner last night and brought back here, we'll know a lot more than we do now."

"Or a lot less," murmured Vance.

Heath looked up quickly and grunted with an air of massive petulance.

"Let me tell you something, Mr. Vance," he said, "since I understand you want to learn something about these affairs: when anything goes seriously wrong in this world, it's pretty safe to look for a woman in the case."

"Ah, yes," smiled Vance. "*Cherchez la femme*—an aged notion. Even the Romans labored under the superstition. They expressed it with *Dux femina facti*."

"However they expressed it," retorted Heath, "they had the right idea. And don't let 'em tell you different."

Again Markham diplomatically intervened.

"That point will be settled very soon, I hope. . . . And now, Sergeant, if you've nothing else to suggest, I'll be getting along. I told Major Benson I'd see him at lunchtime; and I may have some news for you by tonight."

"Right," assented Heath. "I'm going to stick around here awhile and see if there's anything I overlooked. I'll arrange for a guard outside and also for a man inside to keep an eye on the Platz woman. Then I'll see the reporters and let them in on the disappearing Cadillac and Mr. Vance's mysterious revolver in the secret drawer. I guess that ought to hold 'em. If I find out anything, I'll phone you."

When he had shaken hands with the district attorney, he turned to Vance. "Good-bye, sir," he said pleasantly, much to my surprise, and to Markham's, too, I imagine. "I hope you learned something this morning."

"You'd be positively dumfounded, Sergeant, at all I did learn," Vance answered carelessly.

Again I noted the look of shrewd scrutiny in Heath's eyes; but in a second it was gone. "Well, I'm glad of that," was his perfunctory reply.

Markham, Vance, and I went out, and the patrolman on duty hailed a taxicab for us.

"So that's the way our lofty *gendarmérie* approaches the mysterious wherefores of criminal enterprise—eh?" mused Vance, as we started on our way across town. "Markham, old dear, how do those robust lads ever succeed in running down a culprit?"

"You have witnessed only the barest preliminaries," Markham explained. "There are certain things that must be done as a matter of routine—*ex abundantia cautela*, as we lawyers say."

"But, my word!—such technique!" sighed Vance. "Ah, well, *quantum est in rubus inane!* as we laymen say."

"You don't think much of Heath's capacity, I know"—Markham's voice was patient—"but he's a clever man and one that it's very

easy to underestimate."

"I daresay," murmured Vance. "Anyway, I'm deuced grateful to you, and all that, for letting me behold the solemn proceedings. I've been vastly amused, even if not uplifted. Your official Aesculapius rather appealed to me, y' know—such a brisk, unemotional chap, and utterly unimpressed with the corpse. He really should have taken up crime in a serious way, instead of studying medicine."

Markham lapsed into gloomy silence and sat looking out of the window in troubled meditation until we reached Vance's house.

"I don't like the looks of things," he remarked, as we drew up to the curb. "I have a curious feeling about this case."

Vance regarded him a moment from the corner of his eye. "See here, Markham," he said with unwonted seriousness; "haven't you any idea who shot Benson?"

Markham forced a faint smile, "I wish I had. Crimes of willful murder are not so easily solved. And this case strikes me as a particularly complex one."

"Fancy, now!" said Vance, as he stepped out of the machine. "And I thought it extr'ordin'rily simple."

## 5. GATHERING INFORMATION

(Saturday, June 15; forenoon.)

You will remember the sensation caused by Alvin Benson's murder. It was one of those crimes that appeal irresistibly to the popular imagination. Mystery is the basis of all romance, and about the Benson case there hung an impenetrable aura of mystery. It was many days before any definite light was shed on the circumstances surrounding the shooting; but numerous *ignes fatui* arose to beguile the public's imagination, and wild speculations were heard on all sides.

Alvin Benson, while not a romantic figure in any respect, had been well known; and his personality had been a colorful and spectacular one. He had been a member of New York's wealthy bohemian social set—an avid sportsman, a rash gambler, and professional man-about-town; and his life, led on the borderland of the demimonde, had contained many highlights. His exploits in the nightclubs and cabarets had long supplied the subject matter for exaggerated stories and comments in the various local papers and magazines which batten on Broadway's scandalmongers.

Benson and his brother, Anthony, had, at the time of the former's sudden death, been running a brokerage office at 21 Wall Street, under the name of Benson and Benson. Both were regarded by the other brokers of the Street as shrewd businessmen, though perhaps a shade unethical when gauged by the constitution and bylaws of the New York Stock Exchange. They were markedly contrasted as to temperament and taste and saw little of each other outside the office. Alvin Benson devoted his entire leisure to pleasure-seeking and was a regular patron of the city's leading cafés; whereas Anthony Benson, who was the older and had served as a major in the late war, followed a sedate and conventional existence, spending most of his evenings quietly at his clubs. Both, however, were popular in their respective circles, and between them they had built up a large clientele.

The glamour of the financial district had much to do with the manner in which the crime was handled by the newspapers. Moreover, the murder had been committed at a time when the metropolitan press was experiencing a temporary lull in sensationalism; and the story was spread over the front pages of the papers with a prodigality rarely encountered in such cases.<sup>[8]</sup> Eminent detectives throughout the country were interviewed by enterprising reporters. Histories of famous unsolved murder cases were revived; and clairvoyants and astrologers were engaged by the Sunday editors to solve the mystery by various metaphysical devices. Photographs and detailed diagrams were the daily accompaniments of these journalistic outpourings.

In all the news stories the gray Cadillac and the pearl-handled Smith and Wesson were featured. There were pictures of Cadillac cars, "touched up" and reconstructed to accord with Patrolman McLaughlin's description, some of them even showing the fishing tackle protruding from the tonneau. A photograph of Benson's center table had been taken, with the secret drawer enlarged and reproduced in an "inset." One Sunday magazine went so far as to hire an expert cabinetmaker to write a dissertation on secret compartments in furniture.

The Benson case from the outset had proved a trying and difficult one from the police standpoint. Within an hour of the time that Vance and I had left the scene of the crime a systematic investigation had been launched by the men of the homicide bureau in charge of Sergeant Heath. Benson's house was again gone over thoroughly, and all his private correspondence read; but nothing was brought forth that could throw any light on the tragedy. No weapon was found aside from Benson's own Smith and Wesson; and though all the window grilles were again inspected, they were found to be secure, indicating that the murderer had either let himself in with a key or else been admitted by Benson. Heath, by the way, was unwilling to admit this latter possibility despite Mrs. Platz's positive assertion that no other person besides herself and Benson had a key.

Because of the absence of any definite clue, other than the handbag and the gloves, the only proceeding possible was the interrogating of Benson's friends and associates in the hope of uncovering some fact which would furnish a trail. It was by this process also that Heath hoped to establish the identity of the owner of the handbag. A special effort was therefore made to ascertain where Benson had spent the evening; but though many of his acquaintances were questioned, and the cafés where he habitually dined were visited, no one could at once be found who had seen him that night; nor, as far as it was possible to learn, had he mentioned to anyone his plans for the evening. Furthermore, no general information of a helpful nature came to light immediately, although the police pushed their inquiry with the utmost thoroughness. Benson apparently had no enemies; he had not quarreled seriously with anyone; and his affairs were reported in their usual orderly shape.

Major Anthony Benson was naturally the principal person looked to for information, because of his intimate knowledge of his brother's affairs; and it was in this connection that the district attorney's office did its chief functioning at the beginning of the case. Markham had lunched with Major Benson the day the crime was discovered, and though the latter had shown a willingness to cooperate—even to the detriment of his brother's character—his suggestions were of little value. He explained to Markham that, though he knew most of his brother's associates, he could not name anyone who would have any reason for committing such a crime or anyone who, in his opinion, would be able to help in leading the police to the guilty person. He admitted frankly, however, that there was a side to his brother's life with which he was unacquainted and regretted that he was unable to suggest any specific way of ascertaining the hidden facts. But he intimated that his brother's relations with women were of a somewhat unconventional nature; and he ventured the opinion that there was a bare possibility of a motive being found in that direction.

Pursuant of the few indefinite and unsatisfactory suggestions of Major Benson, Markham had immediately put to work two good men from the detective division assigned to the district attorney's office, with instructions to confine their investigations to Benson's women acquaintances so as not to appear in any way to be encroaching upon the activities of the central office men. Also, as a result of Vance's apparent interest in the housekeeper at the time of the interrogation, he had sent a man to look into the woman's antecedents and relationships.

Mrs. Platz, it was learned, had been born in a small Pennsylvania town, of German parents both of whom were dead; and had been a widow for over sixteen years. Before coming to Benson, she had been with one family for twelve years and had left the position only



because her mistress had given up housekeeping and moved into a hotel. Her former employer, when questioned, said she thought there had been a daughter but had never seen the child and knew nothing of it. In these facts there was nothing to take hold of, and Markham had merely filed the report as a matter of form.

Heath had instigated a citywide search for the gray Cadillac, although he had little faith in its direct connection with the crime; and in this the newspapers helped considerably by the extensive advertising given the car. One curious fact developed that fired the police with the hope that the Cadillac might indeed hold some clue to the mystery. A street cleaner, having read or heard about the fishing tackle in the machine, reported the finding of two jointed fishing rods, in good condition, at the side of one of the drives in Central Park near Columbus Circle. The question was: were these rods part of the equipment Patrolman McLaughlin had seen in the Cadillac? The owner of the car might conceivably have thrown them away in his flight; but, on the other hand, they might have been lost by someone else while driving through the park. No further information was forthcoming, and on the morning of the day following the discovery of the crime the case, so far as any definite progress toward a solution was concerned, had taken no perceptible forward step.

That morning Vance had sent Currie out to buy him every available newspaper; and he had spent over an hour perusing the various accounts of the crime. It was unusual for him to glance at a newspaper, even casually, and I could not refrain from expressing my amazement at his sudden interest in a subject so entirely outside his normal routine.

"No, Van old dear," he explained languidly, "I am not becoming sentimental or even human, as that word is erroneously used today. I can not say with Terence, '*Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*,' because I regard most things that are called human as decidedly alien to myself. But, y' know, this little flurry in crime has proved rather int'restin', or, as the magazine writers say, intriguing—beastly word! . . . Van, you really should read this precious interview with Sergeant Heath. He takes an entire column to say, 'I know nothing.' A priceless lad! I'm becoming pos'tively fond of him."

"It may be," I suggested, "that Heath is keeping his true knowledge from the papers as a bit of tactical diplomacy."

"No," Vance returned, with a sad wag of the head, "no man has so little vanity that he would deliberately reveal himself to the world as a creature with no perceptible powers of human reasoning—as he does in all these morning journals—for the mere sake of bringing one murderer to justice. That would be martyrdom gone mad."

"Markham, at any rate, may know or suspect something that hasn't been revealed," I said.

Vance pondered a moment. "That's not impossible," he admitted. "He has kept himself modestly in the background in all this journalistic palaver. Suppose we look into the matter more thoroughly—eh, what?"

Going to the telephone, he called the district attorney's office, and I heard him make an appointment with Markham for lunch at the Stuyvesant Club.

"What about that Nadelmann statuette at Stieglitz's," I asked, remembering the reason for my presence at Vance's that morning.

"I ain't[9] in the mood for Greek simplifications today," he answered, turning again to his newspapers.

To say that I was surprised at his attitude is to express it mildly. In all my association with him I had never known him to forgo his enthusiasm for art in favor of any other divertimento; and heretofore anything pertaining to the law and its operations had failed to interest him. I realized, therefore that something of an unusual nature was at work in his brain and I refrained from further comment.

Markham was a little late for the appointment at the club, and Vance and I were already at our favorite corner table when he arrived.

"Well, my good Lyncurgus," Vance greeted him, "aside from the fact that several new and significant clues have been unearthed and that the public may expect important developments in the very near future, and all that sort of tosh, how are things really going?"

Markham smiled. "I see you have been reading the newspapers. What do you think of the accounts?"

"Typical, no doubt," replied Vance. "They carefully and painstakingly omit nothing but the essentials."

"Indeed?" Markham's tone was jocular. "And what, may I ask, do you regard as the essentials of the case?"

"In my foolish amateur way," said Vance, "I looked upon dear Alvin's toupee as a rather conspicuous essential, don't y' know?"

"Benson, at any rate, regarded it in that light, I imagine. . . . Anything else?"

"Well, there was the collar and the tie on the chiffonier."

"And," added Markham chaffingly, "don't overlook the false teeth in the tumbler."

"You're pos'tively coruscatin'!" Vance exclaimed. "Yes, they, too, were an essential of the situation. And I'll warrant the incomp'able Heath didn't even notice them. But the other Aristotles present were equally sketchy in their observations."

"You weren't particularly impressed by the investigation yesterday, I take it," said Markham.

"On the contrary," Vance assured him, "I was impressed to the point of stupefaction. The whole proceedings constituted a masterpiece of absurdity. Everything relevant was sublimely ignored. There were at least a dozen *points de départ*, all leading in the same direction, but not one of them apparently was even noticed by any of the officiating *pourparleurs*. Everybody was too busy at such silly occupations as looking for cigarette ends and inspecting the ironwork at the windows. Those grilles, by the way, were rather attractive—Florentine design."

Markham was both amused and ruffled.

"One's pretty safe with the police, Vance," he said. "They get there eventually."

"I simply adore your trusting nature," murmured Vance. "But confide in me: what do you know regarding Benson's murderer?"

Markham hesitated. "This is, of course, in confidence," he said at length; "but this morning, right after you phoned, one of the men I had put to work on the amatory end of Benson's life reported that he had found the woman who left her handbag and gloves at the house that night—the initials on the handkerchief gave him the clue. And he dug up some interesting facts about her. As I suspected, she was Benson's dinner companion that evening. She's an actress—musical comedy, I believe. Muriel St. Clair by name."

"Most unfortunate," breathed Vance. "I was hoping, y' know, your myrmidons wouldn't discover the lady. I haven't the pleasure of her acquaintance or I'd send her a note of commiseration. . . . Now, I presume, you'll play the *juge d'instruction* and chivvy her most horribly, what?"

"I shall certainly question her, if that's what you mean."

Markham's manner was preoccupied, and during the rest of the lunch we spoke but little.

As we sat in the club's lounge room later having our smoke, Major Benson, who had been standing dejectedly at a window close by,

caught sight of Markham and came over to us. He was a full-faced man of about fifty, with grave, kindly features and a sturdy, erect body.

He greeted Vance and me with a casual bow and turned at once to the district attorney. "Markham, I've been thinking things over constantly since our lunch yesterday," he said, "and there's one other suggestion I think I might make. There's a man named Leander Pfyfe who was very close to Alvin; and it's possible he could give you some helpful information. His name didn't occur to me yesterday, for he doesn't live in the city; he's on Long Island somewhere—Port Washington, I think. It's just an idea. The truth is, I can't seem to figure out anything that makes sense in this terrible affair."

He drew a quick, resolute breath, as if to check some involuntary sign of emotion. It was evident that the man, for all his habitual passivity of nature, was deeply moved.

"That's a good suggestion, Major," Markham said, making a notation on the back of a letter. "I'll get after it immediately."

Vance, who, during this brief interchange, had been gazing unconcernedly out of the window, turned and addressed himself to the major. "How about Colonel Ostrander? I've seen him several times in the company of your brother."

Major Benson made a slight gesture of depreciation.

"Only an acquaintance. He'd be of no value." Then he turned to Markham. "I don't imagine it's time even to hope that you've run across anything."

Markham took his cigar from his mouth and turning it about in his fingers, contemplated it thoughtfully.

"I wouldn't say that," he remarked, after a moment. "I've managed to find out whom your brother dined with Thursday night; and I know that this person returned home with him shortly after midnight." He paused as if deliberating the wisdom of saying more. Then: "The fact is, I don't need a great deal more evidence than I've got already to go before the grand jury and ask for an indictment."

A look of surprised admiration flashed in the major's sombre face.

"Thank God for that, Markham!" he said. Then, setting his heavy jaw, he placed his hand on the district attorney's shoulder. "Go the limit—for my sake!" he urged. "If you want me for anything, I'll be here at the club till late."

With this he turned and walked from the room.

"It seems a bit cold-blooded to bother the major with questions so soon after his brother's death," commented Markham. "Still, the world has got to go on."

Vance stifled a yawn. "Why—in Heaven's name?" he murmured listlessly.

## 6. VANCE OFFERS AN OPINION

(Saturday, June 15; 2 P.M.)

We sat for a while smoking in silence, Vance gazing lazily out into Madison Square, Markham frowning deeply at the faded oil portrait of old Peter Stuyvesant that hung over the fireplace.

Presently Vance turned and contemplated the district attorney with a faintly sardonic smile.

"I say, Markham," he drawled; "it has always been a source of amazement to me how easily you investigators of crime are misled by what you call clues. You find a footprint, or a parked automobile, or a monogrammed handkerchief, and then dash off on a wild chase with your eternal *Ecce signum!* 'Pon my word, it's as if you chaps were all under the spell of shillin' shockers. Won't you ever learn that crimes can't be solved by deductions based merely on material clues and circumstantial evidence?"

I think Markham was as much surprised as I at this sudden criticism; yet we both knew Vance well enough to realize that, despite his placid and almost flippant tone, there was a serious purpose behind his words.

"Would you advocate ignoring all the tangible evidence of a crime?" asked Markham, a bit patronizingly.

"Most emphatically," Vance declared calmly. "It's not only worthless but dangerous. . . . The great trouble with you chaps, d' ye see, is that you approach every crime with a fixed and unshakable assumption that the criminal is either half-witted or a colossal bungler. I say, has it never by any chance occurred to you that if a detective could see a clue, the criminal would also have seen it and would either have concealed it or disguised it, if he had not wanted it found? And have you never paused to consider that anyone clever enough to plan and execute a successful crime these days is, *ipso facto*, clever enough to manufacture whatever clues suit his purpose? Your detective seems wholly unwilling to admit that the surface appearance of a crime may be deliberately deceptive or that the clues may have been planted for the definite purpose of misleading him."

"I'm afraid," Markham pointed out, with an air of indulgent irony, "that we'd convict very few criminals if we were to ignore all indicative evidence, cogent circumstances, and irresistible inferences. . . . As a rule, you know, crimes are not witnessed by outsiders."

"That's your fundamental error, don't y' know," Vance observed impassively. "Every crime is witnessed by outsiders, just as is every work of art. The fact that no one sees the criminal, or the artist, actually at work, is wholly inconsequential. The modern investigator of crime would doubtless refuse to believe that Rubens painted the *Descent from the Cross* in the Cathedral at Antwerp if there was sufficient circumstantial evidence to indicate that he had been away on diplomatic business, for instance, at the time it was painted. And yet, my dear fellow, such a conclusion would be preposterous. Even if the inferences to the contrary were so irresistible as to be legally overpowering, the picture itself would prove conclusively that Rubens did paint it. Why? For the simple reason, d' ye see, that no one but Rubens could have painted it. It bears the indelible imprint of his personality and genius—and his alone."

"I'm not an aesthete," Markham reminded him, a trifle testily. "I'm merely a practical lawyer and when it comes to determining the authorship of a crime, I prefer tangible evidence to metaphysical hypotheses."

"Your preference, my dear fellow," Vance returned blandly, "will inevitably involve you in all manner of embarrassing errors."

He slowly lit another cigarette and blew a wreath of smoke toward the ceiling. "Consider, for example, your conclusions in the present murder case," he went on, in his emotionless drawl. "You are laboring under the grave misconception that you know the person who probably killed the unspeakable Benson. You admitted as much to the major; and you told him you had nearly enough evidence to ask for an indictment. No doubt, you do possess a number of what the learned Solons of today regard as convincing clues. But the truth is, don't y' know, you haven't your eye on the guilty person at all. You're about to bedevil some poor girl who had nothing whatever to do with the crime."

Markham swung about sharply.

"So!" he retorted. "I'm about to bedevil an innocent person, eh? Since my assistants and I are the only ones who happen to know what evidence we hold against her, perhaps you will explain by what occult process you acquired your knowledge of this person's innocence."

"It's quite simple, y' know," Vance replied, with a quizzical twitch of the lips. "You haven't your eye on the murderer for the reason that the person who committed this particular crime was sufficiently shrewd and perspicacious to see to it that no evidence which you or the police were likely to find would even remotely indicate his guilt."

He had spoken with the easy assurance of one who enunciates an obvious fact—a fact which permits of no argument.

Markham gave a disdainful laugh. "No lawbreaker," he asserted oracularly, "is shrewd enough to see all contingencies. Even the most trivial event has so many intimately related and serrated points of contact with other events which precede and follow, that it is a known fact that every criminal—however long and carefully he may plan—leaves some loose end to his preparations, which in the end betrays him."

"A known fact?" Vance repeated. "No, my dear fellow—merely a conventional superstition, based on the childish idea of an implacable, avenging Nemesis. I can see how this esoteric notion of the inevitability of divine punishment would appeal to the popular imagination, like fortune-telling and Ouija boards, don't y' know; but—my word!—it desolates me to think that you, old chap, would give credence to such mystical moonshine."

"Don't let it spoil your entire day," said Markham acridly.

"Regard the unsolved, or successful, crimes that are taking place every day," Vance continued, disregarding the other's irony, "—crimes which completely baffle the best detectives in the business, what? The fact is, the only crimes that are ever solved are those planned by stupid people. That's why, whenever a man of even moderate sagacity decides to commit a crime, he accomplishes it with but little difficulty and fortified with the positive assurance of his immunity to discovery."

"Undetected crimes," scornfully submitted Markham, "result, in the main, from official bad luck, not from superior criminal cleverness."

"Bad luck"—Vance's voice was almost dulcet—"is merely a defensive and self-consoling synonym for inefficiency. A man with ingenuity and brains is not harassed by bad luck. . . . No, Markham old dear; unsolved crimes are simply crimes which have been intelligently planned and executed. And, d' ye see, it happens that the Benson murder falls into that categ'ry. Therefore, when, after a few hours' investigation, you say you're pretty sure who committed it, you must pardon me if I take issue with you."

He paused and took a few meditative puffs on his cigarette. "The factitious and casuistic methods of deduction you chaps pursue are apt to lead almost anywhere. In proof of which assertion I point triumphantly to the unfortunate young lady whose liberty you are now plotting to take away."

Markham, who had been hiding his resentment behind a smile of tolerant contempt, now turned on Vance and fairly glowered.

"It so happens—and I'm speaking *ex cathedra*," he proclaimed defiantly, "that I come pretty near having the goods on your 'unfortunate young lady.'"

Vance was unmoved. "And yet, y' know," he observed drily, "no woman could possibly have done it."

I could see that Markham was furious. When he spoke he almost spluttered.

"A woman couldn't have done it, eh—no matter what the evidence?"

"Quite so," Vance rejoined placidly; "not if she herself swore to it and produced a tome of what you scions of the law term, rather pompously, incontrovertible evidence."

"Ah!" There was no mistaking the sarcasm of Markham's tone. "I am to understand, then, that you even regard confessions as valueless?"

"Yes, my dear Justinian," the other responded, with an air of complacency; "I would have you understand precisely that. Indeed, they are worse than valueless—they're downright misleading. The fact that occasionally they may prove to be correct—like woman's preposterously overrated intuition—renders them just so much more unreliable."

Markham grunted disdainfully.

"Why should any person confess something to his detriment unless he felt that the truth had been found out or was likely to be found out?"

"Pon my word, Markham, you astound me! Permit me to murmur, *privatissime et gratis*, into your innocent ear that there are many other presumable motives for confessing. A confession may be the result of fear, or duress, or expediency, or mother-love, or chivalry, or what the psychoanalysts call the inferiority complex, or delusions, or a mistaken sense of duty, or a perverted egotism, or sheer vanity, or any other of a hundred causes. Confessions are the most treacherous and unreliable of all forms of evidence; and even the silly and unscientific law repudiates them in murder cases unless substantiated by other evidence."

"You are eloquent; you wring me," said Markham. "But if the law threw out all confessions and ignored all material clues, as you appear to advise, then society might as well close down all its courts and scrap all its jails."

"A typical *non sequitur* of legal logic," Vance replied.

"But how would you convict the guilty, may I ask?"

"There is one infallible method of determining human guilt and responsibility," Vance explained; "but as yet the police are as blissfully unaware of its possibilities as they are ignorant of its operations. The truth can be learned only by an analysis of the psychological factors of a crime and an application of them to the individual. The only real clues are psychological—not material. Your truly profound art expert, for instance, does not judge and authenticate pictures by an inspection of the underpainting and a chemical analysis of the pigments, but by studying the creative personality revealed in the picture's conception and execution. He asks himself: Does this work of art embody the qualities of form and technique and mental attitude that made up the genius—namely, the personality—of Rubens, or Michelangelo, or Veronese, or Titian, or Tintoretto, or whoever may be the artist to whom the work has been tentatively credited."

"My mind is, I fear," Markham confessed, "still sufficiently primitive to be impressed by vulgar facts; and in the present instance—unfortunately for your most original and artistic analogy—I possess quite an array of such facts, all of which indicate that a certain young woman is the—shall we say?—creator of the criminal opus entitled *The Murder of Alvin Benson*."

Vance shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly.

"Would you mind telling me—in confidence, of course—what these facts are?"

"Certainly not," Markham acceded. "*Imprimis*: the lady was in the house at the time the shot was fired."

Vance affected incredulity. "Eh—my word! She was actu'lly there? Most extr'ordin'ry!"

"The evidence of her presence is unassailable," pursued Markham. "As you know, the gloves she wore at dinner and the handbag she carried with her were both found on the mantel in Benson's living room."

"Oh!" murmured Vance, with a faintly deprecating smile. "It was not the lady, then, but her gloves and bag which were present—a minute and unimportant distinction, no doubt, from the legal point of view. . . . Still," he added, "I deplore the inability of my layman's untutored mind to accept the two conditions as identical. My trousers are at the dry cleaners; therefore, I am at the dry cleaners, what?"

Markham turned on him with considerable warmth.

"Does it mean nothing in the way of evidence, even to your layman's mind, that a woman's intimate and necessary articles, which she has carried throughout the evening, are found in her escort's quarters the following morning?"

"In admitting that it does not," Vance acknowledged quietly, "I no doubt expose a legal perception lamentably inefficient."

"But since the lady certainly wouldn't have carried these particular objects during the afternoon, and since she couldn't have called at the house that evening during Benson's absence without the housekeeper knowing it, how, may one ask, did these articles happen to be there the next morning if she herself did not take them there late that night?"

"Pon my word, I haven't the slightest notion," Vance rejoined. "The lady, herself could doubtless appease your curiosity. But there are any number of possible explanations, y' know. Our departed Chesterfield might have brought them home in his coat pocket—women are eternally handing men all manner of gewgaws and bundles to carry for 'em, with the cooing request: 'Can you put this in your pocket for me?' . . . Then again, there is the possibility that the real murderer secured them in some way and placed them on the mantel delib'rately to mislead the *Polizei*. Women, don't y' know, never put their belongings in such neat, out-of-the-way places as

mantels and hatracks. They invariably throw them down on your favorite chair or your center table."

"And, I suppose," Markham interjected, "Benson also brought the lady's cigarette butts home in his pocket?"

"Stranger things have happened," returned Vance equably; "though I shan't accuse him of it in this instance. . . . The cigarette butts may, y' know, be evidence of a previous *conversazione*."

"Even your despised Heath," Markham informed him, "had sufficient intelligence to ascertain from the housekeeper that she sweeps out the grate every morning."

Vance sighed admiringly. "You're *so* thorough, aren't you? . . . But, I say, that can't be, by any chance, your only evidence against the lady?"

"By no means," Markham assured him. "But, despite your superior distrust, it's good corroboratory evidence nevertheless."

"I daresay," Vance agreed, "seeing with what frequency innocent persons are condemned in our courts. . . . But tell me more."

Markham proceeded with an air of quiet self-assurance. "My man learned, first, that Benson dined alone with this woman at the Marseilles, a little bohemian restaurant in West Fortieth Street; secondly, that they quarreled; and thirdly, that they departed at midnight, entering a taxicab together. . . . Now, the murder was committed at twelve-thirty; but since the lady lives on Riverside Drive, in the Eighties, Benson couldn't possibly have accompanied her home—which obviously he would have done had he not taken her to his own house—and returned by the time the shot was fired. But we have further proof pointing to her being at Benson's. My man learned, at the woman's apartment house, that actually she did not get home until shortly after one. Moreover, she was without gloves and handbag and had to be let in to her rooms with a passkey, because, as she explained, she had lost hers. As you remember, we found the key in her bag. And—to clinch the whole matter—the smoked cigarettes in the grate corresponded to the one you found in her case."

Markham paused to relight his cigar.

"So much for that particular evening," he resumed. "As soon as I learned the woman's identity this morning, I put two more men to work on her private life. Just as I was leaving the office this noon the men phoned in their reports. They had learned that the woman has a fiancé, a chap named Leacock, who was a captain in the army, and who would be likely to own just such a gun as Benson was killed with. Furthermore, this Captain Leacock lunched with the woman the day of the murder and also called on her at her apartment the morning after."

Markham leaned slightly forward, and his next words were emphasized by the tapping of his fingers on the arm of the chair.

"As you see, we have the motive, the opportunity, and the means. . . . Perhaps you will tell me now that I possess no incriminating evidence."

"My dear Markham," Vance affirmed calmly, "you haven't brought out a single point which could not easily be explained away by any bright schoolboy." He shook his head lugubriously. "And on such evidence people are deprived of their life and liberty! 'Pon my word, you alarm me. I tremble for my personal safety."

Markham was nettled.

"Would you be so good as to point out, from your dizzy pinnacle of sapience, the errors in my reasoning?"

"As far as I can see," returned Vance evenly, "your particularization concerning the lady is innocent of reasoning. You've simply taken several unaffined facts and jumped to a false conclusion. I happen to know the conclusion is false because all the psychological indications of the crime contradict it—that is to say, the only real evidence in the case points unmistakably in another direction."

He made a gesture of emphasis, and his tone assumed an unwonted gravity.

"And if you arrest any woman for killing Alvin Benson, you will simply be adding another crime—a crime of delib'rate and unpardonable stupidity—to the one already committed. And between shooting a boulder like Benson and ruining an innocent woman's reputation, I'm inclined to regard the latter as the more reprehensible."

I could see a flash of resentment leap into Markham's eyes; but he did not take offense. Remember: these two men were close friends; and, for all their divergency of nature, they understood and respected each other. Their frankness—severe and even mordant at times—was, indeed, a result of that respect.

There was a moment's silence; then Markham forced a smile. "You fill me with misgivings," he averred mockingly; but, despite the lightness of his tone, I felt that he was half in earnest. "However, I hadn't exactly planned to arrest the lady just yet."

"You reveal commendable restraint," Vance complimented him. "But I'm sure you've already arranged to ballyrag the lady and perhaps trick her into one or two of those contradictions so dear to every lawyer's heart—just as if any nervous or high-strung person could help indulging in apparent contradictions while being cross-questioned as a suspect in a crime they had nothing to do with. . . . To 'put 'em on the grill'—a most accurate designation. So reminiscent of burning people at the stake, what?"

"Well, I'm most certainly going to question her," replied Markham firmly, glancing at his watch. "And one of my men is escorting her to the office in half an hour; so I must break up this most delightful and edifying chat."

"You really expect to learn something incriminating by interrogating her?" asked Vance. "Y' know, I'd jolly well like to witness your humiliation. But I presume your heckling of suspects is a part of the legal arcana."

Markham had risen and turned toward the door, but at Vance's words he paused and appeared to deliberate. "I can't see any particular objection to your being present," he said, "if you really care to come."

I think he had an idea that the humiliation of which the other had spoken would prove to be Vance's own; and soon we were in a taxicab headed for the Criminal Courts Building.

## 7. REPORTS AND AN INTERVIEW

(Saturday, June 15; 3 P.M.)

We entered the ancient building, with its discolored marble pillars and balustrades and its old-fashioned iron scrollwork, by the Franklin Street door and went directly to the district attorney's office on the fourth floor. The office, like the building, breathed an air of former days. Its high ceilings, its massive golden-oak woodwork, its elaborate low-hung chandelier of bronze and china, its dingy bay walls of painted plaster, and its four high narrow windows to the south—all bespoke a departed era in architecture and decoration.

On the floor was a large velvet carpet-rug of dingy brown; and the windows were hung with velour draperies of the same color. Several large, comfortable chairs stood about the walls and before the long oak table in front of the district attorney's desk. This desk, directly under the windows and facing the room, was broad and flat, with carved uprights and two rows of drawers extending to the floor. To the right of the high-backed swivel desk-chair, was another table of carved oak. There were also several filing cabinets in the room and a large safe. In the center of the east wall a leather-covered door, decorated with large brass nailheads, led into a long narrow room, between the office and the waiting room, where the district attorney's secretary and several clerks had their desks. Opposite to this door was another one opening into the district attorney's inner sanctum; and still another door, facing the windows, gave on the main corridor.

Vance glanced over the room casually.

"So this is the matrix of municipal justice—eh, what?" He walked to one of the windows and looked out upon the gray circular tower of the Tombs opposite. "And there, I take it, are the oubliettes where the victims of our law are incarcerated so as to reduce the competition of criminal activity among the remaining citizenry. A most distressin' sight, Markham."

The district attorney had sat down at his desk and was glancing at several notations on his blotter.

"There are a couple of my men waiting to see me," he remarked, without looking up; "so, if you'll be good enough to take a chair over here, I'll proceed with my humble efforts to undermine society still further."

He pressed a button under the edge of his desk, and an alert young man with thick-lensed glasses appeared at the door.

"Swacker, tell Phelps to come in," Markham ordered. "And also tell Springer, if he's back from lunch, that I want to see him in a few minutes."

The secretary disappeared, and a moment later a tall, hawk-faced man, with stoop shoulders and an awkward, angular gait, entered.

"What news?" asked Markham.

"Well, Chief," the detective replied in a low, grating voice, "I just found out something I thought you could use right away. After I reported this noon, I ambled around to this Captain Leacock's house, thinking I might learn something from the houseboys, and ran into the captain coming out. I tailed along; and he went straight up to the lady's house on the Drive and stayed there over an hour. Then he went back home, looking worried."

Markham considered a moment.

"It may mean nothing at all, but I'm glad to know it anyway. St. Clair'll be here in a few minutes, and I'll find out what she has to say. There's nothing else for today. . . . Tell Swacker to send Tracy in."

Tracy was the antithesis of Phelps. He was short, a trifle stout, and exuded an atmosphere of studied suavity. His face was rotund and genial; he wore a pince nez; and his clothes were modish and fitted him well.

"Good-morning, Chief." He greeted Markham in a quiet, ingratiating tone. "I understand the St. Clair woman is to call here this afternoon, and there are a few things I've found out that may assist in your questioning."

He opened a small notebook and adjusted his pince nez.

"I thought I might learn something from her singing teacher, an Italian formerly connected with the Metropolitan but now running a sort of choral society of his own. He trains aspiring prima donnas in their roles with a chorus and settings, and Miss St. Clair is one of his pet students. He talked to me without any trouble; and it seems he knew Benson well. Benson attended several of St. Clair's rehearsals and sometimes called for her in a taxicab. Rinaldo—that's the man's name—thinks he had a bad crush on the girl. Last winter when she sang at the Criterion in a small part, Rinaldo was back stage coaching, and Benson sent her enough hothouse flowers to fill the star's dressing room and have some left over. I tried to find out if Benson was playing 'angel' for her, but Rinaldo either didn't know or pretended he didn't." Tracy closed his notebook and looked up. "That any good to you Chief?"

"First-rate," Markham told him. "Keep at work along that line and let me hear from you again about this time Monday."

Tracy bowed, and as he went out the secretary again appeared at the door. "Springer's here now, sir," he said. "Shall I send him in?"

Springer proved to be a type of detective quite different from either Phelps or Tracy. He was older, and had the gloomy capable air of a hardworking bookkeeper in a bank. There was no initiative in his bearing, but one felt that he could discharge a delicate task with extreme competency.

Markham took from his pocket the envelope on which he had noted the name given him by Major Benson.

"Springer, there's a man down on Long Island that I want to interview as soon as possible. It's in connection with the Benson case, and I wish you'd locate him and get him up here as soon as possible. If you can find him in the telephone book, you needn't go down personally. His name is Leander Pfyfe, and he lives, I think, at Port Washington."

Markham jotted down the name on a card and handed it to the detective. "This is Saturday, so if he comes to town tomorrow, have him ask for me at the Stuyvesant Club. I'll be there in the afternoon."

When Springer had gone, Markham again rang for his secretary and gave instructions that the moment Miss St. Clair arrived she was to be shown in.

"Sergeant Heath is here," Swacker informed him, "and wants to see you if you're not too busy."

Markham glanced at the clock over the door. "I guess I'll have time. Send him in."



Heath was surprised to see Vance and me in the district attorney's office, but after greeting Markham with the customary handshake, he turned to Vance with a good-natured smile.

"Still acquiring knowledge, Mr. Vance?"

"Can't say that I am, Sergeant," returned Vance lightly. "But I'm learning a number of most int'restin' errors. . . . How goes the sleuthin'?"

Heath's face became suddenly serious.

"That's what I'm here to tell the chief about." He addressed himself to Markham. "This case is a jawbreaker, sir. My men and myself have talked to a dozen of Benson's cronies, and we can't worm a single fact of any value out of 'em. They either don't know anything or they're giving a swell imitation of a lot of clams. They all appear to be greatly shocked—bowled over, floored, flabbergasted—by the news of the shooting. And have they got any idea as to why or how it happened? They'll tell the world they haven't. You know the line of talk: Who'd want to shoot good old Al? Nobody could've done it but a burglar who didn't know good old Al. If he'd known good old Al, even the burglar wouldn't have done it. . . . Hell! I felt like killing off a few of those birds myself so they could go and join their good old Al."

"Any news of the car?" asked Markham.

Heath grunted his disgust. "Not a word. And that's funny, too, seeing all the advertising it got. Those fishing rods are the only thing we've got. . . . The inspector, by the way, sent me the postmortem report this morning; but it didn't tell us anything we didn't know. Translated into human language, it said Benson died from a shot in the head, with all his organs sound. It's a wonder, though, they didn't discover that he'd been poisoned with a Mexican bean or bit by an African snake, or something, so's to make the case a little more intrikkit than it already is."

"Cheer up, Sergeant," Markham exhorted him. "I've had a little better luck. Tracy ran down the owner of the handbag and found out she'd been to dinner with Benson that night. He and Phelps also learned a few other supplementary facts that fit in well; and I'm expecting the lady here at any minute. I'm going to find out what she has to say for herself."

An expression of resentment came into Heath's eyes as the district attorney was speaking, but he erased it at once and began asking questions. Markham gave him every detail and also informed him of Leander Pfyfe.

"I'll let you know immediately how the interview comes out," he concluded.

As the door closed on Heath, Vance looked up at Markham with a sly smile.

"Not exactly one of Nietzsche's *Übermenschen*—eh, what? I fear the subtleties of this complex world bemuse him a bit, y' know. . . . And he's so disappointin'! I felt positively elated when the bustling lad with the thick glasses announced his presence. I thought surely he wanted to tell you he had jailed at least six of Benson's murderers."

"Your hopes run too high, I fear," commented Markham.

"And yet, that's the usual procedure—if the headlines in our great moral dailies are to be credited. I always thought that the moment a crime was committed the police began arresting people promiscuously—to maintain the excitement, don't y' know. Another illusion gone! . . . Sad, sad," he murmured. "I sha'n't forgive our Heath; he has betrayed my faith in him."

At this point Markham's secretary came to the door and announced the arrival of Miss St. Clair.

I think we were all taken a little aback at the spectacle presented by this young woman as she came slowly into the room with a firm graceful step, and with her head held slightly to one side in an attitude of supercilious inquiry. She was small and strikingly pretty, although "pretty" is not exactly the word with which to describe her. She possessed that faintly exotic beauty that we find in the portraits of the Carracci, who sweetened the severity of Leonardo and made it at once intimate and decadent. Her eyes were dark and widely spaced; her nose was delicate and straight, and her forehead broad. Her full sensuous lips were almost sculpturesque in their linear precision, and her mouth wore an enigmatic smile, or hint of a smile. Her rounded, firm chin was a bit heavy when examined apart from the other features, but not in the ensemble. There was poise and a certain strength of character in her bearing; but one sensed the potentialities of powerful emotions beneath her exterior calm. Her clothes harmonized with her personality; they were quiet and apparently in the conventional style, but a touch of color and originality here and there conferred on them a fascinating distinction.

Markham rose and bowing, with formal courtesy, indicated a comfortable upholstered chair directly in front of his desk. With a barely perceptible nod, she glanced at the chair and then seated herself in a straight armless chair standing next to it.

"You won't mind, I'm sure," she said, "if I choose my own chair for the inquisition."

Her voice was low and resonant—the speaking voice of the highly trained singer. She smiled as she spoke, but it was not a cordial smile; it was cold and distant, yet somehow indicative of levity.

"Miss St. Clair," began Markham, in a tone of polite severity, "the murder of Mr. Alvin Benson has intimately involved yourself. Before taking any definite steps, I have invited you here to ask you a few questions. I can, therefore, advise you quite honestly that frankness will best serve your interests."

He paused, and the woman looked at him with an ironically questioning gaze. "Am I supposed to thank you for your generous advice?"

Markham's scowl deepened as he glanced down at a typewritten page on his desk.

"You are probably aware that your gloves and handbag were found in Mr. Benson's house the morning after he was shot."

"I can understand how you might have traced the handbag to me," she said; "but how did you arrive at the conclusion that the gloves were mine?"

Markham looked up sharply. "Do you mean to say the gloves are not yours?"

"Oh, no." She gave him another wintry smile. "I merely wondered how you knew they belonged to me, since you couldn't have known either my taste in gloves or the size I wore."

"They're your gloves, then?"

"If they are Tréfousse, size five-and-three-quarters, of white kid and elbow length, they are certainly mine. And I'd so like to have them back, if you don't mind."

"I'm sorry," said Markham, "but it is necessary that I keep them for the present."

She dismissed the matter with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "Do you mind if I smoke?" she asked.

Markham instantly opened a drawer of his desk and took out a box of Benson and Hedges cigarettes.

"I have my own, thank you," she informed him. "But I would so appreciate my holder. I've missed it horribly."

Markham hesitated. He was manifestly annoyed by the woman's attitude. "I'll be glad to lend it to you," he compromised; and reaching into another drawer of his desk, he laid the holder on the table before her.

"Now, Miss St. Clair," he said, resuming his gravity of manner, "will you tell me how these personal articles of yours happened to be in Mr. Benson's living room?"

"No, Mr. Markham, I will not," she answered.

"Do you realize the serious construction your refusal places upon the circumstances?"

"I really hadn't given it much thought." Her tone was indifferent.

"It would be well if you did," Markham advised her. "Your position is not an enviable one; and the presence of your belongings in Mr. Benson's room is, by no means, the only thing that connects you directly with the crime."

The woman raised her eyes inquiringly, and again the enigmatic smile appeared at the corners of her mouth. "Perhaps you have sufficient evidence to accuse me of the murder?"

Markham ignored this question. "You were well acquainted with Mr. Benson, I believe?"

"The finding of my handbag and gloves in his apartment might lead one to assume as much, mightn't it?" she parried.

"He was, in fact, much interested in you?" persisted Markham.

She made a *moue* and sighed. "Alas, yes! Too much for my peace of mind. . . . Have I been brought here to discuss the attentions this gentleman paid me?"

Again Markham ignored her query. "Where were you, Miss St. Clair, between the time you left the Marseilles at midnight and the time you arrived home—which, I understand, was after one o'clock?"

"You are simply wonderful!" she exclaimed. "You seem to know everything. . . . Well, I can only say that during that time I was on my way home."

"Did it take you an hour to go from Fortieth Street to Eighty-first and Riverside Drive?"

"Just about, I should say—a few minutes more or less, perhaps."

"How do you account for that?" Markham was becoming impatient.

"I can't account for it," she said, "except by the passage of time. Time does fly, doesn't it, Mr. Markham?"

"By your attitude you are only working detriment to yourself," Markham warned her, with a show of irritation. "Can you not see the seriousness of your position? You are known to have dined with Mr. Benson, to have left the restaurant at midnight, and to have arrived at your own apartment after one o'clock. At twelve-thirty, Mr. Benson was shot; and your personal articles were found in the same room the morning after."

"It looks terribly suspicious, I know," she admitted, with whimsical seriousness. "And I'll tell you this, Mr. Markham: if my thoughts could have killed Mr. Benson, he would have died long ago. I know I shouldn't speak ill of the dead—there's a saying about it beginning '*de mortuis*,' isn't there?—but the truth is, I had reason to dislike Mr. Benson exceedingly."

"Then, why did you go to dinner with him?"

"I've asked myself the same question a dozen times since," she confessed dolefully. "We women are such impulsive creatures—always doing things we shouldn't. . . . But I know what you're thinking: if I had intended to shoot him, that would have been a natural preliminary. Isn't that what's in your mind? I suppose all murderesses do go to dinner with their victims first."

While she spoke she opened her vanity case and looked at her reflection in its mirror. She daintily adjusted several imaginary stray ends of her abundant dark brown hair, and touched her arched eyebrows gently with her little finger as if to rectify some infinitesimal disturbance in their penciled contour. Then she tilted her head, regarded herself appraisingly, and returned her gaze to the district attorney only as she came to the end of her speech. Her actions had perfectly conveyed to her listeners the impression that the subject of the conversation was, in her scheme of things, of secondary importance to her personal appearance. No words could have expressed her indifference so convincingly as had her little pantomime.

Markham was becoming exasperated. A different type of district attorney would no doubt have attempted to use the pressure of his office to force her into a more amenable frame of mind. But Markham shrank instinctively from the bludgeoning, threatening methods of the ordinary public prosecutor, especially in his dealings with women. In the present case, however, had it not been for Vance's strictures at the club, he would no doubt have taken a more aggressive stand. But it was evident he was laboring under a burden of uncertainty superinduced by Vance's words and augmented by the evasive deportment of the woman herself.

After a moment's silence he asked grimly, "You did considerable speculating through the firm of Benson and Benson, did you not?"

A faint ring of musical laughter greeted this question. "I see that the dear major has been telling tales. . . . Yes, I've been gambling most extravagantly. And I had no business to do it. I'm afraid I'm avaricious."

"And is it not true that you've lost heavily of late—that, in fact, Mr. Alvin Benson called upon you for additional margin and finally sold out your securities?"

"I wish to Heaven it were not true," she lamented, with a look of simulated tragedy. Then: "Am I supposed to have done away with Mr. Benson out of sordid revenge or as an act of just retribution?" She smiled archly and waited expectantly, as if her question had been part of a guessing game.

Markham's eyes hardened as he coldly enunciated his next words.

"Is it not a fact that Captain Philip Leacock owned just such a pistol as Mr. Benson was killed with—a forty-five army Colt automatic?"

At the mention of her fiancé's name she stiffened perceptibly and caught her breath. The part she had been playing fell from her, and a faint flush suffused her cheeks and extended to her forehead. But almost immediately she had reassumed her role of playful indifference.

"I never inquired into the make or caliber of Captain Leacock's firearms," she returned carelessly.

"And is it not a fact," pursued Markham's imperturbable voice, "that Captain Leacock lent you his pistol when he called at your apartment on the morning before the murder?"

"It's most ungallant of you, Mr. Markham," she reprimanded him coyly, "to inquire into the personal relations of an engaged couple; for I am betrothed to Captain Leacock—though you probably know it already."

Markham stood up, controlling himself with effort.

"Am I to understand that you refuse to answer any of my questions, or to endeavor to extricate yourself from the very serious position you are in?"

She appeared to consider. "Yes," she said slowly, "I haven't anything I care especially to say just now."

Markham leaned over and rested both hands on the desk. "Do you realize the possible consequences of your attitude?" he asked ominously. "The facts I know regarding your connection with the case, coupled with your refusal to offer a single extenuating explanation, give me more grounds than I actually need to order your being held."

I was watching her closely as he spoke, and it seemed to me that her eyelids drooped involuntarily the merest fraction of an inch. But she gave no other indication of being affected by the pronouncement, and merely looked at the district attorney with an air of defiant amusement.

Markham, with a sudden contraction of the jaw, turned and reached toward a bell button beneath the edge of his desk. But, in doing so, his glance fell upon Vance; and he paused indecisively. The look he had encountered on the other's face was one of reproachful amazement; not only did it express complete surprise at his apparent decision but it stated, more eloquently than words could have done, that he was about to commit an act of irreparable folly.

There were several moments of tense silence in the room. Then calmly and unhurriedly Miss St. Clair opened her vanity case and powdered her nose. When she had finished, she turned a serene gaze upon the district attorney.

"Well, do you want to arrest me now?" she asked.

Markham regarded her for a moment, deliberating. Instead of answering at once, he went to the window and stood for a full minute looking down upon the Bridge of Sighs which connects the Criminal Courts Building with the Tombs.

"No, I think not today," he said slowly.

He stood awhile longer in absorbed contemplation; then, as if shaking off his mood of irresolution, he swung about and confronted the woman.

"I'm not going to arrest you—yet," he reiterated, a bit harshly. "But I'm going to order you to remain in New York for the present. And if you attempt to leave, you *will* be arrested. I hope that is clear."

He pressed a button, and his secretary entered.

"Swacker, please escort Miss St. Clair downstairs, and call a taxicab for her. . . . Then you can go home yourself."

She rose and gave Markham a little nod.

"You were very kind to lend me my cigarette holder," she said pleasantly, laying it on his desk.

Without another word, she walked calmly from the room.

The door had no more than closed behind her when Markham pressed another button. In a few moments the door leading into the outer corridor opened, and a white-haired, middle-aged man appeared.

"Ben," ordered Markham hurriedly, "have that woman that Swacker's taking downstairs followed. Keep her under surveillance and don't let her get lost. She's not to leave the city—understand? It's the St. Clair woman Tracy dug up."

When the man had gone, Markham turned and stood glowering at Vance.

"What do you think of your innocent young lady now?" he asked, with an air of belligerent triumph.

"Nice gel—eh, what?" replied Vance blandly. "Extr'ordin'ry control. And she's about to marry a professional milit'ry man! Ah, well. *De gustibus*. . . . Y' know, I was afraid for a moment you were actu'lly going to send for the manacles. And if you had, Markham old dear, you'd have regretted it to your dying day."

Markham studied him for a few seconds. He knew there was something more than a mere whim beneath Vance's certitude of manner; and it was this knowledge that had stayed his hand when he was about to have the woman placed in custody.

"Her attitude was certainly not conducive to one's belief in her innocence," Markham objected. "She played her part damned cleverly, though. But it was just the part a shrewd woman, knowing herself guilty, would have played."

"I say, didn't it occur to you," asked Vance, "that perhaps she didn't care a farthing whether you thought her guilty or not?—that, in fact, she was a bit disappointed when you let her go?"

"That's hardly the way I read the situation," returned Markham. "Whether guilty or innocent, a person doesn't ordinarily invite arrest."

"By the bye," asked Vance, "where was the fortunate swain during the hour of Alvin's passing?"

"Do you think we didn't check up on that point?" Markham spoke with disdain. "Captain Leacock was at his own apartment that night from eight o'clock on."

"Was he, really?" airily retorted Vance. "A most model young fella!"

Again Markham looked at him sharply. "I'd like to know what weird theory has been struggling in your brain today," he mused. "Now that I've let the lady go temporarily—which is what you obviously wanted me to do—and have stultified my own better judgment in so doing, why not tell me frankly what you've got up your sleeve?"

"Up my sleeve? Such an inelegant metaphor! One would think I was a prestidigitator, what?"

Whenever Vance answered in this fashion, it was a sign that he wished to avoid making a direct reply; and Markham dropped the matter.

"Anyway," he submitted, "you didn't have the pleasure of witnessing my humiliation, as you prophesied."

Vance looked up in simulated surprise. "Didn't I, now?" Then he added sorrowfully, "Life is so full of disappointments, y' know."

## 8. VANCE ACCEPTS A CHALLENGE

(Saturday, June 15; 4 P.M.)

After Markham had telephoned Heath the details of the interview, we returned to the Stuyvesant Club. Ordinarily the district attorney's office shuts down at one o'clock on Saturdays; but today the hour had been extended because of the importance attaching to Miss St. Clair's visit. Markham had lapsed into an introspective silence which lasted until we were again seated in the alcove of the club's lounge-room. Then he spoke irritably.

"Damn it! I shouldn't have let her go. . . . I still have a feeling she's guilty."

Vance assumed an air of gushing credulousness.

"Oh, really? I daresay you're *so* psychic. Been that way all your life, no doubt. And haven't you had lots and lots of dreams that came true? I'm sure you've often had a phone call from someone you were thinking about at the moment. A delectable gift. Do you read palms, also? . . . Why not have the lady's horoscope cast?"

"I have no evidence as yet," Markham retorted, "that your belief in her innocence is founded on anything more substantial than your impressions."

"Ah, but it is," averred Vance. "I *know* she's innocent. Furthermore, I know that no woman could possibly have fired the shot."

"Don't get the erroneous idea in your head that a woman couldn't have manipulated a forty-five army Colt."

"Oh, that?" Vance dismissed the notion with a shrug. "The material indications of the crime don't enter into my calculations, y' know—I leave 'em entirely to you lawyers and the lads with the bulging deltoids. I have other, and surer, ways of reaching conclusions. That's why I told you that if you arrested any woman for shooting Benson, you'd be blundering most shamefully."

Markham grunted indignantly. "And yet you seem to have repudiated all processes of deduction whereby the truth may be arrived at. Have you, by any chance, entirely renounced your faith in the operations of the human mind?"

"Ah, there speaks the voice of God's great common people!" exclaimed Vance. "Your mind is so typical, Markham. It works on the principle that what you don't know isn't knowledge, and that, since you don't understand a thing there is no explanation. A comfortable point of view. It relieves one from all care and uncertainty. Don't you find the world a very sweet and wonderful place?"

Markham adopted an attitude of affable forbearance. "You spoke at lunchtime, I believe, of one infallible method of detecting crime. Would you care to divulge this profound and priceless secret to a mere district attorney?"

Vance bowed with exaggerated courtesy.<sup>[10]</sup>

"Delighted, I'm sure," he returned. "I referred to the science of individual character and the psychology of human nature. We all do things, d' ye see, in a certain individual way, according to our temp'raments. Every human act, no matter how large or how small, is a direct expression of a man's personality and bears the inev'table impress of his nature. Thus, a musician, by looking at a sheet of music, is able to tell at once whether it was composed, for example, by Beethoven, or Schubert, or Debussy, or Chopin. And an artist, by looking at a canvas, knows immediately whether it is a Corot, a Harpignies, a Rembrandt, or a Franz Hals. And just as no two faces are exactly alike, so no two natures are exactly alike; the combination of ingredients which go to make up our personalities, varies in each individual. That is why, when twenty artists, let us say, sit down to paint the same subject, each one conceives and executes it in a different manner. The result in each case is a distinct and unmistakable expression of the personality of the painter who did it. . . . It's really rather simple, don't y' know."

"Your theory, doubtless, would be comprehensible to an artist," said Markham, in a tone of indulgent irony. "But its metaphysical refinements are, I admit, considerably beyond the grasp of a vulgar worldling like myself."

"The mind inclined to what is false rejects the nobler course," murmured Vance, with a sigh.

"There is," argued Markham, "a slight difference between art and crime."

"Psychologically, old chap, there's none," Vance amended evenly. "Crimes possess all the basic factors of a work of art—approach, conception, technique, imagination, attack, method, and organization. Moreover, crimes vary fully as much in their manner, their aspects, and their general nature, as do works of art. Indeed, a carefully planned crime is just as direct an expression of the individual as is a painting, for instance. And therein lies the one great possibility of detection. Just as an expert aesthete can analyze a picture and tell you who painted it, or the personality and temp'rament of the person who painted it, so can the expert psychologist analyze a crime and tell you who committed it—that is, if he happens to be acquainted with the person—or else can describe to you, with almost mathematical surety, the criminal's nature and character. . . . And that, my dear Markham, is the only sure and inev'table means of determining human guilt. All others are mere guesswork, unscientific, uncertain, and—perilous."

Throughout this explanation Vance's manner had been almost casual; yet the very serenity and assurance of his attitude conferred upon his words a curious sense of authority. Markham had listened with interest, though it could be seen that he did not regard Vance's theorizing seriously.

"Your system ignores motive altogether," he objected.

"Naturally," Vance replied, "since it's an irrelevant factor in most crimes. Every one of us, my dear chap, has just as good a motive for killing at least a score of men as the motives which actuate ninety-nine crimes out of a hundred. And, when anyone is murdered, there are dozens of innocent people who had just as strong a motive for doing it as had the actual murderer. Really, y' know, the fact that a man has a motive is no evidence whatever that he's guilty—such motives are too universal a possession of the human race. Suspecting a man of murder because he has a motive is like suspecting a man of running away with another man's wife because he has two legs. The reason that some people kill and others don't, is a matter of temp'rament—of individual psychology. It all comes back to that. . . . And another thing: when a person does possess a real motive—something tremendous and overpowering—he's pretty apt to keep it to himself, to hide it and guard it carefully—eh, what? He may even have disguised the motive through years of preparation; or the motive may have been born within five minutes of the crime through the unexpected discovery of facts a decade old. . . . So, d' ye

see, the absence of any apparent motive in a crime might be regarded as more incriminating than the presence of one."

"You are going to have some difficulty in eliminating the idea of *cui bono* from the consideration of crime."

"I daresay," agreed Vance. "The idea of *cui bono* is just silly enough to be impregnable. And yet, many persons would be benefited by almost anyone's death. Kill Sumner, and, on that theory, you could arrest the entire membership of the Authors' League."

"Opportunity, at any rate," persisted Markham, "is an insuperable factor in crime—and by opportunity, I mean that affinity of circumstances and conditions which make a particular crime possible, feasible, and convenient for a particular person."

"Another irrelevant factor," asserted Vance. "Think of the opportunities we have every day to murder people we dislike! Only the other night I had ten insufferable bores to dinner in my apartment—a social devoir. But I refrained—with considerable effort, I admit—from putting arsenic in the Pontet Canet. The Borgias and I, y' see, merely belong in different psychological categories. On the other hand, had I been resolved to do murder, I would—like those resourceful *cinquecento* patricians—have created my own opportunity. . . . And there's the rub:—one can either make an opportunity or disguise the fact that he had it, with false alibis and various other tricks. You remember the case of the murderer who called the police to break into his victim's house before the latter had been killed, saying he suspected foul play, and who then preceded the policemen indoors and stabbed the man as they were trailing up the stairs." [11]

"Well, what of actual proximity, or presence—the proof of a person being on the scene of the crime at the time it was committed?"

"Again misleading," Vance declared. "An innocent person's presence is too often used as a shield by the real murderer, who is actually absent. A clever criminal can commit a crime from a distance through an agency that is present. Also, a clever criminal can arrange an alibi and then go to the scene of the crime disguised and unrecognized. There are far too many convincing ways of being present when one is believed to be absent—and vice versa. . . . But we can never part from our individualities and our natures. And that is why all crime inevitably comes back to human psychology—the one fixed, undisguisable basis of deduction."

"It's a wonder to me," said Markham, "in view of your theories, that you don't advocate dismissing nine-tenths of the police force and installing a gross or two of those psychological machines so popular with the Sunday Supplement editor."

Vance smoked a minute meditatively.

"I've read about 'em. Int'restin' toys. They can no doubt indicate a certain augmented emotional stress when the patient transfers his attention from the pious platitudes of Dr. Frank Crane to a problem in spherical trigonometry. But if an innocent person were harnessed up to the various tubes, galvanometers, electromagnets, glass plates, and brass knobs of one of these apparatuses, and then quizzed about some recent crime, your indicat'ry needle would cavort about like a Russian dancer as a result of sheer nervous panic on the patient's part."

Markham smiled patronizingly.

"And I suppose the needle would remain static with a guilty person in contact?"

"Oh, on the contrary," Vance's tone was unruffled. "The needle would bob up and down just the same—but not *because* he was guilty. If he was stupid, for instance, the needle would jump as a result of his resentment at a seemingly newfangled third-degree torture. And if he was intelligent, the needle would jump because of his suppressed mirth at the puerility of the legal mind for indulging in such nonsense."

"You move me deeply," said Markham. "My head is spinning like a turbine. But there are those of us poor worldlings who believe that criminality is a defect of the brain."

"So it is," Vance readily agreed. "But unfortunately the entire human race possesses the defect. The virtuous ones haven't, so to speak, the courage of their defects. . . . However, if you were referring to a criminal type, then, alas! we must part company. It was Lombroso, that darling of the yellow journals, who invented the idea of the congenital criminal. Real scientists like DuBois, Karl Pearson, and Goring have shot his idiotic theories full of holes." [12]

"I am floored by your erudition," declared Markham, as he signaled to a passing attendant and ordered another cigar. "I console myself, however, with the fact that, as a rule, murder will leak out."

Vance smoked his cigarette in silence, looking thoughtfully out through the window up at the hazy June sky.

"Markham," he said at length, "the number of fantastic ideas extant about criminals is positively amazing. How a sane person can subscribe to that ancient hallucination that 'murder will out' is beyond me. It rarely 'outs,' old dear. And, if it did 'out,' why a homicide bureau? Why all this whirling-dervish activity by the police whenever a body is found? . . . The poets are to blame for this bit of lunacy. Chaucer probably started it with his 'Mordre wol out,' and Shakespeare helped it along by attributing to murder a miraculous organ that speaks in lieu of a tongue. It was some poet, too, no doubt, who conceived the fancy that carcasses bleed at the sight of the murderer. . . . Would you, as the great Protector of the Faithful, dare tell the police to wait calmly in their offices, or clubs, or favorite beauty parlors—or wherever policemen do their waiting—until a murder 'outs'? Poor dear!—if you did, they'd ask the governor for your detention as *particeps criminis*, or apply for a *de lunatico inquirendo*." [13]

Markham grunted good-naturedly. He was busy cutting and lighting his cigar.

"I believe you chaps have another hallucination about crime," continued Vance, "namely, that the criminal always returns to the scene of the crime. This weird notion is even explained on some recondite and misty psychological ground. But, I assure you, psychology teaches no such preposterous doctrine. If ever a murderer returned to the body of his victim for any reason other than to rectify some blunder he had made, then he is a subject for Broadmoor—or Bloomingdale. . . . How easy it would be for the police if this fanciful notion were true! They'd merely have to sit down at the scene of the crime, play bezique or Mah Jongg until the murderer returned, and then escort him to the bastille, what? The true psychological instinct in anyone having committed a punishable act is to get as far away from the scene of it as the limits of this world will permit." [14]

"In the present case, at any rate," Markham reminded him, "we are neither waiting inactively for the murder to out, nor sitting in Benson's living room trusting to the voluntary return of the criminal."

"Either course would achieve success as quickly as the one you are now pursuing," Vance said.

"Not being gifted with your singular insight," retorted Markham, "I can only follow the inadequate processes of human reasoning."

"No doubt," Vance agreed commiseratingly. "And the results of your activities thus far force me to the conclusion that a man with a handful of legalistic logic can successfully withstand the most obstinate and heroic assaults of ordinary common sense."

Markham was piqued. "Still harping on the St. Clair woman's innocence, eh? However, in view of the complete absence of any tangible evidence pointing elsewhere, you must admit I have no choice of courses."

"I admit nothing of the kind," Vance told him, "for, I assure you, there is an abundance of evidence pointing elsewhere. You simply failed to see it."

"You think so!" Vance's nonchalant cocksureness had at last overthrown Markham's equanimity. "Very well, old man; I hereby enter an emphatic denial to all your fine theories; and I challenge you to produce a single piece of this evidence which you say exists."

He threw his words out with asperity, and gave a curt, aggressive gesture with his extended fingers, to indicate that, as far as he was concerned, the subject was closed.

Vance, too, I think, was pricked a little.

"Y'know, Markham old dear, I'm no avenger of blood or vindicator of the honor of society. The role would bore me."

Markham smiled loftily but made no reply.

Vance smoked meditatively for a while. Then, to my amazement, he turned calmly and deliberately to Markham, and said in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice, "I'm going to accept your challenge. It's a bit alien to my tastes; but the problem, y' know, rather appeals to me; it presents the same difficulties as the *Concert Champêtre* affair—a question of disputed authorship, as it were."<sup>[15]</sup>

Markham abruptly suspended the motion of lifting his cigar to his lips. He had scarcely intended his challenge literally; it had been uttered more in the nature of a verbal defiance; and he scrutinized Vance a bit uncertainly. Little did he realize that the other's casual acceptance of his unthinking and but half-serious challenge was to alter the entire criminal history of New York.

"Just how do you intend to proceed?" he asked.

Vance waved his hand carelessly. "Like Napoleon, *je m'en gage, et puis je vois*. However, I must have your word that you'll give me every possible assistance and will refrain from all profound legal objections."

Markham pursed his lips. He was frankly perplexed by the unexpected manner in which Vance had met his defiance. But immediately he gave a good-natured laugh, as if, after all, the matter was of no serious consequence.

"Very well," he assented. "You have my word. . . . And now what?"

After a moment Vance lit a fresh cigarette and rose languidly. "First," he announced, "I shall determine the exact height of the guilty person. Such a fact will, no doubt, come under the head of indicat'ry evidence—eh, what?"

Markham stared at him incredulously.

"How, in Heaven's name, are you going to do that?"

"By those primitive deductive methods to which you so touchingly pin your faith," he answered easily. "But come; let us repair to the scene of the crime."

He moved toward the door, Markham reluctantly following in a state of perplexed irritation. "But you know the body was removed," the latter protested; "and the place by now has no doubt been straightened up."

"Thank Heaven for that!" murmured Vance. "I'm not particularly fond of corpses; and untidiness, y' know, annoys me frightfully."

As we emerged into Madison Avenue, he signaled to the *commissionnaire* for a taxicab, and without a word, urged us into it.

"This is all nonsense," Markham declared ill-naturedly, as we started on our journey uptown. "How do you expect to find any clues now? By this time everything has been obliterated."

"Alas, my dear Markham," lamented Vance, in a tone of mock solicitude, "how woefully deficient you are in philosophic theory! If anything, no matter how infinitesimal, could really be obliterated, the universe, y' know, would cease to exist—the cosmic problem would be solved, and the Creator would write Q.E.D. across an empty firmament. Our only chance of going on with this illusion we call Life, d' ye see, lies in the fact that consciousness is like an infinite decimal point. Did you, as a child, ever try to complete the decimal one-third by filling a whole sheet of paper with the numeral three? You always had the fraction one-third left, don't y' know. If you could have eliminated the smallest one-third, after having set down ten thousand threes, the problem would have ended. So with life, my dear fellow. It's only because we can't erase or obliterate anything that we go on existing."

He made a movement with his fingers, putting a sort of tangible period to his remarks, and looked dreamily out of the window up at the fiery film of sky.

Markham had settled back into his corner and was chewing morosely at his cigar. I could see he was fairly simmering with impotent anger at having let himself be goaded into issuing his challenge. But there was no retreating now. As he told me afterward, he was fully convinced he had been dragged forth out of a comfortable chair on a patent and ridiculous fool's errand.



## 9. THE HEIGHT OF THE MURDERER

(Saturday, June 15; 5 P.M.)

When we arrived at Benson's house, a patrolman leaning somnolently against the iron paling of the areaway came suddenly to attention and saluted. He eyed Vance and me hopefully, regarding us no doubt as suspects being taken to the scene of the crime for questioning by the district attorney. We were admitted by one of the men from the homicide bureau who had been in the house on the morning of the investigation.

Markham greeted him with a nod.

"Everything going all right?"

"Sure," the man replied good-naturedly. "The old lady's as meek as a cat—and a swell cook."

"We want to be alone for a while, Sniffin," said Markham, as we passed into the living room.

"The gastronome's name is Snitkin, not Sniffin," Vance corrected him, when the door had closed on us.

"Wonderful memory," muttered Markham churlishly.

"A failing of mine," said Vance. "I suppose you are one of those rare persons who never forget a face but just can't recall names, what?"

But Markham was in no mood to be twitted. "Now that you've dragged me here, what are you going to do?" He waved his hand depreciatingly and sank into a chair with an air of contemptuous abdication.

The living room looked much the same as when we saw it last, except that it had been put neatly in order. The shades were up, and the late afternoon light was flooding in profusely. The ornateness of the room's furnishings seemed intensified by the glare.

Vance glanced about him and gave a shudder. "I'm half inclined to turn back," he drawled. "It's a clear case of justifiable homicide by an outraged interior decorator."

"My dear aesthete," Markham urged impatiently, "be good enough to bury your artistic prejudices and to proceed with your problem. . . . Of course," he added, with a malicious smile, "if you fear the result, you may still withdraw and thereby preserve your charming theories in their present virgin state."

"And permit you to send an innocent maiden to the chair!" exclaimed Vance, in mock indignation. "Fie, fie! *La politesse* alone forbids my withdrawal. May I never have to lament, with Prince Henry, that 'to my shame I have a truant been to chivalry.'"

Markham set his jaw and gave Vance a ferocious look. "I'm beginning to think that, after all, there is something in your theory that every man has some motive for murdering another."

"Well," replied Vance cheerfully, "now that you have begun to come round to my way of thinking, do you mind if I send Mr. Snitkin on an errand?"

Markham sighed audibly and shrugged his shoulders. "I'll smoke during the *opéra bouffe*, if it won't interfere with your performance."

Vance went to the door and called Snitkin.

"I say, would you mind going to Mrs. Platz and borrowing a long tape measure and a ball of string. . . . The district attorney wants them," he added, giving Markham a sycophantic bow.

"I can't hope that you're going to hang yourself, can I?" asked Markham. Vance gazed at him reprovingly. "Permit me," he said sweetly, "to command *Othello* to your attention:

'How poor are they that have not patience!

What wound did ever heal but by degrees?'

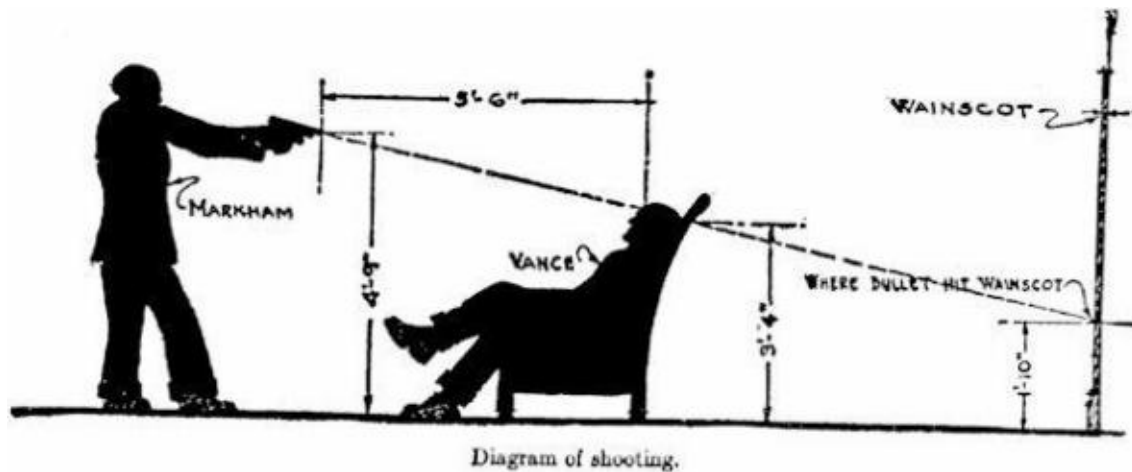
Or—to descend from a poet to a platitudinarian—let me present for your consid'ration a pentameter from Longfellow: 'All things come round to him who will but wait.' Untrue, of course, but consoling. Milton said it much better in his 'They also serve—.' But Cervantes said it best: 'Patience and shuffle the cards.' Sound advice, Markham—and advice expressed rakishly, as all good advice should be. . . . To be sure, patience is a sort of last resort—a practice to adopt when there's nothing else to do. Still, like virtue, it occasionally rewards the practitioner; although I'll admit that, as a rule, it is—again like virtue—bootless. That is to say, it is its own reward. It has, however, been swathed in many verbal robes. It is 'sorrows's slave,' and the 'sov'reign o'er transmuted ills,' as well as 'all the passion of great hearts.' Rousseau wrote, *La patience est amère mais son fruit est doux*. But perhaps your legal taste runs to Latin. *Superanda omnis fortuna ferendo est*, quoth Vergil. And Horace also spoke on the subject. *Durum!* said he, *sed levius fit patientia*—"

"Why the hell doesn't Snitkin come?" growled Markham.

Almost as he spoke the door opened, and the detective handed Vance the tape measure and string.

"And now, Markham, for your reward!"

Bending over the rug Vance moved the large wicker chair into the exact position it had occupied when Benson had been shot. The position was easily determined, for the impressions of the chair's castors on the deep nap of the rug were plainly visible. He then ran the string through the bullet hole in the back of the chair and directed me to hold one end of it against the place where the bullet had struck the wainscot. Next he took up the tape measure and, extending the string through the hole, measured a distance of five feet and six inches along it, starting at the point which corresponded to the location of Benson's forehead as he sat in the chair. Tying a knot in the string to indicate the measurement, he drew the string taut, so that it extended in a straight line from the mark on the wainscot, through the hole in the back of the chair, to a point five feet and six inches in front of where Benson's head had rested.



"This knot in the string," he explained, "now represents the exact location of the muzzle of the gun that ended Benson's career. You see the reasoning—eh, what? Having two points in the bullet's course—namely, the hole in the chair and the mark on the wainscot—and also knowing the approximate vertical line of explosion, which was between five and six feet from the gentleman's skull, it was merely necessary to extend the straight line of the bullet's course to the vertical line of explosion in order to ascertain the exact point at which the shot was fired."

"Theoretically very pretty," commented Markham; "though why you should go to so much trouble to ascertain this point in space I can't imagine. . . . Not that it matters, for you have overlooked the possibility of the bullet's deflection."

"Forgive me for contradicting you," Vance smiled—"but yesterday morning I questioned Captain Hagedorn at some length and learned that there had been no deflection of the bullet. Hagedorn had inspected the wound before we arrived; and he was really positive on that point. In the first place, the bullet struck the frontal bone at such an angle as to make deflection practically impossible even had the pistol been of smaller caliber. And in the second place, the pistol with which Benson was shot was of so large a bore—a point-forty-five—and the muzzle velocity was so great, that the bullet would have taken a straight course even had it been held at a greater distance from the gentleman's brow."

"And how," asked Markham, "did Hagedorn know what the muzzle velocity was?"

"I was inquisitive on that point myself," answered Vance; "and he explained that the size and character of the bullet and the expelled shell told him the whole tale. That's how he knew the gun was an army Colt automatic—I believe he called it a U.S. Government Colt—and not the ordinary Colt automatic. The weight of the bullets of these two pistols is slightly different: the ordinary Colt bullet weighs 200 grains, whereas the army Colt bullet weighs 230 grains. Hagedorn, having a hypersensitive tactile sense, was able, I presume, to distinguish the difference at once, though I didn't go into his physiological gifts with him—my reticent nature, you understand. . . . However, he could tell it was a forty-five army Colt automatic bullet; and knowing this, he knew that the muzzle velocity was 809 feet, and that the striking energy was 329—which gives a six-inch penetration in white pine at a distance of twenty-five yards. . . . An amazin' creature, this Hagedorn. Imagine having one's head full of such entrancing information! The old mysteries of why a man should take up the bass fiddle as a life work and where all the pins go are babes' conundrums compared with the one of why a human being should devote his years to the idiosyncrasies of bullets."

"The subject is not exactly an enthralling one," said Markham wearily; "so, for the sake of argument, let us admit that you have now found the precise point of the gun's explosion. Where do we go from there?"

"While I hold the string on a straight line," directed Vance, "be good enough to measure the exact distance from the floor to the knot. Then my secret will be known."

"This game doesn't enthrall me, either," Markham protested. "I'd much prefer 'London Bridge'"

Nevertheless he made the measurement.

"Four feet, eight and a half inches," he announced indifferently.

Vance laid a cigarette on the rug at a point directly beneath the knot.

"We now know the exact height at which the pistol was held when it was fired. . . . You grasp the process by which this conclusion was reached, I'm sure."

"It seems rather obvious," answered Markham.

Vance again went to the door and called Snitkin.

"The district attorney desires the loan of your gun for a moment," he said. "He wishes to make a test."

Snitkin stepped up to Markham and held out his pistol wonderingly.

"The safety's on, sir. Shall I shift it?"

Markham was about to refuse the weapon when Vance interposed.

"That's quite all right. Mr. Markham doesn't intend to fire it—I hope."

When the man had gone, Vance seated himself in the wicker chair and placed his head in juxtaposition with the bullet hole.

"Now, Markham," he requested, "will you please stand on the spot where the murderer stood, holding the gun directly above that cigarette on the floor, and aim deliberately at my left temple. . . . Take care," he cautioned, with an engaging smile, "not to pull the

trigger, or you will never learn who killed Benson."

Reluctantly Markham complied. As he stood taking aim Vance asked me to measure the height of the gun muzzle from the floor.

The distance was four feet and nine inches.

"Quite so," he said, rising. "Y' see, Markham, you are five feet, eleven inches tall; therefore the person who shot Benson was very nearly your own height—certainly not under five feet, ten. . . . That, too, is rather obvious, what?"

His demonstration had been simple and clear. Markham was frankly impressed; his manner had become serious. He regarded Vance for a moment with a meditative frown; then he said, "That's all very well; but the person who fired the shot might have held the pistol relatively higher than I did."

"Not tenable," returned Vance. "I've done too much shooting myself not to know that when an expert takes delib'rate aim with a pistol at a small target, he does it with a stiff arm and with a slightly raised shoulder, so as to bring the sight on a straight line between his eye and the object at which he aims. The height at which one holds a revolver, under such conditions, pretty accurately determines his own height."

"Your argument is based on the assumption that the person who killed Benson was an expert taking deliberate aim at a small target?"

"Not an assumption, but a fact," declared Vance. "Consider: had the person not been an expert shot, he would not—at a distance of five or six feet—have selected the forehead but a larger target—namely, the breast. And having selected the forehead, he most certainly took delib'rate aim, what? Furthermore, had he not been an expert shot, and had he pointed the gun at the breast without taking delib'rate aim, he would, in all probability, have fired more than one shot."

Markham pondered. "I'll grant that, on the face of it, your theory sounds plausible," he conceded at length. "On the other hand, the guilty man could have been almost any height over five feet, ten; for certainly a man may crouch as much as he likes and still take deliberate aim."

"True," agreed Vance. "But don't overlook the fact that the murderer's position, in this instance, was a perfectly natural one. Otherwise, Benson's attention would have been attracted, and he would not have been taken unawares. That he was shot unawares was indicated by his attitude. Of course, the assassin might have stooped a little without causing Benson to look up. . . . Let us say, therefore, that the guilty person's height is somewhere between five feet, ten, and six feet, two. Does that appeal to you?"

Markham was silent.

"The delightful Miss St. Clair, y' know," remarked Vance, with a japing smile, "can't possibly be over five feet, five or six."

Markham grunted and continued to smoke abstractedly.

"This Captain Leacock, I take it," said Vance, "is over six feet—eh, what?"

Markham's eyes narrowed. "What makes you think so?"

"You just told me, don't y' know."

"I told you!"

"Not in so many words," Vance pointed out. "But after I had shown you the approximate height of the murderer, and it didn't correspond at all to that of the young lady you suspected, I knew your active mind was busy looking around for another possibility. And, as the lady's *inamorato* was the only other possibility on your horizon, I concluded that you were permitting your thoughts to play about the captain. Had he, therefore, been the stipulated height, you would have said nothing; but when you argued that the murderer might have stooped to fire the shot, I decided that the captain was inordinately tall. . . . Thus, in the pregnant silence that emanated from you, old dear, your spirit held sweet communion with mine and told me that the gentleman was a six-footer no less."

"I see that you include mind reading among your gifts," said Markham. "I now await an exhibition of slate writing."

His tone was irritable, but his irritation was that of a man reluctant to admit the alteration of his beliefs. He felt himself yielding to Vance's guiding rein, but he still held stubbornly to the course of his own previous convictions.

"Surely you don't question my demonstration of the guilty person's height?" asked Vance mellifluously.

"Not altogether," Markham replied. "It seems colorable enough. . . . But why, I wonder, didn't Hagedorn work the thing out, if it was so simple?"

"Anaxagoras said that those who have occasion for a lamp supply it with oil. A profound remark, Markham—one of those seemingly simple quips that contain a great truth. A lamp without oil, y' know, is useless. The police always have plenty of lamps—every variety, in fact—but no oil, as it were. That's why they never find anyone unless it's broad daylight."

Markham's mind was now busy in another direction, and he rose and began to pace the floor. "Until now I hadn't thought of Captain Leacock as the actual agent of the crime."

"Why hadn't you thought of him? Was it because one of your sleuths told you he was at home like a good boy that night?"

"I suppose so." Markham continued pacing thoughtfully. Then suddenly he swung about. "That wasn't it, either. It was the amount of damning circumstantial evidence against the St. Clair woman. . . . And, Vance, despite your demonstration here today, you haven't explained away any of the evidence against her. Where was she between twelve and one? Why did she go with Benson to dinner? How did her handbag get here? And what about those burned cigarettes of hers in the grate?—they're the obstacle, those cigarette butts; and I can't admit that your demonstration wholly convinces me—despite the fact that it *is* convincing—as long as I've got the evidence of those cigarettes to contend with, for that evidence is also convincing."

"My word!" sighed Vance. "You're in a pos'tively ghastly predic'ment. However, maybe I can cast illumination on those disquietin' cigarette butts."

Once more he went to the door and, summoning Snitkin, returned the pistol.

"The district attorney thanks you," he said. "And will you be good enough to fetch Mrs. Platz. We wish to chat with her."

Turning back to the room, he smiled amiably at Markham. "I desire to do all the conversing with the lady this time, if you don't mind. There are potentialities in Mrs. Platz which you entirely overlooked when you questioned her yesterday."

Markham was interested, though sceptical. "You have the floor," he said.

## 10. ELIMINATING A SUSPECT

(Saturday, June 15, 5:30 P.M.)

When the housekeeper entered, she appeared even more composed than when Markham had first questioned her. There was something at once sullen and indomitable in her manner, and she looked at me with a slightly challenging expression. Markham merely nodded to her, but Vance stood up and indicated a low tufted Morris chair near the fireplace, facing the front windows. She sat down on the edge of it, resting her elbows on its broad arms.

"I have some questions to ask you, Mrs. Platz," Vance began, fixing her sharply with his gaze; "and it will be best for everyone if you tell the whole truth. You understand me—eh, what?"

The easygoing, half-whimsical manner he had taken with Markham had disappeared. He stood before the woman, stern and implacable.

At his words she lifted her head. Her face was blank, but her mouth was set stubbornly, and a smouldering look in her eyes told of a suppressed anxiety.

Vance waited a moment and then went on, enunciating each word with distinctness.

"At what time, on the day Mr. Benson was killed, did the lady call here?"

The woman's gaze did not falter, but the pupils of her eyes dilated. "There was nobody here."

"Oh, yes, there was, Mrs. Platz," Vance's tone was assured. "What time did she call?"

"Nobody was here, I tell you," she persisted.

Vance lit a cigarette with interminable deliberation, his eyes resting steadily on hers. He smoked placidly until her gaze dropped. Then he stepped nearer to her, and said firmly, "If you tell the truth, no harm will come to you. But if you refuse any information you will find yourself in trouble. The withholding of evidence is a crime, y' know, and the law will show you no mercy."

He made a sly grimace at Markham, who was watching the proceedings with interest.

The woman now began to show signs of agitation. She drew in her elbows, and her breathing quickened. "In God's name, I swear it!—there wasn't anybody here." A slight hoarseness gave evidence of her emotion.

"Let us not invoke the Deity," suggested Vance carelessly. "What time was the lady here?"

She set her lips stubbornly, and for a whole minute there was silence in the room. Vance smoked quietly, but Markham held his cigar motionless between his thumb and forefinger in an attitude of expectancy.

Again Vance's impassive voice demanded: "What time was she here?"

The woman clinched her hands with a spasmodic gesture, and thrust her head forward.

"I tell you—I swear it—"

Vance made a peremptory movement of his hand and smiled coldly. "It's no go," he told her. "You're acting stupidly. We're here to get the truth—and you're going to tell us."

"I've told you the truth."

"Is it going to be necessary for the district attorney here to order you placed in custody?"

"I've told you the truth," she repeated.

Vance crushed out his cigarette decisively in an ash receiver on the table.

"Right-o, Mrs. Platz. Since you refuse to tell me about the young woman who was here that afternoon, I'm going to tell you about her."

His manner was easy and cynical, and the woman watched him suspiciously.

"Late in the afternoon of the day your employer was shot the doorbell rang. Perhaps you had been informed by Mr. Benson that he was expecting a caller, what? Anyhow, you answered the door and admitted a charming young lady. You showed her into this room . . . and—what do you think, my dear Madam!—she took that very chair on which you are resting so uncomfortably."

He paused and smiled tantalizingly.

"Then," he continued, "you served tea to the young lady and Mr. Benson. After a bit she departed, and Mr. Benson went upstairs to dress for dinner. . . . Y' see, Mrs. Platz, I happen to know."

He lit another cigarette.

"Did you notice the young lady particularly? If not, I'll describe her to you. She was rather short—*petite* is the word. She had dark hair and dark eyes and she was dressed quietly."

A change had come over the woman. Her eyes stared; her cheeks were now gray; and her breathing had become audible.

"Now, Mrs. Platz," demanded Vance sharply, "what have you to say?"

She drew a deep breath. "There wasn't anybody here," she said doggedly. There was something almost admirable in her obstinacy.

Vance considered a moment. Markham was about to speak but evidently thought better of it and sat watching the woman fixedly.

"Your attitude is understandable," Vance observed finally. "The young lady, of course, was well known to you, and you had a personal reason for not wanting it known she was here."

At these words she sat up straight, a look of terror in her face. "I never saw her before!" she cried, then stopped abruptly.

"Ah!" Vance gave her an amused leer. "You had never seen the young lady before—eh, what? . . . That's quite possible. But it's immaterial. She's a nice girl, though, I'm sure—even if she did have a dish of tea with your employer alone in his home."

"Did she tell you she was here?" The woman's voice was listless. The reaction to her tense obduracy had left her apathetic.

"Not exactly," Vance replied. "But it wasn't necessary. I knew without her informing me. . . . Just when did she arrive, Mrs. Platz?"

"About a half hour after Mr. Benson got here from the office." She had at last given over all denials and evasions. "But he didn't expect her—that is, he didn't say anything to me about her coming; and he didn't order tea until after she came."

Markham thrust himself forward. "Why didn't you tell me she'd been here when I asked you yesterday morning?"

The woman cast an uneasy glance about the room.

"I rather fancy," Vance intervened pleasantly, "that Mrs. Platz was afraid you might unjustly suspect the young lady."

She grasped eagerly at his words. "Yes sir—that was all. I was afraid you might think she—did it. And she was such a quiet, sweet-looking girl. . . . That was the only reason, sir."

"Quite so," agreed Vance consolingly. "But tell me: did it not shock you to see such a quiet, sweet-looking young lady smoking cigarettes?"

Her apprehension gave way to astonishment. "Why—yes, sir, it did. . . . But she wasn't a bad girl—I could tell that. And most girls smoke nowadays. They don't think anything of it, like they used to."

"You're quite right," Vance assured her. "Still young ladies really shouldn't throw their cigarettes in tiled, gas-log fireplaces, should they, now?"

The woman regarded him uncertainly; she suspected him of jesting. "Did she do that?" She leaned over and looked into the fireplace. "I didn't see any cigarettes there this morning."

"No, you wouldn't have," Vance informed her. "One of the district attorney's sleuths, d' ye see, cleaned it all up nicely for you yesterday."

She shot Markham a questioning glance. She was not sure whether Vance's remark was to be taken seriously; but his casualness of manner and pleasantness of voice tended to put her at ease.

"Now that we understand each other, Mrs. Platz," he was saying, "was there anything else you particularly noticed when the young lady was here? You will be doing her a good service by telling us, because both the district attorney and I happen to know she is innocent."

She gave Vance a long, shrewd look, as if appraising his sincerity. Evidently the results of her scrutiny were favorable, for her answer left no doubt as to her complete frankness.

"I don't know if it'll help, but when I came in with the toast, Mr. Benson looked like he was arguing with her. She seemed worried about something that was going to happen and asked him not to hold her to some promise she'd made. I was only in the room a minute and I didn't hear much. But just as I was going out he laughed and said it was only a bluff and that nothing was going to happen."

She stopped and waited anxiously. She seemed to fear that her revelation might, after all, prove injurious rather than helpful to the girl.

"Was that all?" Vance's tone indicated that the matter was of no consequence.

The woman demurred.

"That was all I heard; but . . . there was a small blue box of jewelry sitting on the table."

"My word!—a box of jewelry! Do you know whose it was?"

"No, sir, I don't. The lady hadn't brought it, and I never saw it in the house before."

"How did you know it was jewelry?"

"When Mr. Benson went upstairs to dress, I came in to clear the tea things away, and it was still sitting on the table."

Vance smiled. "And you played Pandora and took a peep—eh, what? Most natural—I'd have done it myself."

He stepped back and bowed politely.

"That will be all, Mrs. Platz. . . . And you needn't worry about the young lady. Nothing is going to happen to her."

When she had left us, Markham leaned forward and shook his cigar at Vance. "Why didn't you tell me you had information about the case unknown to me?"

"My dear chap!" Vance lifted his eyebrows in protestation. "To what do you refer specifically?"

"How did you know this St. Clair woman had been here in the afternoon?"

"I didn't; but I surmised it. There were cigarette butts of hers in the grate; and, as I knew she hadn't been here on the night Benson was shot, I thought it rather likely she had been here earlier in the day. And since Benson didn't arrive from his office until four, I whispered into my ear that she had called sometime between four and the hour of his departure for dinner. . . . An element'ry syllogism, what?"

"How did you know she wasn't here that night?"

"The psychological aspects of the crime left me in no doubt. As I told you, no woman committed it—my metaphysical hypotheses again; but never mind. . . . Furthermore, yesterday morning I stood on the spot where the murderer stood and sighted with my eye along the line of fire, using Benson's head and the mark on the wainscot as my points of coincidence. It was evident to me then, even without measurements, that the guilty person was rather tall."

"Very well. . . . But how did you know she left here that afternoon before Benson did?" persisted Markham.

"How else could she have changed into an evening gown? Really, y' know, ladies don't go about *décolletées* in the afternoon."

"You assume, then, that Benson himself brought her gloves and handbag back here that night?"

"Someone did—and it certainly wasn't Miss St. Clair."

"All right," conceded Markham. "And what about this Morris chair?—how did you know she sat in it?"

"What other chair could she have sat in and still thrown her cigarettes into the fireplace? Women are notoriously poor shots, even if they were given to hurling their cigarette stubs across the room."

"That deduction is simple enough," admitted Markham. "But suppose you tell me how you know she had tea here unless you were privy to some information on the point?"

"It positively shames me to explain it. But the humiliating truth is that I inferred the fact from the condition of yon samovar. I noted yesterday that it had been used and had not been emptied or wiped off."

Markham nodded with contemptuous elation.

"You seem to have sunk to the despised legal level of material clues."

"That's why I'm blushing so furiously. . . . However, psychological deductions alone do not determine facts *in esse*, but only *in*

*posse*. Other conditions must, of course, be considered. In the present instance the indications of the samovar served merely as the basis for an assumption, or guess, with which to draw out the housekeeper."

"Well, I won't deny that you succeeded," said Markham. "I'd like to know, though, what you had in mind when you accused the woman of a personal interest in the girl. That remark certainly indicated some preknowledge of the situation."

Vance's face became serious.

"Markham, I give you my word," he said earnestly, "I had nothing in mind. I made the accusation, thinking it was false, merely to trap her into a denial. And she fell into the trap. But—deuce take it!—I seemed to hit some nail squarely on the head, what? I can't for the life of me imagine why she was frightened. But it really doesn't matter."

"Perhaps not," agreed Markham, but his tone was dubious. "What do you make of the box of jewelry and the disagreement between Benson and the girl?"

"Nothing yet. They don't fit in, do they?"

He was silent a moment. Then he spoke with unusual seriousness. "Markham, take my advice and don't bother with these side issues. I'm telling you the girl had no part in the murder. Let her alone—you'll be happier in your old age if you do."

Markham sat scowling, his eyes in space. "I'm convinced that you *think* you know something."

"Cogito, ergo sum," murmured Vance. "Y' know, the naturalistic philosophy of Descartes has always rather appealed to me. It was a departure from universal doubt and a seeking for positive knowledge in self-consciousness. Spinoza in his pantheism, and Berkeley in his idealism, quite misunderstood the significance of their precursor's favorite enthymeme. Even Descartes' errors were brilliant. His method of reasoning, for all its scientific inaccuracies, gave new signification to the symbols of the analyst. The mind, after all, if it is to function effectively, must combine the mathematical precision of a natural science with such pure speculations as astronomy. For instance, Descartes' doctrine of Vortices—"

"Oh, be quiet," growled Markham. "I'm not insisting that you reveal your precious information. So why burden me with a dissertation on seventeenth-century philosophy?"

"Anyhow, you'll admit, won't you," asked Vance lightly, "that, in elimin'ating those disturbing cigarette butts, so to speak, I've elimin'ated Miss St. Clair as a suspect?"

Markham did not answer at once. There was no doubt that the developments of the past hour had made a decided impression upon him. He did not underestimate Vance, despite his persistent opposition; and he knew that, for all his flippancy, Vance was fundamentally serious. Furthermore, Markham had a finely developed sense of justice. He was not narrow, even though obstinate at times; and I have never known him to close his mind to the possibilities of truth, however opposed to his own interests. It did not, therefore, surprise me in the least when, at last, he looked up with a gracious smile of surrender.

"You've made your point," he said; "and I accept it with proper humility. I'm most grateful to you."

Vance walked indifferently to the window and looked out. "I am happy to learn that you are capable of accepting such evidence as the human mind could not possibly deny."

I had always noticed, in the relationship of these two men, that whenever either made a remark that bordered on generosity, the other answered in a manner which ended all outward show of sentiment. It was as if they wished to keep this more intimate side of their mutual regard hidden from the world.

Markham therefore ignored Vance's thrust. "Have you perhaps any enlightening suggestions, other than negative ones, to offer as to Benson's murderer?" he asked.

"Rather!" said Vance. "No end of suggestions."

"Could you spare me a good one?" Markham imitated the other's playful tone.

Vance appeared to reflect. "Well, I should advise that, as a beginning, you look for a rather tall man, cool-headed, familiar with firearms, a good shot, and fairly well known to the deceased—a man who was aware that Benson was going to dinner with Miss St. Clair, or who had reason to suspect the fact."

Markham looked narrowly at Vance for several moments.

"I think I understand. . . . Not a bad theory, either. You know, I'm going to suggest immediately to Heath that he investigate more thoroughly Captain Leacock's activities on the night of the murder."

"Oh, by all means," said Vance carelessly, going to the piano.

Markham watched him with an expression of puzzled interrogation. He was about to speak when Vance began playing a rollicking French café song which opens, I believe, with "Ils sont dans les vignes les moineaux."



## 11. A MOTIVE AND A THREAT

(Sunday, June 16; afternoon.)

The following day, which was Sunday, we lunched with Markham at the Stuyvesant Club. Vance had suggested the appointment the evening before; for, as he explained to me, he wished to be present in case Leander Pfyfe should arrive from Long Island.

"It amuses me tremendously," he had said, "the way human beings delib'rately complicate the most ordin'ry issues. They have a downright horror of anything simple and direct. The whole modern commercial system is nothing but a colossal mechanism for doing things in the most involved and roundabout way. If one makes a ten-cent purchase at a department store nowadays, a complete history of the transaction is written out in triplicate, checked by a dozen floorwalkers and clerks, signed and countersigned, entered into innum'able ledgers with various colored inks, and then elab'rately secreted in steel filing cabinets. And not content with all this superfluous *chinoiserie*, our businessmen have created a large and expensive army of efficiency experts whose sole duty it is to complicate and befuddle this system still further. . . . It's the same with everything else in modern life. Regard that insup'able mania called golf. It consists merely of knocking a ball into a hole with a stick. But the devotees of this pastime have developed a unique and distinctive livery in which to play it. They concentrate for twenty years on the correct angulation of their feet and the proper method of entwining their fingers about the stick. Moreover, in order to discuss the pseudointr'cacies of this idiotic sport, they've invented an outlandish vocabulary which is unintelligible even to an English scholar."

He pointed disgustedly at a pile of Sunday newspapers.

"Then here's this Benson murder—a simple and incons'quential affair. Yet the entire machinery of the law is going at high pressure and blowing off jets of steam all over the community, when the matter could be settled quietly in five minutes with a bit of intelligent thinking."

At lunch, however, he did not refer to the crime; and, as if by tacit agreement, the subject was avoided. Markham had merely mentioned casually to us as we went into the dining room that he was expecting Heath a little later.

The sergeant was waiting for us when we retired to the lounge room for our smoke, and by his expression it was evident he was not pleased with the way things were going.

"I told you, Mr. Markham," he said, when he had drawn up our chairs, "that this case was going to be a tough one. . . . Could you get any kind of a lead from the St. Clair woman?"

Markham shook his head.

"She's out of it." And he recounted briefly the happenings at Benson's house the preceding afternoon.

"Well, if you're satisfied," was Heath's somewhat dubious comment, "that's good enough for me. But what about this Captain Leacock?"

"That's what I asked you here to talk about," Markham told him. "There's no direct evidence against him, but there are several suspicious circumstances that tend to connect him with the murder. He seems to meet the specifications as to height; and we mustn't overlook the fact that Benson was shot with just such a gun as Leacock would be likely to possess. He was engaged to the girl, and a motive might be found in Benson's attentions to her."

"And ever since the big scrap," supplemented Heath, "these Army boys don't think anything of shooting people. They got used to blood on the other side."

"The only hitch," resumed Markham, "is that Phelps, who had the job of checking up on the captain, reported to me that he was home that night from eight o'clock on. Of course, there may be a loophole somewhere, and I was going to suggest that you have one of your men go into the matter thoroughly and see just what the situation is. Phelps got his information from one of the hallboys; and I think it might be well to get hold of the boy again and apply a little pressure. If it was found that Leacock was not at home at twelve-thirty that night, we might have the lead you've been looking for."

"I'll attend to it myself," said Heath. "I'll go round there tonight, and if this boy knows anything, he'll spill it before I'm through with him."

We had talked but a few minutes longer when a uniformed attendant bowed deferentially at the district attorney's elbow and announced that Mr. Pfyfe was calling.

Markham requested that his visitor be shown into the lounge room, and then added to Heath, "You'd better remain, and hear what he has to say."

Leander Pfyfe was an immaculate and exquisite personage. He approached us with a mincing gait of self-approbation. His legs, which were very long and thin, with knees that seemed to bend slightly inward, supported a short bulging torso; and his chest curved outward in a generous arc, like that of a pouter pigeon. His face was rotund, and his jowls hung in two loops over a collar too tight for comfort. His blond sparse hair was brushed back sleekly; and the ends of his narrow, silken moustache were waxed into needlepoints. He was dressed in light gray summer flannels and wore a pale turquoise-green silk shirt, a vivid foulard tie, and gray suede Oxfords. A strong odor of oriental perfume was given off by the carefully arranged batiste handkerchief in his breast pocket.

He greeted Markham with viscid urbanity and acknowledged his introduction to us with a patronizing bow. After posing himself in a chair the attendant placed for him, he began polishing a gold-rimmed eyeglass which he wore on a ribbon, and fixed Markham with a melancholy gaze.

"A very sad occasion, this," he sighed.

"Realizing your friendship for Mr. Benson," said Markham, "I deplore the necessity of appealing to you at this time. It was very good of you, by the way, to come to the city today."

Pfyfe made a mildly deprecating movement with his carefully manicured fingers. He was, he explained with an air of ineffable self-complacency, only too glad to discommode himself to give aid to servants of the public. A distressing necessity, to be sure; but his

manner conveyed unmistakably that he knew and recognized the obligations attaching to the dictum of *noblesse oblige* and was prepared to meet them.

He looked at Markham with a self-congratulatory air, and his eyebrows queried: "What can I do for you?" though his lips did not move.

"I understand from Major Anthony Benson," Markham said, "that you were very close to his brother and therefore might be able to tell us something of his personal affairs, or private social relationships, that would indicate a line of investigation."

Pfyfe gazed sadly at the floor. "Ah, yes. Alvin and I were very close—we were, in fact, the most intimate of friends. You can not imagine how broken up I was at hearing of the dear fellow's tragic end." He gave the impression that here was a modern instance of Aeneas and Achates. "And I was deeply grieved at not being able to come at once to New York to put myself at the service of those that needed me."

"I'm sure it would have been a comfort to his other friends," remarked Vance, with cool politeness. "But in the circumstances you will be forgiven."

Pfyfe blinked regretfully. "Ah, but I shall never forgive myself—though I cannot hold myself altogether blameworthy. Only the day before the tragedy I had started on a trip to the Catskills. I had even asked dear Alvin to go along; but he was too busy." Pfyfe shook his head as if lamenting the incomprehensible irony of life. "How much better—ah, how infinitely much better—if only—"

"You were gone a very short time," commented Markham, interrupting what promised to be a homily on perverse providence.

"True," Pfyfe indulgently admitted. "But I met with a most unfortunate accident." He polished his eyeglass a moment. "My car broke down, and I was necessitated to return."

"What road did you take?" asked Heath.

Pfyfe delicately adjusted his eyeglass and regarded the sergeant with an intimation of boredom.

"My advice, Mr.—ah—Sneed—"

"Heath," the other corrected him surlily.

"Ah, yes—Heath. . . . My advice, Mr. Heath, is that if you are contemplating a motor trip to the Catskills, you apply to the Automobile Club of America for a roadmap. My choice of itinerary might very possibly not suit you."

He turned back to the district attorney with an air that implied he preferred talking to an equal.

"Tell me, Mr. Pfyfe," Markham asked; "did Mr. Benson have any enemies?"

The other appeared to think the matter over. "No-o. Not one, I should say, who would actually have killed him as a result of animosity."

"You imply nevertheless that he had enemies. Could you not tell us a little more?"

Pfyfe passed his hand gracefully over the tips of his golden moustache and then permitted his index-finger to linger on his cheek in an attitude of meditative indecision.

"Your request, Mr. Markham,"—he spoke with pained reluctance—"brings up a matter which I hesitate to discuss. But perhaps it is best that I confide in you—as one gentleman to another. Alvin, in common with many other admirable fellows, had a—what shall I say?—a weakness let me put it that way—for the fair sex."

He looked at Markham, seeking approbation for his extreme tact in stating an indelicate truth.

"You understand," he continued, in answer to the other's sympathetic nod, "Alvin was not a man who possessed the personal characteristics that women hold attractive. (I somehow got the impression that Pfyfe considered himself as differing radically from Benson in this respect.) Alvin was aware of his physical deficiency, and the result was—I trust you will understand my hesitancy in mentioning this distressing fact—but the result was that Alvin used certain—ah—methods in his dealings with women, which you and I could never bring ourselves to adopt. Indeed—though it pains me to say it—he often took unfair advantage of women. He used underhand methods, as it were."

He paused, apparently shocked by this heinous imperfection of his friend and by the necessity of his own seemingly disloyal revelation.

"Was it one of these women whom Benson had dealt with unfairly that you had in mind?" asked Markham.

"No—not the woman herself," Pfyfe replied; "but a man who was interested in her. In fact, this man threatened Alvin's life. You will appreciate my reluctance in telling you this; but my excuse is that the threat was made quite openly. There were several others besides myself who heard it."

"That, of course, relieves you from any technical breach of confidence," Markham observed.

Pfyfe acknowledged the other's understanding with a slight bow.

"It happened at a little party of which I was the unfortunate host," he confessed modestly.

"Who was the man?" Markham's tone was polite but firm.

"You will comprehend my reticence. . . ." Pfyfe began. Then, with an air of righteous frankness, he leaned forward. "It might prove unfair to Alvin to withhold the gentleman's name. . . . He was Captain Philip Leacock."

He allowed himself the emotional outlet of a sigh.

"I trust you won't ask me for the lady's name."

"It won't be necessary," Markham assured him. "But I'd appreciate your telling us a little more of the episode."

Pfyfe complied with an expression of patient resignation.

"Alvin was considerably taken with the lady in question and showed her many attentions which were, I am forced to admit, unwelcome. Captain Leacock resented these attentions; and at the little affair to which I had invited him and Alvin some unpleasant and, I must say, unrefined words passed between them. I fear the wine had been flowing too freely, for Alvin was always punctilious—he was a man, indeed, skilled in the niceties of social intercourse; and the captain, in an outburst of temper, told Alvin that, unless he left the lady strictly alone in the future, he would pay with his life. The captain even went so far as to draw a revolver halfway out of his pocket."

"Was it a revolver or an automatic pistol?" asked Heath.

Pfyfe gave the district attorney a faint smile of annoyance, without deigning even to glance at the sergeant.

"I misspoke myself; forgive me. It was not a revolver. It was, I believe, an automatic army pistol—though, you understand, I didn't see it in its entirety."

"You say there were others who witnessed the altercation?"

"Several of my guests were standing about," Pfyfe explained; "but, on my word, I couldn't name them. The fact is, I attached little importance to the threat—indeed, it had entirely slipped my memory until I read the account of poor Alvin's death. Then I thought at once of the unfortunate incident and said to myself: Why not tell the district attorney. . . ?"

"Thoughts that breathe and words that burn," murmured Vance, who had been sitting through the interview in oppressive boredom.

Pfyfe once more adjusted his eyeglass and gave Vance a withering look.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

Vance smiled disarmingly. "Merely a quotation from Gray. Poetry appeals to me in certain moods, don't y' know. . . . Do you, by any chance, know Colonel Ostrander?"

Pfyfe looked at him coldly, but only a vacuous countenance met his gaze. "I am acquainted with the gentleman," he replied haughtily.

"Was Colonel Ostrander present at this delightful little social affair of yours?" Vance's tone was artlessly innocent.

"Now that you mention it, I believe he was," admitted Pfyfe, and lifted his eyebrows inquisitively.

But Vance was again staring disinterestedly out of the window.

Markham, annoyed at the interruption, attempted to reestablish the conversation on a more amiable and practical basis. But Pfyfe, though loquacious, had little more information to give. He insisted constantly on bringing the talk back to Captain Leacock, and, despite his eloquent protestations, it was obvious he attached more importance to the threat than he chose to admit. Markham questioned him for fully an hour but could learn nothing else of a suggestive nature.

When Pfyfe rose to go, Vance turned from his contemplation of the outside world and, bowing affably, let his eyes rest on the other with ingenuous good nature.

"Now that you are in New York, Mr. Pfyfe, and were so unfortunate as to be unable to arrive earlier, I assume that you will remain until after the investigation."

Pfyfe's studied and habitual calm gave way to a look of oily astonishment. "I hadn't contemplated doing so."

"It would be most desirable if you could arrange it," urged Markham; though I am sure he had no intention of making the request until Vance suggested it.

Pfyfe hesitated and then made an elegant gesture of resignation. "Certainly I shall remain. When you have further need of my services, you will find me at the Ansonia."

He spoke with exalted condescension and magnanimously conferred upon Markham a parting smile. But the smile did not spring from within. It appeared to have been adjusted upon his features by the unseen hands of a sculptor; and it affected only the muscles about his mouth.

When he had gone, Vance gave Markham a look of suppressed mirth.

"Elegancy, facility, and golden cadence.' . . . But put not your faith in poesy, old dear. Our Ciceronian friend is an unmitigated fashioner of deceptions."

"If you're trying to say that he's a smooth liar," remarked Heath, "I don't agree with you. I think that story about the captain's threat is straight goods."

"Oh, that! Of course, it's true. . . . And, y' know, Markham, the knightly Mr. Pfyfe was frightfully disappointed when you didn't insist on his revealing Miss St. Clair's name. This Leander, I fear, would never have swum the Hellespont for a lady's sake."

"Whether he's a swimmer or not," said Heath impatiently, "he's given us something to go on."

Markham agreed that Pfyfe's recital had added materially to the case against Leacock.

"I think I'll have the captain down to my office tomorrow, and question him," he said.

A moment later Major Benson entered the room, and Markham invited him to join us.

"I just saw Pfyfe get into a taxi," he said, when he had sat down. "I suppose you've been asking him about Alvin's affairs. . . . Did he help you any?"

"I hope so, for all our sakes," returned Markham kindly. "By the way, Major, what do you know about a Captain Philip Leacock?"

Major Benson lifted his eyes to Markham's in surprise. "Didn't you know? Leacock was one of the captains in my regiment—a first-rate man. He knew Alvin pretty well, I think; but my impression is they didn't hit it off very chummily. . . . Surely you don't connect him with this affair?"

Markham ignored the question. "Did you happen to attend a party of Pfyfe's the night the captain threatened your brother?"

"I went, I remember, to one or two of Pfyfe's parties," said the major. "I don't, as a rule, care for such gatherings, but Alvin convinced me it was a good business policy."

He lifted his head and frowned fixedly into space, like one searching for an elusive memory.

"However, I don't recall—By George! Yes, I believe I do. . . . But if the instance I am thinking of is what you have in mind, you can dismiss it. We were all a little moist that night."

"Did you see the gun?" pursued Heath.

The major pursed his lips. "Now that you mention it, I think he did make some motion of the kind."

"Did you see the gun?" pursued Heath.

"No, I can't say that I did."

Markham put the next question. "Do you think Captain Leacock capable of the act of murder?"

"Hardly," Major Benson answered with emphasis. "Leacock isn't cold-blooded. The woman over whom the tiff occurred is more capable of such an act than he is."

A short silence followed, broken by Vance.

"What do you know, Major, about this glass of fashion and mold of form, Pfyfe? He appears a rare bird. Has he a history, or is his presence his life's document?"

"Leander Pfyfe," said the major, "is a typical specimen of the modern young do-nothing—I say young, though I imagine he's around forty. He was pampered in his upbringing—had everything he wanted, I believe; but he became restless and followed several different fads till he tired of them. He was two years in South Africa hunting big game and, I think, wrote a book recounting his adventures. Since then he has done nothing that I know of. He married a wealthy shrew some years ago—for her money, I imagine. But the woman's father controls the purse strings and holds him down to a rigid allowance. . . . Pfyfe's a waster and an idler, but Alvin seemed to find some attraction in the man."

The major's words had been careless in inflection and undeliberated, like those of a man discussing a neutral matter; but all of us, I think, received the impression that he had a strong personal dislike for Pfyfe.

"Not a ravishing personality, what?" remarked Vance. "And he uses far too much *Jicky*."

"Still," supplied Heath, with a puzzled frown, "a fellow's got to have a lot of nerve to shoot big game. . . . And, speaking of nerve, I've been thinking that the guy who shot your brother, Major, was a mighty cool-headed proposition. He did it from the front when his man was wide awake and with a servant upstairs. That takes nerve."

"Sergeant, you're positively brilliant!" exclaimed Vance.

## 12. THE OWNER OF A COLT .45

(Monday, June 17; forenoon.)

Though Vance and I arrived at the district attorney's office the following morning a little after nine, the captain had been waiting twenty minutes; and Markham directed Swacker to send him in at once.

Captain Philip Leacock was a typical army officer, very tall—fully six feet, two inches—clean-shaven, straight, and slender. His face was grave and immobile; and he stood before the district attorney in the erect, earnest attitude of a soldier awaiting orders from his superior officer.

"Take a seat, Captain," said Markham, with a formal bow. "I have asked you here, as you probably know, to put a few questions to you concerning Mr. Alvin Benson. There are several points regarding your relationship with him which I want you to explain."

"Am I suspected of complicity in the crime?" Leacock spoke with a slight southern accent.

"That remains to be seen," Markham told him coldly. "It is to determine that point that I wish to question you."

The other sat rigidly in his chair and waited.

Markham fixed him with a direct gaze.

"You recently made a threat on Mr. Alvin Benson's life, I believe."

Leacock started, and his fingers tightened over his knees. But before he could answer, Markham continued: "I can tell you the occasion on which the threat was made—it was at a party given by Mr. Leander Pfyfe."

Leacock hesitated, then thrust forward his jaw. "Very well, sir; I admit I made the threat. Benson was a cad—he deserved shooting. . . . That night he had become more obnoxious than usual. He'd been drinking too much—and so had I, I reckon."

He gave a twisted smile and looked nervously past the district attorney out of the window.

"But I didn't shoot him, sir. I didn't even know he'd been shot until I read the paper next day."

"He was shot with an army Colt, the kind you fellows carried in the war," said Markham, keeping his eyes on the man.

"I know," Leacock replied. "The papers said so."

"You have such a gun, haven't you, Captain?"

Again the other hesitated. "No, sir." His voice was barely audible.

"What became of it?"

The man glanced at Markham and then quickly shifted his eyes. "I—I lost it . . . in France."

Markham smiled faintly.

"Then how do you account for the fact that Mr. Pfyfe saw the gun the night you made the threat?"

"Saw the gun?" He looked blankly at the district attorney.

"Yes, saw it and recognized it as an army gun," persisted Markham, in a level voice. "Also, Major Benson saw you make a motion as if to draw a gun."

Leacock drew a deep breath, and set his mouth doggedly.

"I tell you sir, I haven't a gun. . . . I lost it in France."

"Perhaps you didn't lose it, Captain. Perhaps you lent it to someone."

"I didn't sir!" the words burst from his lips.

"Think a minute, Captain. . . . Didn't you lend it to someone?"

"No—I did not!"

"You paid a visit—yesterday—to Riverside Drive. . . . Perhaps you took it there with you."

Vance had been listening closely. "Oh, deuced clever!" he now murmured in my ear.

Captain Leacock moved uneasily. His face, even with its deep coat of tan, seemed to pale, and he sought to avoid the implacable gaze of his questioner by concentrating his attention upon some object on the table. When he spoke his voice, heretofore truculent, was colored by anxiety.

"I didn't have it with me. . . . And I didn't lend it to anyone."

Markham sat leaning forward over the desk, his chin on his hand, like a minatory graven image. "It may be you lent it to someone prior to that morning."

"Prior to . . . ?" Leacock looked up quickly and paused, as if analyzing the other's remark.

Markham took advantage of his perplexity.

"Have you lent your gun to anyone since you returned from France?"

"No, I've never lent it—" he began, but suddenly halted and flushed. Then he added hastily, "How could I lend it? I just told you, sir —"

"Never mind that!" Markham cut in. "So you had a gun, did you, Captain? . . . Have you still got it?"

Leacock opened his lips to speak but closed them again tightly.

Markham relaxed and leaned back in his chair.

"You were aware, of course, that Benson had been annoying Miss St. Clair with his attentions?"

At the mention of the girl's name the captain's body became rigid; his face turned a dull red, and he glared menacingly at the district attorney. At the end of a slow, deep inhalation he spoke through clenched teeth.

"Suppose we leave Miss St. Clair out of this." He looked as though he might spring at Markham.

"Unfortunately, we can't," Markham's words were sympathetic but firm. "Too many facts connect her with the case. Her handbag, for instance, was found in Benson's living room the morning after the murder."

"That's a lie, sir!"

Markham ignored the insult.

"Miss St. Clair herself admits the circumstance." He held up his hand, as the other was about to answer. "Don't misinterpret my mentioning the fact. I am not accusing Miss St. Clair of having anything to do with the affair. I'm merely endeavoring to get some light on your own connection with it."

The captain studied Markham with an expression that clearly indicated he doubted these assurances. Finally he set his mouth and announced with determination:

"I haven't anything more to say on the subject, sir."

"You knew, didn't you," continued Markham, "that Miss St. Clair dined with Benson at the Marseilles on the night he was shot?"

"What of it?" retorted Leacock sullenly.

"And you knew, didn't you, that they left the restaurant at midnight, and that Miss St. Clair did not reach home until after one?"

A strange look came into the man's eyes. The ligaments of his neck tightened, and he took a deep, resolute breath. But he neither glanced at the district attorney nor spoke.

"You know, of course," pursued Markham's monotonous voice, "that Benson was shot at half past twelve?" He waited, and for a whole minute there was silence in the room.

"You have nothing more to say, Captain?" he asked at length; "no further explanations to give me?"

Leacock did not answer. He sat gazing imperturbably ahead of him; and it was evident he had sealed his lips for the time being.

Markham rose.

"In that case, let us consider the interview at an end."

The moment Captain Leacock had gone, Markham rang for one of his clerks.

"Tell Ben to have that man followed. Find out where he goes and what he does. I want a report at the Stuyvesant Club tonight."

When he was alone, Vance gave Markham a look of half-bantering admiration.

"Ingenious, not to say artful. . . . But, y' know, your questions about the lady were shocking bad form."

"No doubt," Markham agreed. "But it looks now as if we were on the right track. Leacock didn't create an impression of unassailable innocence."

"Didn't he?" asked Vance. "Just what were the signs of his assailable guilt?"

"You saw him turn white when I questioned him about the weapon. His nerves were on edge—he was genuinely frightened."

Vance sighed. "What a perfect ready-made set of notions you have, Markham! Don't you know that an innocent man, when he comes under suspicion, is apt to be more nervous than a guilty one, who, to begin with, had enough nerve to commit the crime and, secondly, realizes that any show of nervousness is regarded as guilt by you lawyer chaps? 'My strength is as the strength of ten because my heart is pure' is a mere Sunday school pleasantry. Touch almost any innocent man on the shoulder and say 'You're arrested,' and his pupils will dilate, he'll break out in a cold sweat, the blood will rush from his face, and he'll have tremors and dyspnea. If he's a *hystérique*, or a cardiac neurotic, he'll probably collapse completely. It's the guilty person who, when thus accosted, lifts his eyebrows in bored surprise and says, 'You don't mean it, really—here have a cigar.'"

"The hardened criminal may act as you say," Markham conceded; "but an honest man who's innocent doesn't go to pieces, even when accused."

Vance shook his head hopelessly. "My dear fellow, Crile and Voronoff might have lived in vain for all of you. Manifestations of fear are the result of glandular secretions—nothing more. All they prove is that the person's thyroid is undeveloped or that his adrenals are subnormal. A man accused of a crime, or shown the bloody weapon with which it was committed, will either smile serenely, or scream, or have hysterics, or faint, or appear disinterested according to his hormones and irrespective of his guilt. Your theory, d' ye see, would be quite all right if everyone had the same amount of the various internal secretions. But they haven't. . . . Really, y' know, you shouldn't send a man to the electric chair simply because he's deficient in endocrines. It isn't cricket."

Before Markham could reply, Swacker appeared at the door and said Heath had arrived.

The sergeant, beaming with satisfaction, fairly burst into the room. For once he forgot to shake hands. "Well, it looks like we've got hold of something workable. I went to this Captain Leacock's apartment house last night, and here's the straight of it:—Leacock was at home the night of the thirteenth all right; but shortly after midnight he went out, headed west—get that!—and he didn't return till about quarter of one!"

"What about the hallboy's original story?" asked Markham.

"That's the best part of it. Leacock had the boy fixed. Gave him money to swear he hadn't left the house that night. What do you think of that, Mr. Markham? Pretty crude—huh? . . . The kid loosened up when I told him I was thinking of sending him up the river for doing the job himself." Heath laughed unpleasantly. "And he won't spill anything to Leacock, either."

Markham nodded his head slowly.

"What you tell me, Sergeant, bears out certain conclusions I arrived at when I talked to Captain Leacock this morning. Ben put a man on him when he left here, and I'm to get a report tonight. Tomorrow may see this thing through. I'll get in touch with you in the morning, and if anything's to be done, you understand, you'll have the handling of it."

When Heath had left us, Markham folded his hands behind his head and leaned back contentedly.

"I think I've got the answer," he said. "The girl dined with Benson and returned to his house afterward. The captain, suspecting the fact, went out, found her there, and shot Benson. That would account not only for her gloves and handbag but for the hour it took her to go from the Marseilles to her home. It would also account for her attitude here Saturday and for the captain's lying about the gun. . . . There. I believe, I have my case. The smashing of the captain's alibi about clinches it."

"Oh, quite," said Vance airily. "'Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing.'"

Markham regarded him a moment. "Have you entirely forsworn human reason as a means of reaching a decision? Here we have an admitted threat, a motive, the time, the place, the opportunity, the conduct, and the criminal agent."

"Those words sound strangely familiar," Vance smiled. "Didn't most of 'em fit the young lady also? . . . And you really haven't got the criminal agent, y' know. But it's no doubt floating about the city somewhere. A mere detail, however."

"I may not have it in my hand," Markham countered. "But with a good man on watch every minute, Leacock won't find much opportunity of disposing of the weapon."

Vance shrugged indifferently.

"In any event, go easy," he admonished. "My humble opinion is that you've merely unearthed a conspiracy."

"Conspiracy? . . . Good Lord! What kind?"

"A conspiracy of circumst'nces, don't y' know."

"I'm glad, at any rate, it hasn't to do with international politics," returned Markham good-naturedly.

He glanced at the clock. "You won't mind if I get to work? I've a dozen things to attend to and a couple of committees to see. . . . Why don't you go across the hall and have a talk with Ben Hanlon and then come back at twelve thirty? We'll have lunch together at the Bankers' Club. Ben's our greatest expert on foreign extradition and has spent most of his life chasing about the world after fugitives from justice. He'll spin you some good yarns."

"How perfectly fascinatin'!" exclaimed Vance, with a yawn. But instead of taking the suggestion, he walked to the window and lit a cigarette. He stood for a while puffing at it, rolling it between his fingers, and inspecting it critically.

"Y'know, Markham," he observed, "everything's going to pot these days. It's this silly democracy. Even the nobility is degen'rating. These Régie cigarettes, now; they've fallen off frightfully. There was a time when no self-respecting potentate would have smoked such inferior tobacco."

Markham smiled. "What's the favor you want to ask?"

"Favor? What has that to do with the decay of Europe's aristocracy?"

"I've noticed that whenever you want to ask a favor which you consider questionable etiquette, you begin with a denunciation of royalty."

"Observin' fella," commented Vance dryly. Then he, too, smiled. "Do you mind if I invite Colonel Ostrander along to lunch?"

Markham gave him a sharp look. "Bigsby Ostrander, you mean? . . . Is he the mysterious colonel you've been asking people about for the past two days?"

"That's the lad. Pompous ass and that sort of thing. Might prove a bit edifyin', though. He's the papa of Benson's crowd, so to speak; knows all parties. Regular old scandalmonger."

"Have him along, by all means," agreed Markham. Then he picked up the telephone. "Now I'm going to tell Ben you're coming over for an hour or so."



### 13. THE GRAY CADILLAC

(Monday, June 17; 12:30 P.M.)

When, at half past twelve, Markham, Vance, and I entered the Grill of the Bankers' Club in the Equitable Building, Colonel Ostrander was already at the bar engaged with one of Charlie's prohibition clam-broth-and-Worcestershire-sauce cocktails. Vance had telephoned him immediately upon our leaving the district attorney's office, requesting him to meet us at the club; and the colonel had seemed eager to comply.

"Here is New York's gayest dog," said Vance, introducing him to Markham (I had met him before); "a sybarite and a hedonist. He sleeps till noon, and makes no appointments before tiffin-time. I had to knock him up and threaten him with your official ire to get him downtown at this early hour."

"Only too pleased to be of any service," the colonel assured Markham grandiloquently. "Shocking affair! Gad! I couldn't credit it when I read it in the papers. Fact is, though—I don't mind sayin' it—I've one or two ideas on the subject. Came very near calling you up myself, sir."

When we had taken our seats at the table, Vance began interrogating him without preliminaries.

"You know all the people in Benson's set, Colonel. Tell us something about Captain Leacock. What sort of chap is he?"

"Ha! So you have your eye on the gallant captain?"

Colonel Ostrander pulled importantly at his white moustache. He was a large pink-faced man with bushy eyelashes and small blue eyes; and his manner and bearing were those of a pompous light-opera general.

"Not a bad idea. Might possibly have done it. Hotheaded fellow. He's badly smitten with a Miss St. Clair—fine girl, Muriel. And Benson was smitten, too. If I'd been twenty years younger myself—"

"You're too fascinatin' to the ladies, as it is, Colonel," interrupted Vance. "But tell us about the captain."

"Ah, yes—the captain. Comes from Georgia originally. Served in the war—some kind of decoration. He didn't care for Benson—disliked him, in fact. Quick-tempered, single-track-minded sort of person. Jealous, too. You know the type—a product of that tribal etiquette below the Mason and Dixon line. Puts women on a pedestal—not that they shouldn't be put there, God bless 'em! But he'd go to jail for a lady's honor. A shielder of womanhood. Sentimental cuss, full of chivalry; just the kind to blow out a rival's brains:—no questions asked—*pop*—and it's all over. Dangerous chap to monkey with. Benson was a confounded idiot to bother with the girl when he knew she was engaged to Leacock. Playin' with fire. I don't mind sayin' I was tempted to warn him. But it was none of my affair—I had no business interferin'. Bad taste."

"Just how well did Captain Leacock know Benson?" asked Vance. "By that I mean, how intimate were they?"

"Not intimate at all," the colonel replied.

He made a ponderous gesture of negation, and added, "I should say not! Formal, in fact. They met each other here and there a good deal, though. Knowing 'em both pretty well, I've often had 'em to little affairs at my humble diggin's."

"You wouldn't say Captain Leacock was a good gambler—levelheaded and all that?"

"Gambler—huh!" The colonel's manner was heavily contemptuous. "Poorest I ever saw. Played poker worse than a woman. Too excitable—couldn't keep his feelin's to himself. Altogether too rash."

Then, after a momentary pause: "By George! I see what you're aimin' at. . . . And you're dead right. It's rash young puppies just like him that go about shootin' people they don't like."

"The captain, I take it, is quite different in that regard from your friend, Leander Pfyfe," remarked Vance.

The colonel appeared to consider. "Yes and no," he decided. "Pfyfe's a cool gambler—that I'll grant you. He once ran a private gambling place of his own down on Long Island—roulette, monte, baccarat, that sort of thing. And he popped tigers and wild boars in Africa for a while. But Pfyfe's got his sentimental side, and he'd plunge on a pair of deuces with all the betting odds against him. Not a good scientific gambler. Flighty in his impulses, if you understand me. I don't mind admittin', though, that he could shoot a man and forget all about it in five minutes. But he'd need a lot of provocation. . . . He may have had it—you can't tell."

"Pfyfe and Benson were rather intimate, weren't they?"

"Very—very. Always saw 'em together when Pfyfe was in New York. Known each other years. Boon companions, as they called 'em in the old days. Actually lived together before Pfyfe got married. An exacting woman, Pfyfe's wife; makes him toe the mark. But loads of money."

"Speaking of the ladies," said Vance, "what was the situation between Benson and Miss St. Clair?"

"Who can tell?" asked the colonel sententiously. "Muriel didn't cotton to Benson—that's sure. And yet . . . women are strange creatures—"

"Oh, no end strange," agreed Vance, a trifle wearily. "But really, y' know, I wasn't prying into the lady's personal relations with Benson. I thought you might know her mental attitude concerning him."

"Ah—I see. Would she, in short, have been likely to take desperate measures against him? . . . Egad! That's an idea!"

The colonel pondered the point.

"Muriel, now, is a girl of strong character. Works hard at her art. She's a singer and, I don't mind tellin' you, a mighty fine one. She's deep, too—deuced deep. And capable. Not afraid of taking a chance. Independent. I myself wouldn't want to be in her path if she had it in for me. Might stick at nothing."

He nodded his head sagely.

"Women are funny that way. Always surprisin' you. No sense of values. The most peaceful of 'em will shoot a man in cold blood without warnin'—"

He suddenly sat up, and his little blue eyes glistened like china. "By gad!" He fairly blurted the ejaculation. "Muriel had dinner alone

with Benson the night he was shot—the very night. Saw 'em together myself at the Marseilles."

"You don't say, really!" muttered Vance incuriously. "But I suppose we all must eat. . . . By the bye, how well did you yourself know Benson?"

The colonel looked startled, but Vance's innocuous expression seemed to reassure him.

"I? My dear fellow! I've known Alvin Benson fifteen years. At least fifteen—maybe longer. Showed him the sights in this old town before the lid was put on. A live town it was then. Wide open. Anything you wanted. Gad—what times we had! Those were the days of the old Haymarket. Never thought of toddlin' home till breakfast—"

Vance again interrupted his irrelevancies.

"How intimate are your relations with Major Benson?"

"The major? . . . That's another matter. He and I belong to different schools. Dissimilar tastes. We never hit it off. Rarely see each other."

He seemed to think that some explanation was necessary, for before Vance could speak again, he nodded, "The major, you know, was never one of the boys, as we say. Disapproved of gaiety. Didn't mix with our little set. Considered me and Alvin too frivolous. Serious-minded chap."

Vance ate in silence for a while, then asked in an offhand way, "Did you do much speculating through Benson and Benson?"

For the first time the colonel appeared hesitant about answering. He ostentatiously wiped his mouth with his napkin.

"Oh—dabbled a bit," he at length admitted airily. "Not very lucky, though. . . . We all flirted now and then with the Goddess of Chance in Benson's office."

Throughout the lunch Vance kept plying him with questions along these lines; but at the end of an hour he seemed to be no nearer anything definite than when he began. Colonel Ostrander was voluble, but his fluency was vague and disorganized. He talked mainly in parentheses and insisted on elaborating his answers with rambling opinions, until it was almost impossible to extract what little information his words contained.

Vance, however, did not appear discouraged. He dwelt on Captain Leacock's character and seemed particularly interested in his personal relationship with Benson. Pfyfe's gambling proclivities also occupied his attention, and he let the colonel ramble on tiresomely about the man's gambling house on Long Island and his hunting experiences in South Africa. He asked numerous questions about Benson's other friends but paid scant attention to the answers.

The whole interview impressed me as pointless, and I could not help wondering what Vance hoped to learn. Markham, I was convinced, was equally at sea. He pretended polite interest and nodded appreciatively during the colonel's incredibly drawn-out periods; but his eyes wandered occasionally, and several times I saw him give Vance a look of reproachful inquiry. There was no doubt, however, that Colonel Ostrander knew his people.

When we were back in the district attorney's office, having taken leave of our garrulous guest at the subway entrance, Vance threw himself into one of the easy chairs with an air of satisfaction.

"Most entertainin', what? As an elim'nator of suspects the colonel has his good points."

"Eliminator!" retorted Markham. "It's a good thing he's not connected with the police; he'd have half the community jailed for shooting Benson."

"He *is* a bit bloodthirsty," Vance admitted. "He's determined to get somebody jailed for the crime."

"According to that old warrior, Benson's coterie was a camorra of gunmen—not forgetting the women. I couldn't help getting the impression, as he talked, that Benson was miraculously lucky not to have been riddled with bullets long ago."

"It's obvious," commented Vance, "that you overlooked the illuminatin' flashes in the colonel's thunder."

"Were there any?" Markham asked. "At any rate, I can't say that they exactly blinded me by their brilliance."

"And you received no solace from his words?"

"Only those in which he bade me a fond farewell. The parting didn't exactly break my heart. . . . What the old boy said about Leacock, however, might be called a confirmatory opinion. It verified—if verification had been necessary—the case against the captain."

Vance smiled cynically. "Oh, to be sure. And what he said about Miss St. Clair would have verified the case against her, too—last Saturday. Also, what he said about Pfyfe would have verified the case against that Beau Sabreur, if you had happened to suspect him—eh, what?"

Vance had scarcely finished speaking when Swacker came in to say that Emery from the homicide bureau had been sent over by Heath and wished, if possible, to see the district attorney.

When the man entered, I recognized him at once as the detective who had found the cigarette butts in Benson's grate.

With a quick glance at Vance and me, he went directly to Markham. "We've found the gray Cadillac, sir; and Sergeant Heath thought you might want to know about it right away. It's in a small, one-man garage on Seventy-fourth Street near Amsterdam Avenue, and has been there three days. One of the men from the Sixty-eighth Street station located it and phoned in to headquarters; and I hopped uptown at once. It's the right car—fishing tackle and all, except for the rods; so I guess the ones found in Central Park belonged to the car after all; fell out probably. . . . It seems a fellow drove the car into the garage about noon last Friday, and gave the garage-man twenty dollars to keep his mouth shut. The man's a wop and says he don't read the papers. Anyway, he came across pronto when I put the screws on."

The detective drew out a small notebook.

"I looked up the car's number. . . . It's listed in the name of Leander Pfyfe, 24 Elm Boulevard, Port Washington, Long Island."

Markham received this piece of unexpected information with a perplexed frown. He dismissed Emery almost curtly and sat tapping thoughtfully on his desk.

Vance watched him with an amused smile.

"It's really not a madhouse, y' know," he observed comfortingly. "I say, don't the colonel's words bring you any cheer, now that you know Leander was hovering about the neighborhood at the time Benson was translated into the Beyond?"

"Damn your old colonel!" snapped Markham. "What interests me at present is fitting this new development into the situation."

"It fits beautifully," Vance told him. "It rounds out the mosaic, so to speak. . . . Are you actu'ly disconcerted by learning that Pfyfe was the owner of the mysterious car?"

"Not having your gift of clairvoyance, I am, I confess, disturbed by the fact."

Markham lit a cigar—an indication of worry. "You, of course," he added, with sarcasm, "knew before Emery came here that it was Pfyfe's car."

"I didn't know," Vance corrected him; "but I had a strong suspicion. Pfyfe overdid his distress when he told us of his breakdown in the Catskills. And Heath's question about his itiner'ry annoyed him frightfully. His hauteur was too melodramatic."

"Your *ex post facto* wisdom is most useful!"

Markham smoked awhile in silence.

"I think I'll find out about this matter."

He rang for Swacker. "Call up the Ansonia," he ordered angrily; "locate Leander Pfyfe, and say I want to see him at the Stuyvesant Club at six o'clock. And tell him he's to be there."

"It occurs to me," said Markham, when Swacker had gone, "that this car episode may prove helpful, after all. Pfyfe was evidently in New York that night, and for some reason he didn't want it known. Why, I wonder? He tipped us off about Leacock's threat against Benson and hinted strongly that we'd better get on the fellow's track. Of course, he may have been sore at Leacock for winning Miss St. Clair away from his friend, and taken this means of wreaking a little revenge on him. On the other hand, if Pfyfe was at Benson's house the night of the murder, he may have some real information. And now that we've found out about the car, I think he'll tell us what he knows."

"He'll tell you something anyway," said Vance. "He's the type of congenital liar that'll tell anybody anything as long as it doesn't involve himself unpleasantly."

"You and the Cumean Sibyl, I presume, could inform me in advance what he's going to tell me."

"I couldn't say as to the Cumean Sibyl, don't y' know," Vance returned lightly; "but speaking for myself, I rather fancy he'll tell you that he saw the impetuous captain at Benson's house that night."

Markham laughed. "I hope he does. You'll want to be on hand to hear him, I suppose."

"I couldn't bear to miss it."

Vance was already at the door, preparatory to going, when he turned again to Markham. "I've another slight favor to ask. Get a dossier on Pfyfe—there's a good fellow. Send one of your innumerable Dogberrys to Port Washington and have the gentleman's conduct and social habits looked into. Tell your emiss'ry to concentrate on the woman question. . . . I promise you, you sha'n't regret it."

Markham, I could see, was decidedly puzzled by this request and half inclined to refuse it. But after deliberating a few moments, he smiled and pressed a button on his desk.

"Anything to humor you," he said. "I'll send a man down at once."

## 14. LINKS IN THE CHAIN

(Monday, June 17; 6 P.M.)

Vance and I spent an hour or so that afternoon at the Anderson Galleries looking at some tapestries which were to be auctioned the next day, and afterward had tea at Sherry's. We were at the Stuyvesant Club a little before six. A few minutes later Markham and Pfyfe arrived; and we went at once into one of the conference rooms.

Pfyfe was as elegant and superior as at the first interview. He wore a rat-catcher suit and Newmarket gaiters of unbleached linen, and was redolent of perfume.

"An unexpected pleasure to see you gentlemen again so soon," he greeted us, like one conferring a blessing.

Markham was far from amiable, and gave him an almost brusque salutation. Vance had merely nodded, and now sat regarding Pfyfe drearily as if seeking to find some excuse for his existence but utterly unable to do so.

Markham went directly to the point. "I've found out, Mr. Pfyfe, that you placed your machine in a garage at noon on Friday and gave the man twenty dollars to say nothing about it."

Pfyfe looked up with a hurt look. "I've been deeply wronged," he complained sadly. "I gave the man fifty dollars."

"I am glad you admit the fact so readily," returned Markham. "You knew, by the newspapers, of course, that your machine was seen outside Benson's house the night he was shot."

"Why else should I have paid so liberally to have its presence in New York kept secret?" His tone indicated that he was pained at the other's obtuseness.

"In that case, why did you keep it in the city at all?" asked Markham. "You could have driven it back to Long Island."

Pfyfe shook his head sorrowfully, a look of commiseration in his eyes. Then he leaned forward with an air of benign patience:—he would be gentle with this dull-witted district attorney, like a fond teacher with a backward child, and would strive to lead him out of the tangle of his uncertainties.

"I am a married man, Mr. Markham." He pronounced the fact as if some special virtue attached to it. "I started on my trip for the Catskills Thursday after dinner, intending to stop a day in New York to make my adieus to someone residing here. I arrived quite late—after midnight—and decided to call on Alvin. But when I drove up, the house was dark. So, without even ringing the bell, I walked to Pietro's in Forty-third Street to get a nightcap,—I keep a bit of my own pinch-bottle Haig and Haig there—but, alas! the place was closed, and I strolled back to my car. . . . To think that while I was away poor Alvin was shot!"

He stopped and polished his eyeglass.

"The irony of it! . . . I didn't even guess that anything had happened to the dear fellow—how could I? I drove, all unsuspecting of the tragedy, to a Turkish bath and remained there the night. The next morning I read of the murder; and in the later editions I saw the mention of my car. It was then I became—shall I say worried? But no. *Worried* is a misleading word. Let me say, rather, that I became aware of the false position I might be placed in if the car were traced to me. So I drove it to the garage and paid the man to say nothing of its whereabouts, lest its discovery confuse the issue of Alvin's death."

One might have thought, from his tone and the self-righteous way he looked at Markham, that he had bribed the garageman wholly out of consideration for the district attorney and the police.

"Why didn't you continue on your trip?" asked Markham. "That would have made the discovery of the car even less likely."

Pfyfe adopted an air of compassionate surprise.

"With my dearest friend foully murdered? How could one have the heart to seek diversion at such a sad moment? . . . I returned home and informed Mrs. Pfyfe that my car had broken down."

"You might have driven home in your car, it seems to me," observed Markham.

Pfyfe offered a look of infinite forbearance for the other's inspection and took a deep sigh, which conveyed the impression that, though he could not sharpen the world's perceptions, he at least could mourn for its deplorable lack of understanding.

"If I had been in the Catskills away from any source of information, where Mrs. Pfyfe believed me to be, how would I have heard of Alvin's death until, perhaps, days afterward? You see, unfortunately I had not mentioned to Mrs. Pfyfe that I was stopping over in New York. The truth is, Mr. Markham, I had reason for not wishing my wife to know I was in the city. Consequently, if I had driven back at once, she would, I regret to say, have suspected me of breaking my journey. I therefore pursued the course which seemed simplest."

Markham was becoming annoyed at the man's fluent hypocrisy. After a brief silence he asked abruptly, "Did the presence of your car at Benson's house that night have anything to do with your apparent desire to implicate Captain Leacock in the affair?"

Pfyfe lifted his eyebrows in pained astonishment and made a gesture of polite protestation.

"My dear sir!" His voice betokened profound resentment of the other's unjust imputation. "If yesterday you detected in my words an undercurrent of suspicion against Captain Leacock, I can account for it only by the fact that I actually saw the captain in front of Alvin's house when I drove up that night."

Markham shot a curious look at Vance, then said to Pfyfe, "You are sure you saw Leacock?"

"I saw him quite distinctly. And I would have mentioned the fact yesterday had it not involved the tacit confession of my own presence there."

"What if it had?" demanded Markham. "It was vital information, and I could have used it this morning. You were placing your comfort ahead of the legal demands of justice; and your attitude puts a very questionable aspect on your own alleged conduct that night."

"You are pleased to be severe, sir," said Pfyfe with self-pity. "But having placed myself in a false position, I must accept your criticism."

"Do you realize," Markham went on, "that many a district attorney, if he knew what I know about your movements and had been

treated the way you've treated me, would arrest you on suspicion?"

"Then I can only say," was the suave response, "that I am most fortunate in my inquisitor."

Markham rose.

"That will be all for today, Mr. Pfyfe. But you are to remain in New York until I give you permission to return home. Otherwise, I will have you held as a material witness."

Pfyfe made a shocked gesture in deprecation of such acerbities and bade us a ceremonious good-afternoon.

When we were alone, Markham looked seriously at Vance. "Your prophecy was fulfilled, though I didn't dare hope for such luck. Pfyfe's evidence puts the final link in the chain against the captain."

Vance smoked languidly.

"I'll admit your theory of the crime is most satisfyin'. But alas! the psychological objection remains. Everything fits, with the one exception of the captain; and he doesn't fit at all. . . . Silly idea, I know. But he has no more business being cast as the murderer of Benson than the bisonic Tetrazzini had being cast as the phthisical Mimi."[\[16\]](#)

"In any other circumstances," Markham answered, "I might defer reverently to your charming theories. But with all the circumstantial and presumptive evidence I have against Leacock, it strikes my inferior legal mind as sheer nonsense to say, 'He just couldn't be guilty because his hair is parted in the middle and he tucks his napkin in his collar.' There's too much logic against it."

"I'll grant your logic is irrefutable—as all logic is, no doubt. You've prob'bly convinced many innocent persons by sheer reasoning that they were guilty."

Vance stretched himself wearily.

"What do you say to a light repast on the roof? The unutt'able Pfyfe has tired me."

In the summer dining room on the roof of the Stuyvesant Club we found Major Benson sitting alone, and Markham asked him to join us.

"I have good news for you, Major," he said, when we had given our order. "I feel confident I have my man; everything points to him. Tomorrow will see the end, I hope."

The major gave Markham a questioning frown.

"I don't understand exactly. From what you told me the other day, I got the impression there was a woman involved."

Markham smiled awkwardly and avoided Vance's eyes. "A lot of water has run under the bridge since then," he said. "The woman I had in mind was eliminated as soon as we began to check up on her. But in the process I was led to the man. There's little doubt of his guilt. I felt pretty sure about it this morning, and just now I learned that he was seen by a credible witness in front of your brother's house within a few minutes of the time the shot was fired."

"Is there any objection to your telling me who it was?" The major was still frowning.

"None whatsoever. The whole city will probably know it tomorrow. . . . It was Captain Leacock."

Major Benson stared at him in unbelief. "Impossible! I simply can't credit it. That boy was with me three years on the other side, and I got to know him pretty well. I can't help feeling there's a mistake somewhere. . . . The police," he added quickly, "have got on the wrong track."

"It's not the police," Markham informed him. "It was my own investigations that turned up the captain."

The major did not answer, but his silence bespoke his doubt.

"Y' know," put in Vance, "I feel the same way about the captain that you do, Major. It rather pleases me to have my impressions verified by one who has known him so long."

"What, then, was Leacock doing in front of the house that night?" urged Markham acidulously.

"He might have been singing carols beneath Benson's window," suggested Vance.

Before Markham could reply, he was handed a card by the headwaiter. When he glanced at it, he gave a grunt of satisfaction and directed that the caller be sent up immediately. Then, turning back to us, he said, "We may learn something more now. I've been expecting this man Higginbotham. He's the detective that followed Leacock from my office this morning."

Higginbotham was a wiry, pale-faced youth with fishy eyes and a shifty manner. He slouched up to the table and stood hesitantly before the district attorney.

"Sit down and report, Higginbotham," Markham ordered. "These gentlemen are working with me on the case."

"I picked up the bird while he was waiting for the elevator," the man began, eyeing Markham craftily. "He went to the subway and rode uptown to Seventy-ninth and Broadway. He walked through Eightieth to Riverside Drive and went in the apartment-house at No. 94. Didn't give his name to the boy—got right in the elevator. He stayed upstairs a coupla hours, come down at one twenty, and hopped a taxi. I picked up another one and followed him. He went down the Drive to Seventy-second, through Central Park, and east on Fifty-ninth. Got out at Avenue A, and walked out on the Queensborough Bridge. About halfway to Blackwell's Island he stood leaning over the rail for five or six minutes. Then he took a small package out of his pocket and dropped it in the river."

"What size was the package?" There was repressed eagerness in Markham's question.

Higginbotham indicated the measurements with his hands.

"How thick was it?"

"Inch or so, maybe."

Markham leaned forward.

"Could it have been a gun—a Colt automatic?"

"Sure, it could. Just about the right size. And it was heavy, too—I could tell by the way he handled it, and the way it hit the water."

"All right." Markham was pleased. "Anything else?"

"No, sir. After he'd ditched the gun, he went home and stayed. I left him there."

When Higginbotham had gone, Markham nodded at Vance with melancholy elation.

"There's your criminal agent. . . . What more would you like?"

"Oh, lots," drawled Vance.

Major Benson looked up, perplexed.

"I don't quite grasp the situation. Why did Leacock have to go to Riverside Drive for his gun?"

"I have reason to think," said Markham, "that he took it to Miss St. Clair the day after the shooting—for safekeeping probably. He wouldn't have wanted it found in his place."

"Might he not have taken it to Miss St. Clair's before the shooting?"

"I know what you mean," Markham answered. (I, too, recalled the major's assertion the day before that Miss St. Clair was more capable of shooting his brother than was the captain.) "I had the same idea myself. But certain evidential facts have eliminated her as a suspect."

"You've undoubtedly satisfied yourself on the point," returned the major; but his tone was dubious. "However, I can't see Leacock as Alvin's murderer."

He paused and laid a hand on the district attorney's arm. "I don't want to appear presumptuous, or unappreciative of all you've done; but I really wish you'd wait a bit before clapping that boy into prison. The most careful and conscientious of us are liable to error. Even facts sometimes lie damnably; and I can't help believing that the facts in this instance have deceived you."

It was plain that Markham was touched by this request of his old friend; but his instinctive fidelity to duty helped him to resist the other's appeal.

"I must act according to my convictions, Major," he said firmly, but with a great kindness.

## 15. "PFYFE—PERSONAL"

(Tuesday, June 18; 9 A.M.)

The next day—the fourth of the investigation—was an important and, in some ways, a momentous one in the solution of the problem posed by Alvin Benson's murder. Nothing of a definite nature came to light, but a new element was injected into the case; and this new element eventually led to the guilty person.

Before we parted from Markham after our dinner with Major Benson, Vance had made the request that he be permitted to call at the district attorney's office the next morning. Markham, both disconcerted and impressed by his unwonted earnestness, had complied; although, I think, he would rather have made his arrangements for Captain Leacock's arrest without the disturbing influence of the other's protesting presence. It was evident that, after Higginbotham's report, Markham had decided to place the captain in custody and to proceed with his preparation of data for the grand jury.

Although Vance and I arrived at the office at nine o'clock, Markham was already there. As we entered the room, he picked up the telephone receiver and asked to be put through to Sergeant Heath.

At that moment Vance did an amazing thing. He walked swiftly to the district attorney's desk and, snatching the receiver out of Markham's hand, clamped it down on the hook. Then he placed the telephone to one side and laid both hands on the other's shoulders.

Markham was too astonished and bewildered to protest; and before he could recover himself, Vance said in a low, firm voice, which was all the more impelling because of its softness, "I'm not going to let you jail Leacock—that's what I came here for this morning. You're not going to order his arrest as long as I'm in this office and can prevent it by any means whatever. There's only one way you can accomplish this act of unmitigated folly, and that's by summoning your policemen and having me forcibly ejected. And I advise you to call a goodly number of 'em, because I'll give 'em the battle of their bellicose lives!"

The incredible part of this threat was that Vance meant it literally. And Markham knew he meant it.

"If you do call your henchmen," he went on, "you'll be the laughing stock of the city inside of a week; for, by that time, it'll be known who really did shoot Benson. And I'll be a popular hero and a martyr—God save the mark!—for defying the district attorney and offering up my sweet freedom on the altar of truth and justice and that sort of thing. . . ."

The telephone rang, and Vance answered it.

"Not wanted," he said, closing off immediately. Then he stepped back and folded his arms.

At the end of the brief silence Markham spoke, his voice quavering with rage. "If you don't go at once, Vance, and let me run this office myself, I'll have no choice but to call in those policemen."

Vance smiled. He knew Markham would take no such extreme measures. After all, the issue between these two friends was an intellectual one; and though Vance's actions had placed it for a moment on a physical basis, there was no danger of its so continuing.

Markham's belligerent gaze slowly turned to one of profound perplexity. "Why are you so damned interested in Leacock?" he asked gruffly. "Why this irrational insistence that he remain at large?"

"You priceless, inexpressible ass!" Vance strove to keep all hint of affection out of his voice. "Do you think I care particularly what happens to a southern army captain? There are hundreds of Leacocks, all alike—with their square shoulders and square chins, and their knobby clothes, and their totemistic codes of barbaric chivalry. Only a mother could tell 'em apart. . . . I'm int'rested in *you*, old chap. I don't want to see you make a mistake that's going to injure you more than it will Leacock."

Markham's eyes lost their hardness; he understood Vance's motive and forgave him. But he was still firm in his belief of the captain's guilt. He remained thoughtful for some time. Then, having apparently arrived at a decision, he rang for Swacker and asked that Phelps be sent for.

"I've a plan that may nail this affair down tight," he said. "And it'll be evidence that not even you, Vance, can gainsay."

Phelps came in, and Markham gave him instructions.

"Go and see Miss St. Clair at once. Get to her some way, and ask her what was in the package Captain Leacock took away from her apartment yesterday and threw in the East River." He briefly summarized Higginbotham's report of the night before. "Demand that she tell you and intimate that you know it was the gun with which Benson was shot. She'll probably refuse to answer and will tell you to get out. Then go downstairs and wait developments. If she phones, listen in at the switchboard. If she happens to send a note to anyone, intercept it. And if she goes out—which I hardly think likely—follow her and learn what you can. Let me hear from you the minute you get hold of anything."

"I get you, Chief." Phelps seemed pleased with the assignment, and departed with alacrity.

"Are such burglarious and eavesdropping methods considered ethical by your learned profession?" asked Vance. "I can't harmonize such conduct with your other qualities, y' know."

Markham leaned back and gazed up at the chandelier. "Personal ethics don't enter into it. Or, if they do, they are crowded out by greater and graver considerations—by the higher demands of justice. Society must be protected; and the citizens of this county look to me for their security against the encroachments of criminals and evildoers. Sometimes, in the pursuance of my duty, it is necessary to adopt courses of conduct that conflict with my personal instincts. I have no right to jeopardize the whole of society because of an assumed ethical obligation to an individual. . . . You understand, of course, that I would not use any information obtained by these unethical methods, unless it pointed to criminal activities on the part of that individual. And in such case, I would have every right to use it, for the good of the community."

"I daresay you're right," yawned Vance. "But society doesn't int'rest me particularly. And I inf'nitely prefer good manners to righteousness."

As he finished speaking Swacker announced Major Benson, who wanted to see Markham at once.

The major was accompanied by a pretty young woman of about twenty-two with yellow bobbed hair, dressed daintily and simply in



light blue *crêpe de Chine*. But for all her youthful and somewhat frivolous appearance, she possessed a reserve and competency of manner that immediately evoked one's confidence.

Major Benson introduced her as his secretary, and Markham placed a chair for her facing his desk.

"Miss Hoffman has just told me something that I think is vital for you to know," said the major; "and I brought her directly to you."

He seemed unusually serious, and his eyes held a look of expectancy colored with doubt.

"Tell Mr. Markham exactly what you told me, Miss Hoffman."

The girl raised her head prettily and related her story in a capable, well-modulated voice.

"About a week ago—I think it was Wednesday—Mr. Pfyfe called on Mr. Alvin Benson in his private office. I was in the next room, where my typewriter is located. There's only a glass partition between the two rooms, and when anyone talks loudly in Mr. Benson's office, I can hear them. In about five minutes, Mr. Pfyfe and Mr. Benson began to quarrel. I thought it was funny, for they were such good friends; but I didn't pay much attention to it and went on with my typing. Their voices got very loud, though, and I caught several words. Major Benson asked me this morning what the words were; so I suppose you want to know, too. Well, they kept referring to a note; and once or twice a check was mentioned. Several times I caught the word *father-in-law*, and once Mr. Benson said 'nothing doing.' . . . Then Mr. Benson called me in and told me to get him an envelope marked 'Pfyfe-Personal' out of his private drawer in the safe. I got it for him, but right after that our bookkeeper wanted me for something, so I didn't hear any more. About fifteen minutes later, when Mr. Pfyfe had gone, Mr. Benson called me to put the envelope back. And he told me that if Mr. Pfyfe ever called again, I wasn't, under any circumstances, to let him into the private office unless he himself was there. He also told me that I wasn't to give the envelope to anybody—not even on a written order. . . . And that is all, Mr. Markham."

During her recital I had been as much interested in Vance's actions as in what she had been saying. When first she had entered the room, his casual glance had quickly changed to one of attentive animation, and he had studied her closely. When Markham had placed the chair for her, he had risen and reached for a book lying on the table near her; and, in doing so, he had leaned unnecessarily close to her in order to inspect—or so it appeared to me—the side of her head. And during her story he had continued his observation, at times bending slightly to the right or left to better his view of her. Unaccountable as his actions had seemed, I knew that some serious consideration had prompted the scrutiny.

When she finished speaking, Major Benson reached in his pocket, and tossed a long manila envelope on the desk before Markham.

"Here it is," he said. "I got Miss Hoffman to bring it to me the moment she told me her story."

Markham picked it up hesitantly, as if doubtful of his right to inspect its contents.

"You'd better look at it," the major advised. "That envelope may very possibly have an important bearing on the case."

Markham removed the elastic band and spread the contents of the envelope before him. They consisted of three items—a canceled check for \$10,000 made out to Leander Pfyfe and signed by Alvin Benson; a note for \$10,000 to Alvin Benson signed by Pfyfe, and a brief confession, also signed by Pfyfe, saying the check was a forgery. The check was dated March 20th of the current year. The confession and the note were dated two days later. The note—which was for ninety days—fell due on Friday, June 21st, only three days off.

For fully five minutes Markham studied these documents in silence. Their sudden introduction into the case seemed to mystify him. Nor had any of the perplexity left his face when he finally put them back in the envelope.

He questioned the girl carefully and had her repeat certain parts of her story. But nothing more could be learned from her; and at length he turned to the major.

"I'll keep this envelope awhile, if you'll let me. I don't see its significance at present, but I'd like to think it over."

When Major Benson and his secretary had gone, Vance rose and extended his legs.

"À la fin!" he murmured. "All things journey: sun and moon, morning, noon, and afternoon, night and all her stars.' *Videlicet*: we begin to make progress."

"What the devil are you driving at?" The new complication of Pfyfe's peccadilloes had left Markham irritable.

"Int'restin' young woman, this Miss Hoffman—eh, what?" Vance rejoined irrelevantly. "Didn't care especially for the deceased Benson. And she fairly detests the aromatic Leander. He has prob'bly told her he was misunderstood by Mrs. Pfyfe and invited her to dinner."

"Well, she's pretty enough," commented Markham indifferently. "Benson, too, may have made advances—which is why she disliked him."

"Oh, absolutely." Vance mused a moment. "Pretty—yes; but misleadin'. She's an ambitious gel and capable, too—knows her business. She's no ball of fluff. She has a solid, honest streak in her—a bit of Teutonic blood, I'd say." He paused meditatively. "Y' know, Markham, I have a suspicion you'll hear from little Miss Katinka again."

"Crystal-gazing, eh?" mumbled Markham.

"Oh, dear no!" Vance was looking lazily out of the window. "But I did enter the silence, so to speak, and indulged in a bit of craniological contemplation."

"I thought I noticed you ogling the girl," said Markham. "But since her hair was bobbed and she had her hat on, how could you analyze the bumps?—if that's the phrase you phrenologists use."

"Forget not Goldsmith's preacher," Vance admonished. "Truth from his lips prevailed, and those who came to scoff remained et cetera. . . . To begin with, I'm no phrenologist. But I believe in epochal, racial, and heredit'ry variations in skulls. In that respect I'm merely an old-fashioned Darwinian. Every child knows that the skull of the Piltdown man differs from that of the Cromagnard; and even a lawyer could distinguish an Aryan head from a Ural-Altaic head, or a Maylaic from a Negrillo. And, if one is versed at all in the Mendelian theory, heredit'ry cranial similarities can be detected. . . . But all this erudition is beyond you, I fear. Suffice it to say that, despite the young woman's hat and hair, I could see the contour of her head and the bone structure in her face; and I even caught a glimpse of her ear."

"And thereby deduced that we'd hear from her again," added Markham scornfully.

"Indirectly—yes," admitted Vance. Then, after a pause: "I say, in view of Miss Hoffman's revelation, do not Colonel Ostrander's

comments of yesterday begin to take on a phosphorescent aspect?"

"Look here!" said Markham impatiently. "Cut out these circumlocutions and get to the point."

Vance turned slowly from the window and regarded him pensively. "Markham—I put the question academically—doesn't Pfyfe's forged check, with its accompanying confession and its shortly due note, constitute a rather strong motive for doing away with Benson?"

Markham sat up suddenly. "You think Pfyfe guilty—is that it?"

"Well, here's the touchin' situation: Pfyfe obviously signed Benson's name to a check, told him about it, and got the surprise of his life when his dear old pal asked him for a ninety-day note to cover the amount and also for a written confession to hold over him to insure payment. . . . Now consider the subsequent facts:—First, Pfyfe called on Benson a week ago and had a quarrel in which the check was mentioned—Damon was prob'bly pleading with Pythias to extend the note and was vulgarly informed that there was 'nothing doing.' Secondly, Benson was shot two days later, less than a week before the note fell due. Thirdly, Pfyfe was at Benson's house the hour of the shooting, and not only lied to you about his whereabouts but bribed a garage owner to keep silent about his car. Fourthly, his explanation, when caught, of his unrewarded search for Haig and Haig was, to say the least, a bit thick. And don't forget that the original tale of his lonely quest for nature's solitudes in the Catskills—with his mysterious stopover in New York to confer a farewell benediction upon some anonymous person—was not all that one could have hoped for in the line of plausibility. Fifthly, he is an impulsive gambler, given to taking chances; and his experiences in South Africa would certainly have familiarized him with firearms. Sixthly, he was rather eager to involve Leacock and did a bit of caddish talebearing to that end, even informing you that he saw the captain on the spot at the fatal moment. Seventhly—but why bore you? Have I not supplied you with all the factors you hold so dear—what are they now?—motive, time, place, opportunity, conduct? All that's wanting is the criminal agent. But then, the captain's gun is at the bottom of the East River; so you're not very much better off in his case, what?"

Markham had listened attentively to Vance's summary. He now sat in rapt silence gazing down at the desk.

"How about a little chat with Pfyfe before you make any final move against the captain?" suggested Vance.

"I think I'll take your advice," answered Markham slowly, after several minutes' reflection. Then he picked up the telephone. "I wonder if he's at his hotel now."

"Oh, he's there," said Vance. "Watchful waitin' and all that."

Pfyfe was in; and Markham requested him to come at once to the office.

"There's another thing I wish you'd do for me," said Vance, when the other had finished telephoning. "The fact is, I'm longing to know what everyone was doing during the hour of Benson's dissolution—that is, between midnight and one A.M. on the night of the thirteenth, or to speak pedantically, the morning of the fourteenth."

Markham looked at him in amazement.

"Seems silly, doesn't it?" Vance went on blithely. "But you put such faith in alibis—though they do prove disappointin' at times, what? There's Leacock, for instance. If that hallboy had told Heath to toddle along and sell his violets, you couldn't do a blessed thing to the captain. Which shows, d' ye see, that you're too trustin'. . . . Why not find out where everyone was? Pfyfe and the captain were at Benson's; and they're about the only ones whose whereabouts you've looked into. Maybe there were others hovering around Alvin that night. There may have been a crush of friends and acquaintances on hand—a regular soiree, y' know. . . . Then again, checking up on all these people will supply the desolate sergeant with something to take his mind off his sorrows."

Markham knew, as well as I, that Vance would not have made a suggestion of this kind unless actuated by some serious motive; and for several moments he studied the other's face intently, as if trying to read his reason for this unexpected request.

"Who, specifically," he asked, "is included in your 'everyone'?" He took up his pencil and held it poised above a sheet of paper.

"No one is to be left out," replied Vance. "Put down Miss St. Clair—Captain Leacock—the Major—Pfyfe—Miss Hoffman—"

"Miss Hoffman!"

"Everyone! . . . Have you Miss Hoffman? Now jot down Colonel Ostrander—"

"Look here!" cut in Markham.

"—and I may have one or two others for you later. But that will do nicely for a beginning."

Before Markham could protest further, Swacker came in to say that Heath was waiting outside.

"What about our friend Leacock, sir?" was the sergeant's first question.

"I'm holding that up for a day or so," explained Markham. "I want to have another talk with Pfyfe before I do anything definite." And he told Heath about the visit of Major Benson and Miss Hoffman.

Heath inspected the envelope and its enclosures and then handed them back.

"I don't see anything in that," he said. "It looks to me like a private deal between Benson and this fellow Pfyfe. Leacock's our man; and the sooner I get him locked up, the better I'll feel."

"That may be tomorrow," Markham encouraged him. "So don't feel downcast over this little delay. . . . You're keeping the captain under surveillance, aren't you?"

"I'll say so," grinned Heath.

Vance turned to Markham. "What about that list of names you made out for the sergeant?" he asked ingenuously. "I understood you to say something about alibis."

Markham hesitated, frowning. Then he handed Heath the paper containing the names Vance had called off to him. "As a matter of caution, Sergeant," he said morosely, "I wish you'd get me the alibis of all these people on the night of the murder. It may bring something contributory to light. Verify those you already know, such as Pfyfe's; and let me have the reports as soon as you can."

When Heath had gone, Markham turned a look of angry exasperation upon Vance.

"Of all the confounded troublemakers—" he began.

But Vance interrupted him blandly.

"Such ingratitude! If only you knew it, Markham, I'm your tutelary genius, your *deus ex machina*, your fairy godmother."

## 16. ADMISSIONS AND SUPPRESSIONS

(Tuesday, June 18; afternoon.)

An hour later Phelps, the operative Markham had sent to 94 Riverside Drive, came in radiating satisfaction.

"I think I've got what you want, Chief." His raucous voice was covertly triumphant. "I went up to the St. Clair woman's apartment and rang the bell. She came to the door herself, and I stepped into the hall and put my questions to her. She sure refused to answer. When I let on I knew the package contained the gun Benson was shot with, she just laughed and jerked the door open. 'Leave this apartment, you vile creature,' she says to me."

He grinned.

"I hurried downstairs, and I hadn't any more than got to the switchboard when her signal flashed. I let the boy get the number and then I stood him to one side and listened in. . . . She was talking to Leacock, and her first words were: 'They know you took the pistol from here yesterday and threw it in the river.' That must've knocked him out, for he didn't say anything for a long time. Then he answered, perfectly calm and kinda sweet: 'Don't worry, Muriel; and don't say a word to anybody for the rest of the day. I'll fix everything in the morning.' He made her promise to keep quiet until tomorrow, and then he said good-bye."

Markham sat awhile digesting the story.

"What impression did you get from the conversation?"

"If you ask me, Chief," said the detective, "I'd lay ten to one that Leacock's guilty and the girl knows it."

Markham thanked him and let him go.

"This sub-Potomac chivalry," commented Vance, "is a frightful nuisance. . . . But aren't we about due to hold polite converse with the genteel Leander?"

Almost as he spoke the man was announced. He entered the room with his habitual urbanity of manner, but for all his suavity, he could not wholly disguise his uneasiness of mind.

"Sit down, Mr. Pfyfe," directed Markham brusquely. "It seems you have a little more explaining to do."

Taking out the manilla envelope, he laid its contents on the desk where the other could see them.

"Will you be so good as to tell me about these?"

"With the greatest pleasure," said Pfyfe; but his voice had lost its assurance. Some of his poise, too, had deserted him, and as he paused to light a cigarette I detected a slight nervousness in the way he manipulated his gold match safe.

"I really should have mentioned these before," he confessed, indicating the papers with a delicately inconsequential wave of the hand.

He leaned forward on one elbow, taking a confidential attitude, and as he talked, the cigarette bobbed up and down between his lips.

"It pains me deeply to go into this matter," he began; "but since it is in the interests of truth, I shall not complain. . . . My—ah—domestic arrangements are not all that one could desire. My wife's father has, curiously enough, taken a most unreasonable dislike to me; and it pleases him to deprive me of all but the meagerest financial assistance, although it is really my wife's money that he refuses to give me. A few months ago I made use of certain funds—ten thousand dollars, to be exact—which, I learned later, had not been intended for me. When my father-in-law discovered my error, it was necessary for me to return the full amount to avoid a misunderstanding between Mrs. Pfyfe and myself—a misunderstanding which might have caused my wife great unhappiness. I regret to say, I used Alvin's name on a check. But I explained it to him at once, you understand, offering him the note and this little confession as evidence of my good faith. . . . And that is all, Mr. Markham."

"Was that what your quarrel with him last week was about?"

Pfyfe gave him a look of querulous surprise. "Ah, you heard of our little contretemps? . . . Yes—we had a slight disagreement as to the—shall I say terms of the transaction?"

"Did Benson insist that the note be paid when due?"

"No—not exactly." Pfyfe's manner became unctuous. "I beg of you, sir, not to press me as to my little chat with Alvin. It was, I assure you, quite irrelevant to the present situation. Indeed, it was of a most personal and private nature." He smiled confidently. "I will admit, however, that I went to Alvin's house the night he was shot, intending to speak to him about the check; but, as you already know, I found the house dark and spent the night in a Turkish bath."

"Parden me, Mr. Pfyfe"—it was Vance who spoke—"but did Mr. Benson take your note without security?"

"Of course!" Pfyfe's tone was a rebuke. "Alvin and I, as I have explained, were the closest friends."

"But even a friend, don't y' know," Vance submitted, "might ask for security on such a large amount. How did Benson know that you'd be able to repay him?"

"I can only say that he did know," the other answered, with an air of patient deliberation.

Vance continued to be doubtful. "Perhaps it was because of the confession you had given him."

Pfyfe rewarded him with a look of beaming approval. "You grasp the situation perfectly," he said.

Vance withdrew from the conversation, and though Markham questioned Pfyfe for nearly half an hour, nothing further transpired. Pfyfe clung to his story in every detail and politely refused to go deeper into his quarrel with Benson, insisting that it had no bearing on the case. At last he was permitted to go.

"Not very helpful," Markham observed. "I'm beginning to agree with Heath that we've turned up a mare's nest in Pfyfe's frenzied financial deal."

"You'll never be anything but your own sweet trusting self, will you?" lamented Vance sadly. "Pfyfe has just given you your first intelligent line of investigation, and you say he's not helpful! . . . Listen to me and *nota bene*. Pfyfe's story about the ten thousand dollars is undoubtedly true; he appropriated the money and forged Benson's name to a check with which to replace it. But I don't for a

second believe there was no security in addition to the confession. Benson wasn't the type of man—friend or no friend—who'd hand over that amount without security. He wanted his money back, not somebody in jail. That's why I put my oar in and asked about the security. Pfyfe, of course, denied it; but when pressed as to how Benson knew he'd pay the note, he retired into a cloud. I had to suggest the confession as the possible explanation; which showed that something else was in his mind—something he didn't care to mention. And the way he jumped at my suggestion bears out my theory."

"Well, what of it?" Markham asked impatiently.

"Oh, for the gift of tears!" moaned Vance. "Don't you see that there's someone in the background—someone connected with the security? It must be so, y' know; otherwise Pfyfe would have told you the entire tale of the quarrel, if only to clear himself from suspicion. Yet, knowing that his position is an awkward one, he refused to divulge what passed between him and Benson in the office that day. . . . Pfyfe is shielding someone—and he is not the soul of chivalry, y' know. Therefore, I ask: Why?"

He leaned back and gazed at the ceiling.

"I have an idea, amounting to a cerebral cyclone," he added, "that when we put our hands on that security, we'll also put our hands on the murderer."

At this moment the telephone rang, and when Markham answered it, a look of startled amusement came into his eyes. He made an appointment with the speaker for half past five that afternoon. Then, hanging up the receiver, he laughed outright at Vance.

"Your auricular researches have been confirmed," he said. "Miss Hoffman just called me confidentially on an outside phone to say she has something to add to her story. She's coming here at five thirty."

Vance was unimpressed by the announcement. "I rather imagined she'd telephone during her lunch hour."

Again Markham gave him one of his searching scrutinies. "There's something damned queer going on around here," he observed.

"Oh, quite," returned Vance carelessly. "Queerer than you could possibly imagine."

For fifteen or twenty minutes Markham endeavored to draw him out; but Vance seemed suddenly possessed of an ability to say nothing with the blandest fluency. Markham finally became exasperated.

"I'm rapidly coming to the conclusion," he said, "that either you had a hand in Benson's murder or you're a phenomenally good guesser."

"There is, y' know, an alternative," rejoined Vance. "It might be that my aesthetic hypotheses and metaphysical deductions, as you call 'em, are working out—eh, what?"

A few minutes before we went to lunch, Swacker announced that Tracy had just returned from Long Island with his report.

"Is he the lad you sent to look into Pfyfe's *affaires du cover*?" Vance asked Markham. "For, if he is, I am all a-flutter."

"He's the man. . . . Send him in, Swacker."

Tracy entered smiling silkily, his black notebook in one hand, his pince nez in the other.

"I had no trouble learning about Pfyfe," he said. "He's well known in Port Washington—quite a character, in fact—and it was easy to pick up gossip about him."

He adjusted his glasses carefully and referred to his notebook. "He married a Miss Hawthorn in nineteen ten. She's wealthy, but Pfyfe doesn't benefit much by it, because her father sits on the moneybags—"

"Mr. Tracy, I say," interrupted Vance; "never mind the *née*-Hawthorn and her doting papa—Mr. Pfyfe himself has confided in us about his sad marriage. Tell us, if you can, about Mr. Pfyfe's extranuptial affairs. Are there any other ladies?"

Tracy looked inquiringly at the district attorney; he was uncertain as to Vance's *locus standi*. Receiving a nod from Markham, he turned a page in his notebook and proceeded.

"I found one other woman in the case. She lives in New York and often telephones to a drugstore near Pfyfe's house and leaves messages for him. He uses the same phone to call her by. He had made some deal with the proprietor, of course; but I was able to obtain her phone number. As soon as I came back to the city, I got her name and address from Information and made a few inquiries. . . . She's a Mrs. Paula Banning, a widow, and a little fast, I should say; and she lives in an apartment at 268 West Seventy-fifth Street."

This exhausted Tracy's information; and when he went out, Markham smiled broadly at Vance.

"He didn't supply you with very much fuel."

"My word! I think he did unbelievably well," said Vance. "He unearthed the very information we wanted."

"We wanted?" echoed Markham. "I have more important things to think about than Pfyfe's amours."

"And yet, y' know, this particular amour of Pfyfe's is going to solve the problem of Benson's murder," replied Vance; and would say no more.

Markham, who had an accumulation of other work awaiting him and numerous appointments for the afternoon, decided to have his lunch served in the office; so Vance and I took leave of him.

We lunched at the Élysée, dropped in at Knoedler's to see an exhibition of French Pointillism, and then went to Aeolian Hall, where a string quartet from San Francisco was giving a program of Mozart. A little before half past five we were again at the district attorney's office, which at that hour was deserted except for Markham.

Shortly after our arrival Miss Hoffman came in and told the rest of her story in direct, businesslike fashion.

"I didn't give you all the particulars this morning," she said; "and I wouldn't care to do so now unless you are willing to regard them as confidential, for my telling you might cost me my position."

"I promise you," Markham assured her, "that I will entirely respect your confidence."

She hesitated a moment and then continued. "When I told Major Benson this morning about Mr. Pfyfe and his brother, he said at once that I should come with him to your office and tell you also. But on the way over, he suggested that I might omit a part of the story. He didn't exactly tell me not to mention it; but he explained that it had nothing to do with the case and might only confuse you. I followed his suggestion; but after I got back to the office, I began thinking it over, and knowing how serious a matter Mr. Benson's death was, I decided to tell you anyway. In case it did have some bearing on the situation, I didn't want to be in the position of having withheld anything from you."

She seemed a little uncertain as to the wisdom of her decision.

"I do hope I haven't been foolish. But the truth is, there was something else besides that envelope which Mr. Benson asked me to bring him from the safe the day he and Mr. Pfyfe had their quarrel. It was a square, heavy package, and, like the envelope, was marked 'Pfyfe-Personal.' And it was over this package that Mr. Benson and Mr. Pfyfe seemed to be quarreling."

"Was it in the safe this morning when you went to get the envelope for the major?" asked Vance.

"Oh, no. After Mr. Pfyfe left last week, I put the package back in the safe along with the envelope. But Mr. Benson took it home with him last Thursday—the day he was killed."

Markham was but mildly interested in the recital and was about to bring the interview to a close when Vance spoke up.

"It was very good of you, Miss Hoffman, to take this trouble to tell us about the package; and now that you are here, there are one or two questions I'd like to ask. . . . How did Mr. Alvin Benson and the major get along together?"

She looked at Vance with a curious little smile.

"They didn't get along very well," she said. "They were so different. Mr. Alvin Benson was not a very pleasant person, and not very honorable, I'm afraid. You'd never have thought they were brothers. They were constantly disputing about the business; and they were terribly suspicious of each other."

"That's not unnatural," commented Vance, "seeing how incompatible their temp'raments were. . . . By the bye, how did this suspicion show itself?"

"Well, for one thing, they sometimes spied on each other. You see, their offices were adjoining, and they would listen to each other through the door. I did the secretarial work for both of them, and I often saw them listening. Several times they tried to find out things from me about each other."

Vance smiled at her appreciatively.

"Not a pleasant position for you."

"Oh, I didn't mind it." She smiled back. "It amused me."

"When was the last time you caught either one of them listening?" he asked.

The girl quickly became serious. "The very last day Mr. Alvin Benson was alive, I saw the major standing by the door. Mr. Benson had a caller—a lady—and the major seemed very much interested. It was in the afternoon. Mr. Benson went home early that day—only about half an hour after the lady had gone. She called at the office again later, but he wasn't there, of course, and I told her he had already gone home."

"Do you know who the lady was?" Vance asked her.

"No, I don't," she said. "She didn't give her name."

Vance asked a few other questions, after which we rode uptown in the subway with Miss Hoffman, taking leave of her at Twenty-third Street.

Markham was silent and preoccupied during the trip. Nor did Vance make any comment until we were comfortably relaxed in the easy chairs of the Stuyvesant Club's lounge room. Then, lighting a cigarette lazily, he said, "You grasp the subtle mental processes leading up to my prophecy about Miss Hoffman's second coming—eh, what, Markham? Y'see, I knew friend Alvin had not paid that forged check without security, and I also knew that the tiff must have been about the security, for Pfyfe was not really worrying about being jailed by his alter ego. I rather suspect Pfyfe was trying to get the security back before paying off the note and was told there was 'nothing doing.' . . . Moreover, Little Goldilocks may be a nice girl and all that; but it isn't in the feminine temp'rament to sit next door to an altercation between two such rakes and not listen attentively. I shouldn't care, y' know, to have to decipher the typing she said she did during the episode. I was quite sure she heard more than she told; and I asked myself: Why this curtailment? The only logical answer was: Because the major had suggested it. And since the *gnädiges Fräulein* was a forthright Germanic soul, with an inbred streak of selfish and cautious honesty, I ventured the prognostication that as soon as she was out from under the benev'lent jurisdiction of her tutor, she would tell us the rest in order to save her own skin if the matter should come up later. . . . Not so cryptic when explained, what?"

"That's all very well," conceded Markham petulantly. "But where does it get us?"

"I shouldn't say that the forward movement was entirely imperceptible."

Vance smoked awhile impassively. "You realize, I trust," he said, "that the mysterious package contained the security."

"One might form such a conclusion," agreed Markham. "But the fact doesn't dumbfound me—if that's what you're hoping for."

"And, of course," pursued Vance easily, "your legal mind, trained in the technique of ratiocination, has already identified it as the box of jewels that Mrs. Platz espied on Benson's table that fatal afternoon."

Markham sat up suddenly, then sank back with a shrug.

"Even if it was," he said, "I don't see how that helps us. Unless the major knew the package had nothing to do with the case, he would not have suggested to his secretary that she omit telling us about it."

"Ah! But if the major knew that the package was an irrelevant item in the case, then he must also know something about the case—eh, what? Otherwise, he couldn't determine what was, and what was not, irrelevant. . . . I have felt all along that he knew more than he admitted. Don't forget that he put us on the track of Pfyfe, and also that he was quite positive Captain Leacock was innocent."

Markham thought for several minutes.

"I'm beginning to see what you're driving at," he remarked slowly. "Those jewels, after all, may have an important bearing on the case. . . . I think I'll have a chat with the major about things."

Shortly after dinner at the club that night Major Benson came into the lounge room where we had retired for our smoke; and Markham accosted him at once.

"Major, aren't you willing to help me a little more in getting at the truth about your brother's death?" he asked.

The other gazed at him searchingly; the inflection of Markham's voice belied the apparent casualness of the question.

"God knows it's not my wish to put obstacles in your way," he said, carefully weighing each word. "I'd gladly give you any help I could. But there are one or two things I cannot tell you at this time. . . . If there was only myself to be considered," he added, "it would be different."

"But you do suspect someone?" Vance put the question.

"In a way—yes. I overheard a conversation in Alvin's office one day that took on added significance after his death."

"You shouldn't let chivalry stand in the way," urged Markham. "If your suspicion is unfounded, the truth will surely come out."

"But when I don't *know*, I certainly ought not to hazard a guess," affirmed the major. "I think it best that you solve this problem without me."

Despite Markham's importunities, he would say no more; and shortly afterward he excused himself and went out.

Markham, now profoundly worried, sat smoking restlessly, tapping the arm of his chair with his fingers.

"Well, old bean, a bit involved, what?" commented Vance.

"It's not so damned funny," Markham grumbled. "Everyone seems to know more about the case than the police or the district attorney's office."

"Which wouldn't be so disconcertin' if they all weren't so deuced reticent," supplemented Vance cheerfully. "And the touchin' part of it is that each of 'em appears to be keeping still in order to shield someone else. Mrs. Platz began it; she lied about Benson's having any callers that afternoon because she didn't want to involve his tea companion. Miss St. Clair declined point-blank to tell you anything because she obviously didn't desire to cast suspicion on another. The captain became voiceless the moment you suggested his affianced bride was entangled. Even Leander refused to extricate himself from a delicate situation lest he implicate another. And now the major! . . . Most annoyin'. On the other hand, don't y' know, it's comfortin'—not to say upliftin'—to be dealing exclusively with such noble, self-sacrificin' souls."

"Hell!" Markham put down his cigar and rose. "The case is getting on my nerves. I'm going to sleep on it and tackle it in the morning."

"That ancient idea of sleeping on a problem is a fallacy," said Vance, as we walked out into Madison Avenue, "—an apologia, as it were, for one's not being able to think clearly. Poetic idea, y' know. All poets believe in it—nature's soft nurse, the balm of woe, childhood's mandragora, tired nature's sweet restorer, and that sort of thing. Silly notion. When the brain is keyed up and alive, it works far better than when apathetic from the torpor of sleep. Slumber is an anodyne—not a stimulus."

"Well, you sit up and think," was Markham's surly advice.

"That's what I'm going to do," blithely returned Vance; "but not about the Benson case. I did all the thinking I'm going to do along that line four days ago."

## 17. THE FORGED CHECK

(Wednesday, June 19; forenoon.)

We rode downtown with Markham the next morning, and though we arrived at his office before nine o'clock, Heath was already there waiting. He appeared worried, and when he spoke, his voice held an ill-disguised reproof for the district attorney.

"What about this Leacock, Mr. Markham?" he asked. "It looks to me like we'd better grab him quick. We've been tailing him right along; and there's something funny going on. Yesterday morning he went to his bank and spent half an hour in the chief cashier's office. After that he visited his lawyer's and was there over an hour. Then he went back to the bank for another half hour. He dropped in to the Astor Grill for lunch but didn't eat anything—sat staring at the table. About two o'clock he called on the realty agents who have the handling of the building he lives in; and after he'd left, we found out he'd offered his apartment for sublease beginning tomorrow. Then he paid six calls on friends of his and went home. After dinner my man rang his apartment bell and asked for Mr. Hoozitz;—Leacock was packing up! . . . It looks to me like a getaway."

Markham frowned. Heath's report clearly troubled him; but before he could answer, Vance spoke. "Why this perturbation, Sergeant? You're watching the captain. I'm sure he can't slip from your vigilant clutches."

Markham looked at Vance a moment, then turned to Heath. "Let it go at that. But if Leacock attempts to leave the city, nab him."

Heath went out sullenly.

"By the bye, Markham," said Vance; "don't make an appointment for half past twelve today. You already have one, don't y' know. And with a lady."

Markham put down his pen and stared. "What new damned nonsense is this?"

"I made an engagement for you. Called the lady by phone this morning. I'm sure I woke the dear up."

Markham spluttered, striving to articulate his angry protest.

Vance held up his hand soothingly.

"And you simply must keep the engagement. Y' see, I told her it was you speaking; and it would be shocking taste not to appear. . . . I promise, you won't regret meeting her," he added. "Things looked so sadly befuddled last night—I couldn't bear to see you suffering so. Cons'quently, I arranged for you to see Mrs. Paula Banning, Pfyfe's Eloise, y' know. I'm pos'tive she'll be able to dispel some of this insinuated gloom that's enveloping you."

"See here, Vance!" Markham growled. "I happen to be running this office—" He stopped abruptly, realizing the hopelessness of making headway against the other's blandness. Moreover, I think, the prospect of interviewing Mrs. Paula Banning was not wholly alien to his inclinations. His resentment slowly ebbed, and when he again spoke, his voice was almost matter-of-fact.

"Since you've committed me, I'll see her. But I'd rather Pfyfe wasn't in such close communication with her. He's apt to drop in—with preconceived unexpectedness."

"Funny," murmured Vance. "I thought of that myself. . . . That's why I phoned him last night that he could return to Long Island."

"You phoned him!"

"Awf'ly sorry and all that," Vance apologized. "But you'd gone to bed. Sleep was knitting up your raveled sleeve of care; and I couldn't bring myself to disturb you. . . . Pfyfe was so grateful, too. Most touchin'. Said his wife also would be grateful. He was pathetically consid'rate about Mrs. Pfyfe. But I fear he'll need all his velvety forensic powers to explain his absence."

"In what other quarters have you involved me during my absence?" asked Markham acrimoniously.

"That's all," replied Vance, rising and strolling to the window.

He stood looking out, smoking thoughtfully. When he turned back to the room, his bantering air had gone. He sat down facing Markham.

"The major has practically admitted to us," he said, "that he knows more about this affair than he has told. You naturally can't push the point, in view of his hon'able attitude in the matter. And yet, he's willing for you to find out what he knows, as long as he doesn't tell you himself—that was unquestionably the stand he took last night. Now, I believe there's a way you can find out without calling upon him to go against his principles. . . . You recall Miss Hoffman's story of the eavesdropping; and you also recall that he told you he heard a conversation which, in the light of Benson's murder, became significant. It's quite prob'ble, therefore, that the major's knowledge has to do with something connected with the business of the firm, or at least with one of the firm's clients."

Vance slowly lit another cigarette.

"My suggestion is this: Call up the major and ask permission to send a man to take a peep at his ledger accounts and his purchase and sales books. Tell him you want to find out about the transactions of one of his clients. Intimate that it's Miss St. Clair—or Pfyfe, if you like. I have a strange mediumistic feeling that, in this way, you'll get on the track of the person he's shielding. And I'm also assailed by the premonition that he'll welcome your interest in his ledger."

The plan did not appeal to Markham as feasible or fraught with possibilities; and it was evident he disliked making such a request of Major Benson. But so determined was Vance, so earnestly did he argue his point, that in the end Markham acquiesced.

"He was quite willing to let me send a man," said Markham, hanging up the receiver. "In fact, he seemed eager to give me every assistance."

"I thought he'd take kindly to the suggestion," said Vance. "Y' see, if you discover for yourself whom he suspects, it relieves him of the onus of having tattled."

Markham rang for Swacker. "Call up Stitt and tell him I want to see him here before noon—that I have an immediate job for him."

"Stitt," Markham explained to Vance, "is the head of a firm of public accountants over in the New York Life Building. I use him a good deal on work like this."

Shortly before noon Stitt came. He was a prematurely old young man, with a sharp, shrewd face and a perpetual frown. The prospect



of working for the district attorney pleased him.

Markham explained briefly what was wanted, and revealed enough of the case to guide him in his task. The man grasped the situation immediately and made one or two notes on the back of a dilapidated envelope.

Vance also, during the instructions, had jotted down some notations on a piece of paper.

Markham stood up and took his hat.

"Now, I suppose, I must keep the appointment you made for me," he complained to Vance. Then: "Come, Stitt, I'll take you down with us in the judges' private elevator."

"If you don't mind," interposed Vance, "Mr. Stitt and I will forgo the honor and mingle with the commoners in the public lift. We'll meet you downstairs."

Taking the accountant by the arm, he led him out through the main waiting room. It was ten minutes, however, before he joined us.

We took the subway to Seventy-second Street and walked up West End Avenue to Mrs. Paula Banning's address. She lived in a small apartment house just around the corner in Seventy-fifth Street. As we stood before her door, waiting for an answer to our ring, a strong odor of Chinese incense drifted out to us.

"Ah! That facilitates matters," said Vance, sniffing. "Ladies who burn joss sticks are invariably sentimental."

Mrs. Banning was a tall, slightly adipose woman of indeterminate age, with straw-colored hair and a pink-and-white complexion. Her face in repose possessed a youthful and vacuous innocence; but the expression was only superficial. Her eyes, a very light blue, were hard; and a slight puffiness about her cheekbones and beneath her chin attested to years of idle and indulgent living. She was not unattractive, however, in a vivid, flamboyant way; and her manner, when she ushered us into her overfurnished and rococo living room, was one of easygoing good-fellowship.

When we were seated and Markham had apologized for our intrusion, Vance at once assumed the role of interviewer. During his opening explanatory remarks he appraised the woman carefully, as if seeking to determine the best means of approaching her for the information he wanted.

After a few minutes of verbal reconnoitering, he asked permission to smoke and offered Mrs. Banning one of his cigarettes, which she accepted. Then he smiled at her in a spirit of appreciative geniality and relaxed comfortably in his chair. He conveyed the impression that he was fully prepared to sympathize with anything she might tell him.

"Mr. Pfyfe strove very hard to keep you entirely out of this affair," said Vance; "and we fully appreciate his delicacy in so doing. But certain circumstances connected with Mr. Benson's death have inadvertently involved you in the case; and you can best help us and yourself—and particularly Mr. Pfyfe—by telling us what we want to know and trusting to our discretion and understanding."

He had emphasized Pfyfe's name, giving it a significant intonation; and the woman had glanced down uneasily. Her apprehension was apparent, and when she looked up into Vance's eyes, she was asking herself: How much does he know? as plainly as if she had spoken the words audibly.

"I can't imagine what you want me to tell you," she said, with an effort at astonishment. "You know that Andy was not in New York that night." (Her designating of the elegant and superior Pfyfe as "Andy" sounded almost like *lèse-majesté*.) "He didn't arrive in the city until nearly nine the next morning."

"Didn't you read in the newspapers about the gray Cadillac that was parked in front of Benson's house?" Vance, in putting the question, imitated her own astonishment.

She smiled confidently. "That wasn't Andy's car. He took the eight o'clock train to New York the next morning. He said it was lucky that he did, seeing that a machine just like his had been at Mr. Benson's the night before."

She had spoken with the sincerity of complete assurance. It was evident that Pfyfe had lied to her on this point.

Vance did not disabuse her; in fact, he gave her to understand that he accepted her explanation and consequently dismissed the idea of Pfyfe's presence in New York on the night of the murder.

"I had in mind a connection of a somewhat different nature when I mentioned you and Mr. Pfyfe as having been drawn into the case. I referred to a personal relationship between you and Mr. Benson."

She assumed an attitude of smiling indifference.

"I'm afraid you've made another mistake." She spoke lightly. "Mr. Benson and I were not even friends. Indeed, I scarcely knew him."

There was an overtone of emphasis in her denial—a slight eagerness which, in indicating a conscious desire to be believed, robbed her remark of the complete casualness she had intended.

"Even a business relationship may have its personal side," Vance reminded her; "especially when the intermediary is an intimate friend of both parties to the transaction."

She looked at him quickly, then turned her eyes away. "I really don't know what you're talking about," she affirmed; and her face for a moment lost its contours of innocence and became calculating. "You're surely not implying that I had any business dealings with Mr. Benson?"

"Not directly," replied Vance. "But certainly Mr. Pfyfe had business dealings with him; and one of them, I rather imagined, involved you considerably."

"Involved me?" She laughed scornfully, but it was a strained laugh.

"It was a somewhat unfortunate transaction, I fear," Vance went on, "—unfortunate in that Mr. Pfyfe was necessitated to deal with Mr. Benson; and doubly unfortunate, y' know, in that he should have had to drag you into it."

His manner was easy and assured, and the woman sensed that no display of scorn or contempt, however well simulated, would make an impression upon him. Therefore, she adopted an attitude of tolerantly incredulous amusement.

"And where did you learn about all this?" she asked playfully.

"Alas! I didn't learn about it," answered Vance, falling in with her manner. "That's the reason, d' ye see, that I indulged in this charming little visit. I was foolish enough to hope that you'd take pity on my ignorance and tell me all about it."

"But I wouldn't think of doing such a thing," she said, "even if this mysterious transaction had really taken place."

"My word!" sighed Vance. "That *is* disappointin'. . . . Ah, well. I see that I must tell you what little I know about it and trust to your sympathy to enlighten me further."

Despite the ominous undercurrent of his words, his levity acted like a sedative to her anxiety. She felt that he was friendly, however much he might know about her.

"Am I bringing you news when I tell you that Mr. Pfyfe forged Mr. Benson's name to a check for ten thousand dollars?" he asked.

She hesitated, gauging the possible consequences of her answer. "No, that isn't news. Andy tells me everything."

"And did you also know that Mr. Benson, when informed of it, was rather put out?—that, in fact, he demanded a note and a signed confession before he would pay the check?"

The woman's eyes flashed angrily.

"Yes, I knew that too. And after all Andy had done for him! If ever a man deserved shooting, it was Alvin Benson. He was a dog. And he pretended to be Andy's best friend. Just think of it—refusing to lend Andy the money without a confession! . . . You'd hardly call that a business deal, would you? I'd call it a dirty, contemptible, underhand trick."

She was enraged. Her mask of breeding and good-fellowship had fallen from her; and she poured out vituperation on Benson with no thought of the words she was using. Her speech was devoid of all the ordinary reticencies of intercourse between strangers.

Vance nodded consolingly during her tirade.

"Y' know, I sympathize fully with you." The tone in which he made the remark seemed to establish a closer rapprochement.

After a moment he gave her a friendly smile. "But, after all, one could almost forgive Benson for holding the confession, if he hadn't also demanded security."

"What security?"

Vance was quick to sense the change in her tone. Taking advantage of her rage, he had mentioned the security while the barriers of her pose were down. Her frightened, almost involuntary query told him that the right moment had arrived. Before she could gain her equilibrium or dispel the momentary fear which had assailed her, he said, with suave deliberation:

"The day Mr. Benson was shot, he took home with him from the office a small blue box of jewels."

She caught her breath but otherwise gave no outward sign of emotion. "Do you think he had stolen them?"

The moment she had uttered the question, she realized that it was a mistake in technique. An ordinary man might have been momentarily diverted from the truth by it. But by Vance's smile she recognized that he had accepted it as an admission.

"It was rather fine of you, y' know, to lend Mr. Pfyfe your jewels to cover the note with."

At this she threw her head up. The blood had left her face, and the rouge on her cheeks took on a mottled and unnatural hue.

"You say I lent my jewels to Andy! I swear to you—"

Vance halted her denial with a slight movement of the hand and a *coup d'oeil*. She saw that his intention was to save her from the humiliation she might feel later at having made too emphatic and unqualified a statement; and the graciousness of his action, although he was an antagonist, gave her more confidence in him.

She sank back into her chair, and her hands relaxed.

"What makes you think I lent Andy my jewels?"

Her voice was colorless, but Vance understood the question. It was the end of her deceptions. The pause which followed was an amnesty—recognized as such by both. The next spoken words would be the truth.

"Andy had to have them," she said, "or Benson would have put him in jail." One read in her words a strange, self-sacrificing affection for the worthless Pfyfe. "And if Benson hadn't done it, and had merely refused to honor the check, his father-in-law would have done it. . . . Andy is so careless, so unthinking. He does things without weighing the consequences. I am all the time having to hold him down. . . . But this thing has taught him a lesson—I'm sure of it."

I felt that if anything in the world could teach Pfyfe a lesson, it was the blind loyalty of this woman.

"Do you know what he quarreled about with Mr. Benson in his office last Wednesday?" asked Vance.

"That was all my fault," she explained, with a sigh. "It was getting very near to the time when the note was due, and I knew Andy didn't have all the money. So I asked him to go to Benson and offer him what he had, and see if he couldn't get my jewels back. . . . But he was refused—I thought he would be."

Vance looked at her for a while sympathetically.

"I don't want to worry you any more than I can help," he said; "but won't you tell me the real cause of your anger against Benson a moment ago?"

She gave him an admiring nod. "You're right—I had good reason to hate him." Her eyes narrowed unpleasantly. "The day after he had refused to give Andy the jewels, he called me up—it was in the afternoon—and asked me to have breakfast with him at his house the next morning. He said he was home and had the jewels with him; and he told me—hinted, you understand—that maybe—*maybe* I could have them. That's the kind of beast he was! . . . I telephoned to Port Washington to Andy and told him about it, and he said he'd be in New York the next morning. He got here about nine o'clock, and we read in the paper that Benson had been shot that night."

Vance was silent for a long time. Then he stood up and thanked her.

"You have helped us a great deal. Mr. Markham is a friend of Major Benson's, and, since we have the check and the confession in our possession, I shall ask him to use his influence with the major to permit us to destroy them—very soon."

## 18. A CONFESSION

(Wednesday, June 19; 1 P.M.)

When we were again outside Markham asked, "How in Heaven's name did you know she had put up her jewels to help Pfyfe?"

"My charmin' metaphysical deductions, don't y' know," answered Vance. "As I told you, Benson was not the openhanded, bighearted altruist who would have lent money without security; and certainly the impecunious Pfyfe had no collateral worth ten thousand dollars or he wouldn't have forged the check. *Ergo*: someone lent him the security. Now, who would be so trustin' as to lend Pfyfe that amount of security except a sentimental woman who was blind to his amazin' defects? Y'know, I was just evil-minded enough to suspect there was a Calypso in the life of this Ulysses when he told us of stopping over in New York to murmur *au revoir* to someone. When a man like Pfyfe fails to specify the sex of a person, it is safe to assume the feminine gender. So I suggested that you send a Paul Pry to Port Washington to peer into his trans-matrimonial activities; I felt certain a *bonne amie* would be found. Then, when the mysterious package, which obviously was the security, seemed to identify itself as the box of jewels seen by the inquisitive housekeeper, I said to myself: 'Ah! Leander's misguided Dulcinea has lent him her gewgaws to save him from the yawning dungeon.' Nor did I overlook the fact that he had been shielding someone in his explanation about the check. Therefore, as soon as the lady's name and address were learned by Tracy, I made the appointment for you. . . ."

We were passing the Gothic-Renaissance Schwab residence which extends from West End Avenue to Riverside Drive at Seventy-third Street; and Vance stopped for a moment to contemplate it.

Markham waited patiently. At length Vance walked on.

". . . Y' know, the moment I saw Mrs. Banning, I knew my conclusions were correct. She was a sentimental soul and just the sort of professional good sport who would have handed over her jewels to her *amoroso*. Also, she was bereft of gems when we called—and a woman of her stamp always wears her jewels when she desires to make an impression on strangers. Moreover, she's the kind that would have jewelry even if the larder was empty. It was therefore merely a question of getting her to talk."

"On the whole, you did very well," observed Markham.

Vance gave him a condescending bow. "Sir Hubert is too generous. But tell me, didn't my little chat with the lady cast a gleam into your darkened mind?"

"Naturally," said Markham. "I'm not utterly obtuse. She played unconsciously into our hands. She believed Pfyfe did not arrive in New York until the morning after the murder, and therefore told us quite frankly that she had phoned him that Benson had the jewels at home. The situation now is: Pfyfe knew they were in Benson's house and was there himself at about the time the shot was fired. Furthermore, the jewels are gone; and Pfyfe tried to cover up his tracks that night."

Vance sighed hopelessly. "Markham, there are altogether too many trees for you in this case. You simply can't see the forest, y' know, because of 'em."

"There is the remote possibility that you are so busily engaged in looking at one particular tree that you are unaware of the others."

A shadow passed over Vance's face. "I wish you were right," he said.

It was nearly half past one, and we dropped into the Fountain Room of the Ansonia Hotel for lunch. Markham was preoccupied throughout the meal, and when we entered the subway later, he looked uneasily at his watch.

"I think I'll go on down to Wall Street and call on the major a moment before returning to the office. I can't understand his asking Miss Hoffman not to mention the package to me. . . . It might not have contained the jewels, after all."

"Do you imagine for one moment," rejoined Vance, "that Alvin told the major the truth about the package? It was not a very creditable transaction, y' know; and the major most likely would have given him what-for."

Major Benson's explanation bore out Vance's surmise. Markham, in telling him of the interview with Paula Banning, emphasized the jewel episode in the hope that the major would voluntarily mention the package; for his promise to Miss Hoffman prevented him from admitting that he was aware of the other's knowledge concerning it.

The major listened with considerable astonishment, his eyes gradually growing angry. "I'm afraid Alvin deceived me," he said. He looked straight ahead for a moment, his face softening. "And I don't like to think it, now that he's gone. But the truth is, when Miss Hoffman told me this morning about the envelope, she also mentioned a small parcel that had been in Alvin's private safe-drawer; and I asked her to omit any reference to it from her story to you. I knew the parcel contained Mrs. Banning's jewels, but I thought the fact would only confuse matters if brought to your attention. You see, Alvin told me that a judgment had been taken against Mrs. Banning, and that, just before the Supplementary Proceedings, Pfyfe had brought her jewels here and asked him to sequester them temporarily in his safe."

On our way back to the Criminal Courts Building, Markham took Vance's arm and smiled. "Your guessing luck is holding out, I see."

"Rather!" agreed Vance. "It would appear that the late Alvin, like Warren Hastings, resolved to die in the last dyke of prevarication. . . . *Splendide mendax*, what?"

"In any event," replied Markham, "the major has unconsciously added another link in the chain against Pfyfe."

"You seem to be making a collection of chains," commented Vance drily. "What have you done with the ones you forged about Miss St. Clair and Leacock?"

"I haven't entirely discarded them—if that's what you think," asserted Markham gravely.

When we reached the office, Sergeant Heath was awaiting us with a beatific grin.

"It's all over, Mr. Markham," he announced. "This noon, after you'd gone, Leacock came here looking for you. When he found you were out, he phoned headquarters, and they connected him with me. He wanted to see me—very important, he said; so I hurried over. He was sitting in the waiting room when I came in and he called me over and said: 'I came to give myself up. I killed Benson.' I got

him to dictate a confession to Swacker, and then he sighed it. . . . Here it is." He handed Markham a typewritten sheet of paper.

Markham sank wearily into a chair. The strain of the past few days had begun to tell on him. He signed heavily. "Thank God! Now our troubles are ended."

Vance looked at him lugubriously and shook his head.

"I rather fancy, y' know, that your troubles are only beginning," he drawled.

When Markham had glanced through the confession, he handed it to Vance, who read it carefully with an expression of growing amusement.

"Y' know," he said, "this document isn't at all legal. Any judge worthy the name would throw it precipitately out of court. It's far too simple and precise. It doesn't begin with 'greetings'; it doesn't contain a single 'wherefore-be-it' or 'be-it-known' or 'do-hereby'; it says nothing about 'free will' or 'sound mind' or 'disposin' mem' ry'; and the captain doesn't once refer to himself as 'the party of the first part'. . . . Utterly worthless, Sergeant. If I were you, I'd chuck it."

Heath was feeling too complacently triumphant to be annoyed. He smiled with magnanimous tolerance.

"It strikes you as funny, doesn't it, Mr. Vance?"

"Sergeant, if you knew how inordinately funny this confession is, you'd positively have hysterics."

Vance then turned to Markham. "Really, y' know, I shouldn't put too much stock in this. It may, however, prove a valuable lever with which to prise open the truth. In fact, I'm jolly glad the captain has gone in for imaginative literature. With this entrancing fable in our possession, I think we can overcome the major's scruples and get him to tell us what he knows. Maybe I'm wrong, but it's worth trying."

He stepped to the district attorney's desk and leaned over it cajolingly.

"I haven't led you astray yet, old dear; and I'm going to make another suggestion. Call up the major and ask him to come here at once. Tell him you've secured a confession—but don't you dare say whose. Imply it's Miss St. Clair's, or Pfyfe's—or Pontius Pilate's. But urge his immediate presence. Tell him you want to discuss it with him before proceeding with the indictment."

"I can't see the necessity of doing that," objected Markham. "I'm pretty sure to see him at the club tonight and I can tell him then."

"That wouldn't do at all," insisted Vance. "If the major can enlighten us on any point, I think Sergeant Heath should be present to hear him."

"I don't need any enlightenment," cut in Heath.

Vance regarded him with admiring surprise.

"What a wonderful man! Even Goethe cried for *mehr Licht*; and here are you in a state of luminous saturation! . . . Astonishin'!"

"See here, Vance," said Markham: "why try to complicate the matter? It strikes me as a waste of time, besides being an imposition, to ask the major here to discuss Leacock's confession. We don't need his evidence now, anyway."

Despite his gruffness there was a hint of reconsideration in his voice; for though his instinct had been to dismiss the request out of hand, the experiences of the past few days had taught him that Vance's suggestions were not made without an object.

Vance, sensing the other's hesitancy, said, "My request is based on something more than an idle desire to gaze upon the major's rubicund features at this moment. I'm telling you, with all the meager earnestness I possess, that his presence here now would be most helpful."

Markham deliberated and argued the point at some length. But Vance was so persistent that in the end he was convinced of the advisability of complying.

Heath was patently disgusted, but he sat down quietly and sought solace in a cigar.

Major Benson arrived with astonishing promptness, and when Markham handed him the confession, he made little attempt to conceal his eagerness. But as he read it his face clouded, and a look of puzzlement came into his eyes.

At length he looked up, frowning.

"I don't quite understand this; and I'll admit I'm greatly surprised. It doesn't seem credible that Leacock shot Alvin. . . . And yet, I may be mistaken, of course."

He laid the confession on Markham's desk with an air of disappointment, and sank into a chair.

"Do *you* feel satisfied?" he asked.

"I don't see any way around it," said Markham. "If he isn't guilty, why should he come forward and confess? God knows, there's plenty of evidence against him. I was ready to arrest him two days ago."

"He's guilty all right," put in Heath. "I've had my eye on him from the first."

Major Benson did not reply at once; he seemed to be framing his next words.

"It might be—that is, there's the bare possibility—that Leacock had an ulterior motive in confessing."

We all, I think, recognized the thought which his words strove to conceal. "I'll admit," acceded Markham, "that at first I believed Miss St. Clair guilty, and I intimated as much to Leacock. But later I was persuaded that she was not directly involved."

"Does Leacock know this?" the major asked quickly.

Markham thought a moment. "No, I can't say that he does. In fact, it's more than likely he still thinks I suspect her."

"Ah!" The major's exclamation was almost involuntary.

"But what's that got to do with it?" asked Heath irritably. "Do you think he's going to the chair to save her reputation?—Bunk! That sort of thing's all right in the movies, but no man's that crazy in real life."

"I'm not so sure, Sergeant," ventured Vance lazily. "Women are too sane and practical to make such foolish gestures; but men, y' know, have an illimitable capacity for idiocy."

He turned an inquiring gaze on Major Benson.

"Won't you tell us why you think Leacock is playing Sir Galahad?"

But the major took refuge in generalities, and was disinclined even to follow up his original intimation as to the cause of the captain's action. Vance questioned him for some time but was unable to penetrate his reticence.

Heath, becoming restless, finally spoke up.

"You can't argue Leacock's guilt away, Mr. Vance. Look at the facts. He threatened Benson that he'd kill him if he caught him with the girl again. The next time Benson goes out with her, he's found shot. Then Leacock hides his gun at her house, and when things begin to get hot, he takes it away and ditches it in the river. He bribes the hallboy to alibi him; and he's seen at Benson's house at twelve thirty that night. When he's questioned, he can't explain anything. . . . If that ain't an open-and-shut case, I'm a mock-turtle."

"The circumstances are convincing," admitted Major Benson. "But couldn't they be accounted for on other grounds?"

Heath did not deign to answer the question.

"The way I see it," he continued, "is like this: Leacock gets suspicious along about midnight, takes his gun and goes out. He catches Benson with the girl, goes in, and shoots him like he threatened. They're both mixed up in it, if you ask me; but Leacock did the shooting. And now we got his confession. . . . There isn't a jury in the country that wouldn't convict him."

"Probi et legales homines—oh, quite!" murmured Vance.

Swacker appeared at the door. "The reporters are clamoring for attention," he announced with a wry face.

"Do they know about the confession?" Markham asked Heath.

"Not yet. I haven't told 'em anything so far—that's why they're clamoring, I guess. But I'll give 'em an earful now, if you say the word."

Markham nodded, and Heath started for the door. But Vance quickly planted himself in the way.

"Could you keep this thing quiet till tomorrow, Markham?" he asked.

Markham was annoyed. "I could if I wanted to—yes. But why should I?"

"For your own sake, if for no other reason. You've got your prize safely locked up. Control your vanity for twenty-four hours. The major and I both know that Leacock's innocent, and by this time tomorrow the whole country'll know it."

Again an argument ensued; but the outcome, like that of the former argument, was a foregone conclusion. Markham had realized for some time that Vance had reason to be convinced of something which as yet he was unwilling to divulge. His opposition to Vance's requests were, I had suspected, largely the result of an effort to ascertain this information; and I was positive of it now as he leaned forward and gravely debated the advisability of making public the captain's confession.

Vance, as heretofore, was careful to reveal nothing; but in the end his sheer determination carried his point; and Markham requested Heath to keep his own council until the next day. The major, by a slight nod, indicated his approbation of the decision.

"You might tell the newspaper lads, though," suggested Vance, "that you'll have a rippin' sensation for 'em tomorrow."

Heath went out, crestfallen and glowering.

"A rash fella, the sergeant—so impetuous!"

Vance again picked up the confession and perused it.

"Now, Markham, I want you to bring your prisoner forth—habeas corpus and that sort of thing. Put him in that chair facing the window, give him one of the good cigars you keep for influential politicians, and then listen attentively while I politely chat with him. . . . The major, I trust, will remain for the interlocutory proceedings."

"That request, at least, I'll grant without objections," smiled Markham. "I had already decided to have a talk with Leacock."

He pressed a buzzer, and a brisk, ruddy-faced clerk entered.

"A requisition for Captain Philip Leacock," he ordered.

When it was brought to him, he initialed it. "Take it to Ben, and tell him to hurry."

The clerk disappeared through the door leading to the outer corridor. Ten minutes later a deputy sheriff from the Tombs entered with the prisoner.

## 19. VANCE CROSS-EXAMINES

(Wednesday, June 19; 3:30 P.M.)

Captain Leacock walked into the room with a hopeless indifference of bearing. His shoulders drooped; his arms hung listlessly. His eyes were haggard like those of a man who had not slept for days. On seeing Major Benson, he straightened a little and, stepping toward him, extended his hand. It was plain that, however much he may have disliked Alvin Benson, he regarded the major as a friend. But suddenly, realizing the situation, he turned away, embarrassed.

The major went quickly to him and touched him on the arm. "It's all right, Leacock," he said softly. "I can't think that you really shot Alvin."

The captain turned apprehensive eyes upon him. "Of course, I shot him." His voice was flat. "I told him I was going to."

Vance came forward and indicated a chair.

"Sit down, Captain. The district attorney wants to hear your story of the shooting. The law, you understand, does not accept murder confessions without corroborat'ry evidence. And since, in the present case, there are suspicions against others than yourself, we want you to answer some questions in order to substantiate your guilt. Otherwise, it will be necess'ry for us to follow up our suspicions."

Taking a seat facing Leacock, he picked up the confession.

"You say here you were satisfied that Mr. Benson had wronged you, and you went to his house at about half past twelve on the night of the thirteenth. . . . When you speak of his wronging you, do you refer to his attentions to Miss St. Clair?"

Leacock's face betrayed a sulky belligerence

"It doesn't matter why I shot him. Can't you leave Miss St. Clair out of it?"

"Certainly," agreed Vance. "I promise you she shall not be brought into it. But we must understand your motive thoroughly."

After a brief silence Leacock said, "Very well, then. That was what I referred to."

"How did you know Miss St. Clair went to dinner with Mr. Benson that night?"

"I followed them to the Marseilles."

"And then you went home?"

"Yes."

"What made you go to Mr. Benson's house later?"

"I got to thinking about it more and more, until I couldn't stand it any longer. I began to see red, and at last I took my Colt and went out, determined to kill him."

A note of passion had crept into his voice. It seemed unbelievable that he could be lying.

Vance again referred to the confession.

"You dictated: 'I went to 87 West Forty-eighth Street and entered the house by the front door.' . . . Did you ring the bell? Or was the front door unlatched?"

Leacock was about to answer but hesitated. Evidently he recalled the newspaper accounts of the housekeeper's testimony in which she asserted positively that the bell had not rung that night.

"What difference does it make?" He was sparring for time.

"We'd like to know—that's all," Vance told him. "But no hurry."

"Well, if it's so important to you: I didn't ring the bell; and the door was unlocked." His hesitancy was gone. "Just as I reached the house, Benson drove up in a taxicab—"

"Just a moment. Did you happen to notice another car standing in front of the house? A gray Cadillac?"

"Why—yes."

"Did you recognize its occupant?"

There was another short silence.

"I'm not sure. I think it was a man named Pfyfe."

"He and Mr. Benson were outside at the same time, then?"

Leacock frowned. "No—not at the same time. There was nobody there when I arrived. . . . I didn't see Pfyfe until I came out a few minutes later."

"He arrived in his car when you were inside—is that it?"

"He must have."

"I see. . . . And now to go back a little: Benson drove up in a taxicab. Then what?"

"I went up to him and said I wanted to speak to him. He told me to come inside, and we went in together. He used his latchkey."

"And now, Captain, tell us just what happened after you and Mr. Benson entered the house."

"He laid his hat and stick on the hatrack, and we walked into the living room. He sat down by the table, and I stood up and said—what I had to say. Then I drew my gun and shot him."

Vance was closely watching the man, and Markham was leaning forward tensely.

"How did it happen that he was reading at the time?"

"I believe he did pick up a book while I was talking. . . . Trying to appear indifferent, I reckon."

"Think now: you and Mr. Benson went into the living room directly from the hall, as soon as you entered the house?"

"Yes."

"Then how do you account for the fact, Captain, that when Mr. Benson was shot, he had on his smoking jacket and slippers?"

Leacock glanced nervously about the room. Before he answered, he wet his lips with his tongue.

"Now that I think of it, Benson did go upstairs for a few minutes first. . . . I guess I was too excited," he added desperately, "to

recollect everything."

"That's natural," Vance said sympathetically. "But when he came downstairs, did you happen to notice anything peculiar about his hair?"

Leacock looked up vaguely. "His hair? I—don't understand."

"The color of it, I mean. When Mr. Benson sat before you under the table lamp, didn't you remark some—difference, let us say—in the way his hair looked?"

The man closed his eyes, as if striving to visualize the scene. "No—I don't remember."

"A minor point," said Vance indifferently. "Did Benson's speech strike you as peculiar when he came downstairs—that is, was there a thickness, or slight impediment of any kind, in his voice?"

Leacock was manifestly puzzled.

"I don't know what you mean," he said. "He seemed to talk the way he always talked."

"And did you happen to see a blue jewel case on the table?"

"I didn't notice."

Vance smoked a moment thoughtfully.

"When you left the room after shooting Mr. Benson, you turned out the lights, of course?"

When no immediate answer came, Vance volunteered the suggestion: "You must have done so, for Mr. Pfyfe says the house was dark when he drove up."

Leacock then nodded an affirmative. "That's right. I couldn't recollect for the moment."

"Now that you remember the fact, just how did you turn them off?"

"I—" he began, and stopped. Then, finally: "At the switch."

"And where is that switch located, Captain?"

"I can't just recall."

"Think a moment. Surely you can remember."

"By the door leading into the hall, I think."

"Which side of the door?"

"How can I tell?" the man asked piteously. "I was too—nervous. . . . But I think it was on the right-hand side of the door."

"The right-hand side when entering or leaving the room?"

"As you go out."

"That would be where the bookcase stands?"

"Yes."

Vance appeared satisfied.

"Now, there's the question of the gun," he said. "Why did you take it to Miss St. Clair?"

"I was a coward," the man replied. "I was afraid they might find it at my apartment. And I never imagined she would be suspected."

"And when she was suspected, you at once took the gun away and threw it into the East River?"

"Yes."

"I suppose there was one cartridge missing from the magazine, too—which in itself would have been a suspicious circumstance."

"I thought of that. That's why I threw the gun away."

Vance frowned. "That's strange. There must have been two guns. We dredged the river, y' know, and found a Colt automatic, but the magazine was full. . . . Are you sure, Captain, that it was *your* gun you took from Miss St. Clair's and threw over the bridge?"

I knew no gun had been retrieved from the river and I wondered what he was driving at. Was he, after all, trying to involve the girl? Markham, too, I could see, was in doubt.

Leacock made no answer for several moments. When he spoke, it was with dogged sullenness.

"There weren't two guns. The one you found was mine. . . . I refilled the magazine myself."

"Ah, that accounts for it." Vance's tone was pleasant and reassuring. "Just one more question, Captain. Why did you come here today and confess?"

Leacock thrust his chin out, and for the first time during the cross-examination his eyes became animated. "Why? It was the only honorable thing to do. You have unjustly suspected an innocent person; and I didn't want anyone else to suffer."

This ended the interview. Markham had no questions to ask; and the deputy sheriff led the captain out.

When the door had closed on him, a curious silence fell over the room. Markham sat smoking furiously, his hands folded behind his head, his eyes fixed on the ceiling. The major had settled back in his chair, and was gazing at Vance with admiring satisfaction. Vance was watching Markham out of the corner of his eye, a drowsy smile on his lips. The expressions and attitudes of the three men conveyed perfectly their varying individual reactions to the interview—Markham troubled, the major pleased, Vance cynical.

It was Vance who broke the silence. He spoke easily, almost lazily. "You see how silly the confession is, what? Our pure and lofty captain is an incredibly poor Munchausen. No one could lie as badly as he did who hadn't been born into the world that way. It's simply impossible to imitate such stupidity. And he did so want us to think him guilty. Very affectin'. He prob'ly imagined you'd merely stick the confession in his shirtfront and send him to the hangman. You noticed, he hadn't even decided how he got into Benson's house that night. Pfyfe's admitted presence outside almost spoiled his impromptu explanation of having entered *bras dessus bras dessous* with his intended victim. And he didn't recall Benson's semi-négligé attire. When I reminded him of it, he had to contradict himself and send Benson trotting upstairs to make a rapid change. Luckily, the toupee wasn't mentioned by the newspapers. The captain couldn't imagine what I meant when I intimated that Benson had dyed his hair when changing his coat and shoes. . . . By the bye, Major, did your brother speak thickly when his false teeth were out?"

"Noticeably so," answered the major. "If Alvin's plate had been removed that night—as I gathered it had been from your question—Leacock would surely have noticed it."

"There were other things he didn't notice," said Vance: "the jewel case, for instance, and the location of the electric light switch."



"He went badly astray on that point," added the major. "Alvin's house is old-fashioned, and the only switch in the room is a pendant one attached to the chandelier."

"Exactly," said Vance. "However, his worst break was in connection with the gun. He gave his hand away completely there. He said he threw the pistol into the river largely because of the missing cartridge, and when I told him the magazine was full, he explained that he had refilled it, so I wouldn't think it was anyone else's gun that was found. . . . It's plain to see what's the matter. He thinks Miss St. Clair is guilty, and is determined to take the blame."

"That's my impression," said Major Benson.

"And yet," mused Vance, "the captain's attitude bothers me a little. There's no doubt he had something to do with the crime, else why should he have concealed his pistol the next day in Miss St. Clair's apartment? He's just the kind of silly beggar, d' ye see, who would threaten any man he thought had designs on his fiancée and then carry out the threat if anything happened. And he has a guilty conscience—that's obvious. But for what? Certainly not the shooting. The crime was planned; and the captain never plans. He's the kind that gets an *idée fixe*, girds up his loins, and does the deed in knightly fashion, prepared to take the consequences. That sort of chivalry, y' know, is sheer *beau geste*: its acolytes want everyone to know of their valor. And when they go forth to rid the world of a Don Juan, they're always clear-minded. The captain, for instance, wouldn't have overlooked his Lady Fair's gloves and handbag, he would have taken 'em away. In fact, it's just as certain he would have shot Benson as it is he didn't shoot him. That's the beetle in the amber. It's psychologically possible he would have done it, and psychologically impossible he would have done it the way it was done."

He lit a cigarette and watched the drifting spirals of smoke.

"If it wasn't so fantastic, I'd say he started out to do it and found it already done. And yet, that's about the size of it. It would account for Pfyfe's seeing him there, and for his secreting the gun at Miss St. Clair's the next day."

The telephone rang: Colonel Ostrander wanted to speak to the district attorney. Markham, after a short conversation, turned a disgruntled look upon Vance.

"Your bloodthirsty friend wanted to know if I'd arrested anyone yet. He offered to confer more of his invaluable suggestions upon me in case I was still undecided as to who was guilty."

"I heard you thanking him fulsomely for something or other. . . . What did you give him to understand about your mental state?"

"That I was still in the dark."

Markham's answer was accompanied by a somber, tired smile. It was his way of telling Vance that he had entirely rejected the idea of Captain Leacock's guilt.

The major went to him and held out his hand.

"I know how you feel," he said. "This sort of thing is discouraging; but it's better that the guilty person should escape altogether than that an innocent man should be made to suffer. . . . Don't work too hard, and don't let these disappointments get to you. You'll soon hit on the right solution, and when you do"—his jaw snapped shut, and he uttered the rest of the sentence between clenched teeth—"you'll meet with no opposition from me. I'll help you put the thing over."

He gave Markham a grim smile and took up his hat.

"I'm going back to the office now. If you want me at any time, let me know. I may be able to help you—later on."

With a friendly, appreciative bow to Vance, he went out.

Markham sat in silence for several minutes.

"Damn it, Vance!" he said irritably. "This case gets more difficult by the hour. I feel worn out."

"You really shouldn't take it so seriously, old dear," Vance advised lightly. "It doesn't pay, y' know, to worry over the trivia of existence."

'Nothing's new,  
And nothing's true,  
And nothing really matters.'

Several million johnnies were killed in the war, and you don't let the fact bedevil your phagocytes or inflame your brain cells. But when one rotter is mercifully shot in your district, you lie awake nights perspiring over it, what? My word! You're deucedly inconsistent."

"Consistency—" began Markham; but Vance interrupted him.

"Now don't quote Emerson. I infinitely prefer Erasmus. Y' know, you ought to read his *Praise of Folly*; it would cheer you no end. That goaty old Dutch professor would never have grieved inconsolably over the destruction of Alvin *Le Chauve*."

"I'm not a *fruges consumere natus* like you," snapped Markham. "I was elected to this office—"

"Oh, quite—'loved I not honor more' and all that," Vance chimed in. "But don't be so sensitive. Even if the captain has succeeded in bungling his way out of jail, you have at least five possibilities left. There's Mrs. Platz . . . and Pfyfe . . . and Colonel Ostrander . . . and Miss Hoffman . . . and Mrs. Banning.—I say! Why don't you arrest 'em all, one at a time, and get 'em to confess? Heath would go crazy with joy."

Markham was in too crestfallen a mood to resent this chaffing. Indeed, Vance's lightheartedness seemed to buoy him up.

"If you want the truth," he said; "that's exactly what I feel like doing. I am restrained merely by my indecision as to which one to arrest first."

"Stout fella!" Then Vance asked: "What are you going to do with the captain now? It'll break his heart if you release him."

"His heart'll have to break, I'm afraid." Markham reached for the telephone. "I'd better see to the formalities now."

"Just a moment!" Vance put forth a restraining hand. "Don't end his rapturous martyrdom just yet. Let him be happy for another day at least. I've a notion he may be most useful to us, pining away in his lonely cell like the prisoner of Chillon."

Markham put down the telephone without a word. More and more, he had noticed, he was becoming inclined to accept Vance's

leadership. This attitude was not merely the result of the hopeless confusion in his mind, though his uncertainty probably influenced him to some extent; but it was due in large measure to the impression Vance had given him of knowing more than he cared to reveal.

"Have you tried to figure out just how Pfyfe and his Turtledove fit into the case?" Vance asked.

"Along with a few thousand other enigmas—yes," was the petulant reply. "But the more I try to reason it out, the more of a mystery the whole thing becomes."

"Loosely put, my dear Markham," criticized Vance. "There are no mysteries originating in human beings, y' know; there are only problems. And any problem originating in one human being can be solved by another human being. It merely requires a knowledge of the human mind, and the application of that knowledge to human acts. Simple, what?"

He glanced at the clock.

"I wonder how your Mr. Stitt is getting along with the Benson and Benson books. I await his report with anticipat'ry excitement."

This was too much for Markham. The wearing-down process of Vance's intimations and veiled innuendoes had at last dissipated his self-control. He bent forward and struck the desk angrily with his hand.

"I'm damned tired of this superior attitude of yours," he complained hotly. "Either you know something or you don't. If you don't know anything, do me the favor of dropping these insinuations of knowledge. If you do know anything, it's up to you to tell me. You've been hinting around in one way or another ever since Benson was shot. If you've got any idea who killed him, I want to know it."

He leaned back and took out a cigar. Not once did he look up as he carefully clipped the end and lit it. I think he was a little ashamed at having given way to his anger.

Vance had sat apparently unconcerned during the outburst. At length he stretched his legs and gave Markham a long contemplative look.

"Y' know, Markham old bean, I don't blame you a bit for your unseemly ebullition. The situation has been most provokin'. But now, I fancy, the time has come to put an end to the comedietta. I really haven't been spoofing, y' know. The fact is, I've some most int'restin' ideas on the subject."

He stood up and yawned.

"It's a beastly hot day, but it must be done—eh, what?"

'So nigh is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man.  
When duty whispers low, *Thou must*,  
The youth replies, *I can*.'

I'm the noble youth, don't y' know. And you're the voice of duty—though you didn't exactly whisper, did you? . . . *Was aber ist deine Pflicht?* And Goethe answered: *Die Forderung des Tages*. But—deuce take it!—I wish the demand had come on a cooler day."

He handed Markham his hat.

"Come, *Postume*. To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.<sup>[17]</sup> You are through with the office for today. Inform Swacker of the fact, will you?—there's a dear! We attend upon a lady—Miss St. Clair, no less."

Markham realized that Vance's jesting manner was only the masquerade of a very serious purpose. Also, he knew that Vance would tell him what he knew or suspected only in his own way, and that, no matter how circuitous and unreasonable that way might appear, Vance had excellent reasons for following it. Furthermore, since the unmasking of Captain Leacock's purely fictitious confession, he was in a state of mind to follow any suggestion that held the faintest hope of getting at the truth. He therefore rang at once for Swacker and informed him he was quitting the office for the day.

In ten minutes we were in the subway on our way to 94 Riverside Drive.

## 20. A LADY EXPLAINS

(Wednesday, June 19; 4:30 P.M.)

"The quest for enlightenment upon which we are now embarked," said Vance, as we rode uptown, "may prove a bit tedious. But you must exert your willpower and bear with me. You can't imagine what a ticklish task I have on my hands. And it's not a pleasant one either. I'm a bit too young to be sentimental and yet, d' ye know, I'm half inclined to let your culprit go."

"Would you mind telling me why we are calling on Miss St. Clair?" asked Markham resignedly.

Vance amiably complied. "Not at all. Indeed, I deem it best for you to know. There are several points connected with the lady that need elucidation. First, there are the gloves and the handbag. Nor poppy nor mandragora shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep which thou ow'dst yesterday until you have learned about those articles—eh, what? Then, you recall, Miss Hoffman told us that the major was lending an ear when a certain lady called upon Benson the day he was shot. I suspect that the visitor was Miss St. Clair; and I am rather curious to know what took place in the office that day and why she came back later. Also, why did she go to Benson's for tea that afternoon? And what part did the jewels play in the chit-chat? But there are other items. For example: Why did the captain take his gun to her? What makes him think she shot Benson?—he really believes it, y' know. And why did she think that he was guilty from the first?"

Markham looked skeptical.

"You expect her to tell us all this?"

"My hopes run high," returned Vance. "With her verray parfit gentil knight jailed as a self-confessed murderer, she will have nothing to lose by unburdening her soul. . . . But we must have no blustering. Your police brand of aggressive cross-examination will, I assure you, have no effect upon the lady."

"Just how do you propose to elicit your information?"

"With *morbidezza*, as the painters say. Much more refined and gentlemanly, y' know."

Markham considered a moment. "I think I'll keep out of it, and leave the Socratic elenctus entirely to you."

"An extr'ordin'rily brilliant suggestion," said Vance.

When we arrived Markham announced over the house telephone that he had come on a vitally important mission; and we were received by Miss St. Clair without a moment's delay. She was apprehensive, I imagine, concerning the whereabouts of Captain Leacock.

As she sat before us in her little drawing room overlooking the Hudson, her face was quite pale, and her hands, though tightly clasped, trembled a little. She had lost much of her cold reserve, and there were unmistakable signs of sleepless worry about her eyes.

Vance went directly to the point. His tone was almost flippant in its lightness: it at once relieved the tension of the atmosphere, and gave an air bordering on inconsequentiality to our visit.

"Captain Leacock has, I regret to inform you, very foolishly confessed to the murder of Mr. Benson. But we are not entirely satisfied with his *bona fides*. We are, alas! awash between Scylla and Charybdis. We can not decide whether the captain is a deep-dyed villain or a *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*. His story of how he accomplished the dark deed is a bit sketchy; he is vague on certain essential details; and—what's most confusin'—he turned the lights off in Benson's hideous living room by a switch which positively doesn't exist. Consequently, the suspicion has crept into my mind that he has concocted this tale of derring-do in order to shield someone whom he really believes guilty."

He indicated Markham with a slight movement of the head.

"The district attorney here does not wholly agree with me. But then, d' ye see, the legal mind is incredibly rigid and unreceptive once it has been invaded by a notion. You will remember that, because you were with Mr. Alvin Benson on his last evening on earth, and for other reasons equally irrelevant and trivial, Mr. Markham actually concluded that you had had something to do with the gentleman's death."

He gave Markham a smile of waggish reproach, and went on: "Since you, Miss St. Clair, are the only person whom Captain Leacock would shield so heroically, and since I, at least, am convinced of your own innocence, will you not clear up for us a few of those points where your orbit crossed that of Mr. Benson? . . . Such information cannot do the captain or yourself any harm, and it very possibly will help to banish from Mr. Markham's mind his lingering doubts as to the captain's innocence."

Vance's manner had an assuaging effect upon the woman; but I could see that Markham was boiling inwardly at Vance's animadversions on him, though he refrained from any interruption.

Miss St. Clair stared steadily at Vance for several minutes.

"I don't know why I should trust you, or even believe you," she said evenly; "but now that Captain Leacock has confessed—I was afraid he was going to, when he last spoke to me—I see no reason why I should not answer your questions. . . . Do you truly think he is innocent?"

The question was like an involuntary cry; her pent-up emotion had broken through her carapace of calm.

"I truly do," Vance avowed soberly. "Mr. Markham will tell you that before we left his office, I pleaded with him to release Captain Leacock. It was with the hope that your explanations would convince him of the wisdom of such a course that I urged him to come here."

Something in his tone and manner seemed to inspire her confidence.

"What do you wish to ask me?" she asked.

Vance cast another reproachful glance at Markham, who was restraining his outraged feelings only with difficulty; and then turned back to the woman.

"First of all, will you explain how your gloves and handbag found their way into Mr. Benson's house? Their presence there has been

preying most distressin'ly on the district attorney's mind."

She turned a direct, frank gaze upon Markham.

"I dined with Mr. Benson at his invitation. Things between us were not pleasant, and when we started for home, my resentment of his attitude increased. At Times Square I ordered the chauffeur to stop—I preferred returning home alone. In my anger and my haste to get away, I must have dropped my gloves and bag. It was not until Mr. Benson had driven off that I realized my loss, and having no money, I walked home. Since my things were found in Mr. Benson's house, he must have taken them there himself."

"Such was my own belief," said Vance. "And—my word!—it's a deucedly long walk out here, what?"

He turned to Markham with a tantalizing smile.

"Really, y' know, Miss St. Clair couldn't have been expected to reach here before one."

Markham, grim and resolute, made no reply.

"And now," pursued Vance, "I should love to know under what circumstances the invitation to dinner was extended."

A shadow darkened her face, but her voice remained even.

"I had been losing a lot of money through Mr. Benson's firm, and suddenly my intuition told me that he was purposely seeing to it that I did lose, and that he could, if he desired, help me to recoup." She dropped her eyes. "He had been annoying me with his attentions for some time; and I didn't put any despicable scheme past him. I went to his office and told him quite plainly what I suspected. He replied that if I'd dine with him that night, we could talk it over. I knew what his object was, but I was so desperate I decided to go anyway, hoping I might plead with him."

"And how did you happen to mention to Mr. Benson the exact time your little dinner party would terminate?"

She looked at Vance in astonishment but answered unhesitatingly. "He said something about making a gay night of it; and then I told him—very emphatically—that if I went, I would leave him sharply at midnight, as was my invariable rule on all parties. . . . You see," she added, "I study very hard at my singing, and going home at midnight, no matter what the occasion, is one of the sacrifices—or rather, restrictions—I impose on myself."

"Most commendable and most wise!" commented Vance. "Was this fact generally known among your acquaintances?"

"Oh, yes. It even resulted in my being nicknamed Cinderella."

"Specifically, did Colonel Ostrander and Mr. Pfyfe know it?"

"Yes."

Vance thought a moment.

"How did you happen to go to tea at Mr. Benson's home the day of the murder, if you were to dine with him that night?"

A flush stained her cheeks. "There was nothing wrong in that," she declared. "Somehow, after I had left Mr. Benson's office, I revolted against my decision to dine with him, and I went to his house—I had gone back to the office first, but he had left—to make a final appeal and to beg him to release me from my promise. But he laughed the matter off and, after insisting that I have tea, sent me home in a taxicab to dress for dinner. He called for me about half past seven."

"And when you pleaded with him to release you from your promise, you sought to frighten him by recalling Captain Leacock's threat; and he said it was only a bluff."

Again the woman's astonishment was manifest. "Yes," she murmured.

Vance gave her a soothing smile.

"Colonel Ostrander told me he saw you and Mr. Benson at the Marseilles."

"Yes, and I was terribly ashamed. He knew what Mr. Benson was and had warned me against him only a few days before."

"I was under the impression the colonel and Mr. Benson were good friends."

"They were—up to a week ago. But the colonel lost more money than I did in a stock pool which Mr. Benson engineered recently, and he intimated to me very strongly that Mr. Benson had deliberately misadvised us to his own benefit. He didn't even speak to Mr. Benson that night at the Marseilles."

"What about these rich and precious stones that accompanied your tea with Mr. Benson?"

"Bribes," she answered; and her contemptuous smile was a more eloquent condemnation of Benson than if she had resorted to the bitterest castigation. "The gentleman sought to turn my head with them. I was offered a string of pearls to wear to dinner, but I declined them. And I was told that if I saw things in the right light—or some such charming phrase—I could have jewels just like them for my very, very own—perhaps even those identical ones, on the twenty-first."

"Of course—the twenty-first." Vance grinned. "Markham, are you listening? On the twenty-first Leander's note falls due, and if it's not paid, the jewels are forfeited."

He addressed himself again to Miss St. Clair.

"Did Mr. Benson have the jewels with him at dinner?"

"Oh, no! I think my refusal of the pearls rather discouraged him."

Vance paused, looking at her with ingratiating cordiality.

"Tell us now, please, of the gun episode—in your own words, as the lawyers say, hoping to entangle you later."

But she evidently feared no entanglement.

"The morning after the murder Captain Leacock came here and said he had gone to Mr. Benson's house about half past twelve with the intention of shooting him. But he had seen Mr. Pfyfe outside and, assuming he was calling, had given up the idea and gone home. I feared that Mr. Pfyfe had seen him, and I told him it would be safer to bring his pistol to me and to say, if questioned, that he'd lost it in France. . . . You see, I really thought he had shot Mr. Benson and was—well, lying like a gentleman, to spare my feelings. Then, when he took the pistol from me with the purpose of throwing it away altogether, I was even more certain of it."

She smiled faintly at Markham.

"That was why I refused to answer your questions. I wanted you to think that maybe I had done it, so you'd not suspect Captain Leacock."

"But he wasn't lying at all," said Vance.

"I know now that he wasn't. And I should have known it before. He'd never have brought the pistol to me if he'd been guilty."

A film came over her eyes.

"And—poor boy!—he confessed because he thought that I was guilty."

"That's precisely the harrowin' situation," nodded Vance. "But where did he think you had obtained a weapon?"

"I know many army men, friends of his and of Major Benson's. And last summer at the mountains I did considerable pistol practice for the fun of it. Oh, the idea was reasonable enough."

Vance rose and made a courtly bow.

"You've been most gracious—and most helpful," he said. "Y' see, Mr. Markham had various theories about the murder. The first, I believe, was that you alone were the Madam Borgia. The second was that you and the captain did the deed together—*à quatre mains*, as it were. The third was that the captain pulled the trigger *a cappella*. And the legal mind is so exquisitely developed that it can believe in several conflicting theories at the same time. The sad thing about the present case is that Mr. Markham still leans toward the belief that both of you are guilty, individually and collectively. I tried to reason with him before coming here; but I failed. Therefore, I insisted upon his hearing from your own charming lips your story of the affair."

He went up to Markham, who sat glaring at him with lips compressed.

"Well, old chap," he remarked pleasantly, "surely you are not going to persist in your obsession that either Miss St. Clair or Captain Leacock is guilty, what? . . . And won't you relent and unshackle the captain as I begged you to?"

He extended his arms in a theatrical gesture of supplication.

Markham's wrath was at the breaking point, but he got up deliberately and, going to the woman, held out his hand. "Miss St. Clair," he said kindly—and again I was impressed by the bigness of the man—, "I wish to assure you that I have dismissed the idea of your guilt, and also Captain Leacock's, from what Mr. Vance terms my incredibly rigid and unreceptive mind. . . . I forgive him, however, because he has saved me from doing you a very grave injustice. And I will see that you have your captain back as soon as the papers can be signed for his release."

As we walked out onto Riverside Drive, Markham turned savagely on Vance.

"So! I was keeping her precious captain locked up, and *you* were pleading with me to let him go! You know damned well I didn't think either one of them was guilty—you—you lounge lizard!"

Vance sighed. "Dear me! Don't you want to be of any help at all in this case?" he asked sadly.

"What good did it do you to make an ass of me in front of that woman?" spluttered Markham. "I can't see that you got anywhere, with all your tomfoolery."

"What!" Vance registered utter amazement. "The testimony you've heard today is going to help immeasurably in convicting the culprit. Furthermore, we now know about the gloves and handbag, and who the lady was that called at Benson's office, and what Miss St. Clair did between twelve and one, and why she dined alone with Alvin, and why she first had tea with him, and how the jewels came to be there, and why the captain took her his gun and then threw it away, and why he confessed. . . . My word! Doesn't all this knowledge soothe you? It rids the situation of so much debris."

He stopped and lit a cigarette.

"The really important thing the lady told us was that her friends knew she invariably departed at midnight when she went out of an evening. Don't overlook or belittle that point, old dear; it's most pertinent. I told you long ago that the person who shot Benson knew she was dining with him that night."

"You'll be telling me next you know who killed him," Markham scoffed.

Vance sent a ring of smoke circling upward.

"I've known all along who shot the blighter."

Markham snorted derisively.

"Indeed! And when did this revelation burst upon you?"

"Oh, not more than five minutes after I entered Benson's house that first morning," replied Vance.

"Well, well! Why didn't you confide in me and avoid all these trying activities?"

"Quite impossible," Vance explained jocularly. "You were not ready to receive my apocryphal knowledge. It was first necess'ry to lead you patiently by the hand out of the various dark forests and morasses into which you insisted upon straying. You're so dev'lishly unimag'native, don't y' know."

A taxicab was passing and he hailed it.

"Eighty-seven West Forty-eighth Street," he directed.

Then he took Markham's arm confidently. "Now for a brief chat with Mrs. Platz. And then—then I shall pour into your ear all my maidenly secrets."

## 21. SARTORIAL REVELATIONS

(Wednesday, June 19, 5:30 P.M.)

The housekeeper regarded our visit that afternoon with marked uneasiness. Though she was a large, powerful woman, her body seemed to have lost some of its strength, and her face showed signs of prolonged anxiety. Snitkin informed us, when we entered, that she had carefully read every newspaper account of the progress of the case and had questioned him interminably on the subject.

She entered the living room with scarcely an acknowledgment of our presence and took the chair Vance placed for her like a woman resigning herself to a dreaded but inevitable ordeal. When Vance looked at her keenly, she gave him a frightened glance and turned her face away, as if, in the second their eyes met, she had read his knowledge of some secret she had been jealously guarding.

Vance began his questioning without prelude or protasis.

"Mrs. Platz, was Mr. Benson very particular about his toupee—that is, did he often receive his friends without having it on?"

The woman appeared relieved. "Oh, no, sir—never."

"Think back, Mrs. Platz. Has Mr. Benson never, to your knowledge, been in anyone's company without his toupee?"

She was silent for some time, her brows contracted.

"Once I saw him take off his wig and show it to Colonel Ostrander, an elderly gentleman who used to call here very often. But Colonel Ostrander was an old friend of his. He told me they lived together once."

"No one else?"

Again she frowned thoughtfully. "No," she said, after several minutes.

"What about the tradespeople?"

"He was very particular about them. . . . And strangers, too," she added. "When he used to sit in here in hot weather without his wig, he always pulled the shade on that window." She pointed to the one nearest the hallway. "You can look in it from the steps."

"I'm glad you brought up that point," said Vance. "And anyone standing on the steps could tap on the window or the iron bars, and attract the attention of anyone in this room?"

"Oh, yes, sir—easily. I did it myself once, when I went on an errand and forgot my key."

"It's quite likely, don't you think, that the person who shot Mr. Benson obtained admittance that way?"

"Yes, sir." She grasped eagerly at the suggestion.

"The person would have had to know Mr. Benson pretty well to tap on the window instead of ringing the bell. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Platz?"

"Yes, sir." Her tone was doubtful; evidently the point was a little beyond her.

"If a stranger had tapped on the window, would Mr. Benson have admitted him without his toupee?"

"Oh, no—he wouldn't have let a stranger in."

"You are sure the bell didn't ring that night?"

"Positive, sir." The answer was very emphatic.

"Is there a light on the front steps?"

"No, sir."

"If Mr. Benson had looked out of the window to see who was tapping, could he have recognized the person at night?"

The woman hesitated. "I don't know—I don't think so."

"Is there any way you can see through the front door who is outside without opening it?"

"No, sir. Sometimes I wished there was."

"Then, if the person knocked on the window, Mr. Benson must have recognized the voice?"

"It looks that way, sir."

"And you're certain no one could have got in without a key?"

"How could they? The door locks by itself."

"It's the regulation spring lock, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then it must have a catch you can turn off so that the door will open from either side even though it's latched."

"It did have a catch like that," she explained, "but Mr. Benson had it fixed so's it wouldn't work. He said it was too dangerous—I might go out and leave the house unlocked."

Vance stepped into the hallway, and I heard him opening and shutting the front door.

"You're right, Mrs. Platz," he observed, when he came back. "Now tell me: are you quite sure no one had a key?"

"Yes, sir. No one but me and Mr. Benson had a key."

Vance nodded his acceptance of her statement.

"You said you left your bedroom door open on the night Mr. Benson was shot. . . . Do you generally leave it open?"

"No, I'most always shut it. But it was terrible close that night."

"Then it was merely an accident you left it open?"

"As you might say."

"If your door had been closed as usual, could you have heard the shot, do you think?"

"If I'd been awake, maybe. Not if I was sleeping, though. They got heavy doors in these old houses, sir."

"And they're beautiful, too," commented Vance.

He looked admiringly at the massive mahogany double door that opened into the hall.

"Y' know, Markham, our so-called civ'lization is nothing more than the persistent destruction of everything that's beautiful and

enduring, and the designing of cheap makeshifts. You should read Oswald Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlands*—a most penetratin' document. I wonder some enterprisin' publisher hasn't embalmed it in our native argot.[18] The whole history of this degen'rate era we call modern civilization can be seen in our woodwork. Look at that fine old door, for instance, with its beveled panels and ornamented bolection, and its Ionic pilasters and carved lintel. And then compare it with the flat, flimsy, machine-made, shellacked boards which are turned out by the thousand today. *Sic transit*. . . ."

He studied the door for some time; then turned abruptly back to Mrs. Platz, who was eyeing him curiously and with mounting apprehension.

"What did Mr. Benson do with the box of jewels when he went out to dinner?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir," she answered nervously. "He left them on the table there."

"Did you see them after he had gone?"

"Yes; and I was going to put them away. But I decided I'd better not touch them."

"And nobody came to the door, or entered the house, after Mr. Benson left?"

"No, sir."

"You're quite sure?"

"I'm positive, sir."

Vance rose, and began to pace the floor. Suddenly, just as he was passing the woman, he stopped and faced her.

"Was your maiden name Hoffman, Mrs. Platz?"

The thing she had been dreading had come. Her face paled, her eyes opened wide, and her lower lip drooped a little.

Vance stood looking at her, not unkindly. Before she could regain control of herself, he said, "I had the pleasure of meeting your charmin' daughter recently."

"My daughter. . . ?" the woman managed to stammer.

"Miss Hoffman, y' know—the attractive young lady with the blond hair. Mr. Benson's secret'ry."

The woman sat erect and spoke through clamped teeth. "She's not my daughter."

"Now, now, Mrs. Platz!" Vance chided her, as if speaking to a child. "Why this foolish attempt at deception? You remember how worried you were when I accused you of having a personal interest in the lady who was here to tea with Mr. Benson? You were afraid I thought it was Miss Hoffman. . . . But why should you be anxious about her, Mrs. Platz? I'm sure she's a very nice girl. And you really can't blame her for preferring the name of Hoffman to that of Platz. *Platz* means generally a place, though it also means a crash or an explosion; and sometimes a *Platz* is a bun or a yeast cake. But a *Hoffman* is a courtier—much nicer than being a yeast cake, what?"

He smiled engagingly, and his manner had a quieting effect upon her.

"It isn't that, sir," she said, looking at him appealingly. "I made her take the name. In this country any girl who's smart can get to be a lady if she's given a chance. And—"

"I understand perfectly," Vance interposed pleasantly. "Miss Hoffman is clever, and you feared that the fact of your being a housekeeper, if it became known, would stand in the way of her success. So you elim'nated yourself, as it were, for her welfare. I think it was very generous of you. . . . Your daughter lives alone?"

"Yes, sir—in Morningside Heights. But I see her every week." Her voice was barely audible.

"Of course—as often as you can, I'm sure. . . . Did you take the position as Mr. Benson's housekeeper because she was his secret'ry?"

She looked up, a bitter expression in her eyes. "Yes, sir—I did. She told me the kind of man he was; and he often made her come to the house here in the evenings to do extra work."

"And you wanted to be here to protect her?"

"Yes, sir—that was it."

"Why were you so worried the morning after the murder, when Mr. Markham here asked you if Mr. Benson kept any firearms around the house?"

The woman shifted her gaze. "I—wasn't worried."

"Yes, you were, Mrs. Platz. And I'll tell you why. You were afraid we might think Miss Hoffman shot him."

"Oh, no, sir, I wasn't!" she cried. "My girl wasn't even here that night—I swear it!—she wasn't here. . . ."

She was badly shaken; the nervous tension of a week had snapped, and she looked helplessly about her.

"Come, come, Mrs. Platz," pleaded Vance consolingly. "No one believes for a moment that Miss Hoffman had a hand in Mr. Benson's death."

The woman peered searchingly into his face. At first she was loath to believe him—it was evident that fear had long been preying on her mind—and it took him fully a quarter of an hour to convince her that what he had said was true. When, finally, we left the house, she was in a comparatively peaceful state of mind.

On our way to the Stuyvesant Club Markham was silent, completely engrossed with his thoughts. It was evident that the new facts educed by the interview with Mrs. Platz troubled him considerably.

Vance sat smoking dreamily, turning his head now and then to inspect the buildings we passed. We drove east through Forty-eighth Street, and when we came abreast of the New York Bible Society House, he ordered the chauffeur to stop and insisted that we admire it.

"Christianity," he remarked, "has almost vindicated itself by its architecture alone. With few exceptions, the only buildings in this city that are not eyesores are the churches and their allied structures. The American aesthetic credo is: Whatever's big is beautiful. These depressin' gargantuan boxes with rectangular holes in 'em, which are called skyscrapers, are worshiped by Americans simply because they're huge. A box with forty rows of holes is twice as beautiful as a box with twenty rows. Simple formula, what? . . . Look at this little five-story affair across the street. It's infinitely lovelier—and more impressive, too—than any skyscraper in the city. . . ."

Vance referred but once to the crime during our ride to the club and then only indirectly.

"Kind hearts, y' know, Markham, are more than coronets. I've done a good deed today and I feel pos'tively virtuous. Frau Platz will *schlafen* much better tonight. She has been frightfully upset about little Gretchen. She's a doughty old soul; motherly and all that. And



she couldn't bear to think of the future Lady Vere de Vere being suspected. . . . Wonder why she worried so?" And he gave Markham a sly look.

Nothing further was said until after dinner, which we ate in the Roof Garden. We had pushed back our chairs, and sat looking out over the treetops of Madison Square.

"Now, Markham," said Vance, "give over all prejudices, and consider the situation judiciously—as you lawyers euphemistically put it. . . . To begin with, we now know why Mrs. Platz was so worried at your question regarding firearms and why she was upset by my reference to her personal interest in Benson's tea companion. So, those two mysteries are eliminated. . . ."

"How did you find out about her relation to the girl?" interjected Markham.

"'Twas my ogling did it." Vance gave him a reproving look. "You recall that I 'ogled' the young lady at our first meeting—but I forgive you. . . . And you remember our little discussion about cranial idiosyncrasies? Miss Hoffman, I noticed at once, possessed all the physical formations of Benson's housekeeper. She was brachycephalic; she had overarticulated cheekbones, an orthognathous jaw, a low, flat parietal structure, and a mesorrhinian nose. . . . Then I looked for her ear, for I had noted that Mrs. Platz had the pointed, lobeless, 'satyr' ear—sometimes called the Darwin ear. These ears run in families; and when I saw that Miss Hoffman's were of the same type, even though modified, I was fairly certain of the relationship. But there were other similarities—in pigment, for instance, and in height—both are tall, y' know. And the central masses of each were very large in comparison with the peripheral masses; the shoulders were narrow and the wrists and ankles small, while the hips were bulky. . . . That Hoffman was Platz's maiden name was only a guess. But it didn't matter."

Vance adjusted himself more comfortably in his chair.

"Now for your judicial considerations. . . . First, let us assume that at a little before half past twelve on the night of the thirteenth the villain came to Benson's house, saw the light in the living room, tapped on the window, and was instantly admitted. . . . What, would you say, do these assumptions indicate regarding the visitor?"

"Merely that Benson was acquainted with him," returned Markham. "But that doesn't help us any. We can't extend the *sus. per coll.* to everybody the man knew."

"The indications go much further than that, old chap," Vance retorted. "They show unmistakably that Benson's murderer was a most intimate crony, or, at least, a person before whom he didn't care how he looked. The absence of the toupee, as I once suggested to you, was a prime essential of the situation. A toupee, don't y' know, is the sartorial *sine qua non* of every middle-aged Beau Brummel afflicted with baldness. You heard Mrs. Platz on the subject. Do you think for a second that Benson, who hid his hirsute deficiency even from the grocer's boy, would visit with a mere acquaintance thus bereft of his crowning glory? And besides being thus denuded, he was without his full complement of teeth. Moreover, he was without collar or tie, and attired in an old smoking jacket and bedroom slippers! Picture the spectacle, my dear fellow. . . . A man does not look fascinatin' without his collar and with his shirtband and gold stud exposed. Thus attired, he is the equiv'lent of a lady in curl papers. . . . How many men do you think Benson knew with whom he would have sat down to a tête-à-tête in this undress condition?"

"Three or four, perhaps," answered Markham. "But I can't arrest them all."

"I'm sure you would if you could. But it won't be necessary."

Vance selected another cigarette from his case and went on. "There are other helpful indications, y' know. For instance, the murderer was fairly well acquainted with Benson's domestic arrangements. He must have known that the housekeeper slept a good distance from the living room and would not be startled by the shot if her door was closed as usual. Also, he must have known there was no one else in the house at that hour. And another thing: don't forget that his voice was perfectly familiar to Benson. If there had been the slightest doubt about it, Benson would not have let him in, in view of his natural fear of housebreakers and with the captain's threat hanging over him."

"That's a tenable hypothesis. . . . What else?"

"The jewels, Markham—those orators of love. Have you thought of them? They were on the center table when Benson came home that night; and they were gone in the morning. Wherefore, it seems inevitable that the murderer took 'em—eh, what? . . . And may they not have been one reason for the murderer's coming there that night? If so, who of Benson's most intimate *personae gratae* knew of their presence in the house? And who wanted 'em particularly?"

"Exactly, Vance," Markham nodded his head slowly. "You've hit it. I've had an uneasy feeling about Pfyfe right along. I was on the point of ordering his arrest today when Heath brought word of Leacock's confession; and then, when that blew up, my suspicions reverted to him. I said nothing this afternoon because I wanted to see where your ideas had led you. What you've been saying checks up perfectly with my own notions. Pfyfe's our man—"

He brought the front legs of his chair down suddenly.

"And now, damn it, you've let him get away from us!"

"Don't fret, old dear," said Vance. "He's safe with Mrs. Pfyfe, I fancy. And anyhow, your friend, Mr. Ben Hanlon, is well versed in retrieving fugitives. . . . Let the harassed Leander alone for the moment. You don't need him tonight—and tomorrow you won't want him."

Markham wheeled about.

"What's that! I won't want him? And why, pray?"

"Well," Vance explained indolently, "he hasn't a congenial and lovable nature, has he? And he's not exactly an object of blindin' beauty. I shouldn't want him around me more than was necessary, don't y' know. . . . Incidentally, he's not guilty."

Markham was too nonplussed to be exasperated. He regarded Vance searchingly for a full minute.

"I don't follow you," he said. "If you think Pfyfe's innocent, who, in God's name, do you think is guilty?"

Vance glanced at his watch.

"Come to my house tomorrow for breakfast and bring those alibis you asked Heath for; and I'll tell you who shot Benson."

Something in his tone impressed Markham. He realized that Vance would not have made so specific a promise unless he was confident of his ability to keep it. He knew Vance too well to ignore, or even minimize, his statement.

"Why not tell me now?" he asked.

"Awf'lly sorry, y' know," apologized Vance; "but I'm going to the Philharmonic's 'special' tonight. They're playing César Franck's D-Minor, and Strinsky's temp'rament is em'nently suited to its diatonic sentimentalities. . . . You'd better come along, old man. Soothin' to the nerves and all that."

"Not me!" grumbled Markham. "What I need is a brandy-and-soda"

He walked down with us to the taxicab.

"Come at nine tomorrow," said Vance, as we took our seats. "Let the office wait a bit. And don't forget to phone Heath for those alibis."

Then, just as we started off, he leaned out of the car. "And I say, Markham: how tall would you say Mrs. Platz is?"

## 22. VANCE OUTLINES A THEORY

(Thursday, June 20, 9 A.M.)

Markham came to Vance's apartment at promptly nine o'clock the next morning. He was in a bad humor.

"Now, see here, Vance," he said, as soon as he was seated at the table, "I want to know what was the meaning of your parting words last night."

"Eat your melon, old dear," said Vance. "It comes from northern Brazil and is very delicious. But don't devitalize its flavor with pepper or salt. An amazin' practice, that, though not as amazin' as stuffing a melon with ice cream. The American does the most dumbfoundin' things with ice cream. He puts it on pie; he puts it in soda water; he encases it in hard chocolate like a bonbon; he puts it between sweet biscuits and calls the result an ice cream sandwich; he even uses it instead of whipped cream in a Charlotte Russe. . . ."

"What I want to know—" began Markham; but Vance did not permit him to finish.

"It's surprisin', y' know, the erroneous ideas people have about melons. There are only two species, the muskmelon and the watermelon. All breakfast melons—like cantaloupes, citrons, nutmegs, Cassabas, and honeydews—are varieties of the muskmelon. But people have the notion, d' ye see, that cantaloupe is a generic term. Philadelphians call all melons cantaloupes; whereas this type of muskmelon was first cultivated in Cantalupo, Italy. . . ."

"Very interesting," said Markham, with only partly disguised impatience. "Did you intend by your remark last night—"

"And after the melon, Currie has prepared a special dish for you. It's my own gustat'ry *chef-d'oeuvre*—with Currie's collaboration, of course. I've spent months on its conception—composing and organizing it, so to speak. I haven't named it yet; perhaps you can suggest a fitting appellation. . . . To achieve this dish, one first chops up a hard-boiled egg and mixes it with grated *Port du Salut* cheese, adding a soupçon of tarragon. This paste is then enclosed in a filet of white perch, like a French pancake. It is tied with silk, rolled in a specially prepared almond batter, and cooked in sweet butter. That, of course, is the barest outline of its manufacture, with all the truly exquisite details omitted."

"It sounds appetizing." Markham's tone was devoid of enthusiasm. "But I didn't come here for a cooking lesson."

"Y' know, you underestimate the importance of your ventral pleasures," pursued Vance. "Eating is the one infallible guide to a people's intellectual advancement, as well as the inev'table gauge of the individual's temp'rament. The savage cooked and ate like a savage. In the early days of the human race mankind was cursed with one vast epidemic of indigestion. There's where his devils and demons and ideas of hell came from: they were the nightmares of his dyspepsia. Then, as man began to master the technique of cooking, he became civilized; and when he achieved the highest pinnacles of the culin'ry art, he also achieved the highest pinnacles of cultural and intellectual glory. When the art of the gourmet retrogressed, so did man. The tasteless, standardized cookery of America is typical of our decadence. A perfectly blended soup, Markham, is more ennoblin' than Beethoven's C-Minor Symphony. . . ."

Markham listened stolidly to Vance's chatter during breakfast. He made several attempts to bring up the subject of the crime, but Vance glibly ignored each essay. It was not until Currie had cleared away the dishes that he referred to the object of Markham's visit.

"Did you bring the alibi reports?" was his first question.

Markham nodded. "And it took me two hours to find Heath after you'd gone last night."

"Sad," breathed Vance.

He went to the desk and took a closely written double sheet of foolscap from one of the compartments.

"I wish you'd glance this over and give me your learned opinion," he said, handing the paper to Markham. "I prepared it last night after the concert."

I later took possession of the document and filed it with my other notes and papers pertaining to the Benson case. The following is a verbatim copy:

### HYPOTHESIS

*Mrs. Anna Platz shot and killed Alvin Benson on the night of June 13th.*

### PLACE

*She lived in the house and admitted being there at the time the shot was fired.*

### OPPORTUNITY

*She was alone in the house with Benson.*

*All the windows were either barred or locked on the inside. The front door was locked. There was no other means of ingress.*

*Her presence in the living room was natural; she might have entered ostensibly to ask Benson a domestic question.*

*Her standing directly in front of him would not necessarily have caused him to look up. Hence, his reading attitude.*

*Who else could have come so close to him for the purpose of shooting him without attracting his attention?*

*He would not have cared how he appeared before his housekeeper. He had become accustomed to being seen by her without his teeth and toupee and in négligé condition.*

*Living in the house, she was able to choose a propitious moment for the crime.*

### TIME

*She waited up for him. Despite her denial, he might have told her when he would return.  
When he came in alone and changed to his smoking jacket, she knew he was not expecting any late visitors.  
She chose a time shortly after his return because it would appear that he had brought someone home with him, and that this other person had killed him.*

#### MEANS

*She used Benson's own gun. Benson undoubtedly had more than one; for he would have been more likely to keep a gun in his bedroom than in his living room; and since a Smith and Wesson was found in the living room, there probably was another in the bedroom.*

*Being his housekeeper, she knew of the gun upstairs. After he had gone down to the living room to read, she secured it and took it with her, concealed under her apron.*

*She threw the gun away or hid it after the shooting. She had all night in which to dispose of it.*

*She was frightened when asked what firearms Benson kept about the house, for she was not sure whether or not we knew of the gun in the bedroom.*

#### MOTIVE

*She took the position of housekeeper because she feared Benson's conduct toward her daughter. She always listened when her daughter came to his house at night to work.*

*Recently she discovered that Benson had dishonorable intentions and believed her daughter to be in imminent danger.*

*A mother who would sacrifice herself for her daughter's future, as she has done, would not hesitate at killing to save her.*

*And there are the jewels. She has them hidden and is keeping them for her daughter. Would Benson have gone out and left them on the table? And if he had put them away, who but she, familiar with the house and having plenty of time, could have found them?*

#### CONDUCT

*She lied about St. Clair's coming to tea, explaining later that she knew St. Clair could not have had anything to do with the crime. Was this feminine intuition? No. She could know St. Clair was innocent only because she herself was guilty. She was too motherly to want an innocent person suspected.*

*She was markedly frightened yesterday when her daughter's name was mentioned, because she feared the discovery of the relationship might reveal her motive for shooting Benson.*

*She admitted hearing the shot, because, if she had denied it, a test might have proved that a shot in the living room would have sounded loudly in her room; and this would have aroused suspicion against her. Does a person, when awakened, turn on the lights and determine the exact hour? And if she had heard a report which sounded like a shot being fired in the house, would she not have investigated or given an alarm?*

*When first interviewed, she showed plainly she disliked Benson.*

*Her apprehension has been pronounced each time she has been questioned.*

*She is the hardheaded, shrewd, determined German type, who could both plan and perform such a crime.*

#### HEIGHT

*She is about five feet, ten inches tall—the demonstrated height of the murderer.*

*Markham read this précis through several times—he was fully fifteen minutes at the task—and when he had finished, he sat silent for ten minutes more. Then he rose and walked up and down the room.*

*"Not a fancy legal document, that," remarked Vance. "But I think even a grand juror could understand it. You, of course, can rearrange and elaborate it, and bedeck it with innumerable meaningless phrases and recondite legal idioms."*

*Markham did not answer at once. He paused by the French windows and looked down into the street. Then he said, "Yes, I think you've made out a case. . . . Extraordinary! I've wondered from the first what you were getting at; and your questioning of Platz yesterday impressed me as pointless. I'll admit it never occurred to me to suspect her. Benson must have given her good cause."*

*He turned and came slowly toward us, his head down, his hands behind him.*

*"I don't like the idea of arresting her. . . . Funny I never thought of her in connection with it."*

*He stopped in front of Vance.*

*"And you yourself didn't think of her at first, despite your boast that you knew who did it after you'd been in Benson's house five minutes."*

*Vance smiled mirthfully and sprawled in his chair.*

*Markham became indignant. "Damn it! You told me the next day that no woman could have done it, no matter what evidence was adduced, and harangued me about art and psychology and God knows what."*

*"Quite right," murmured Vance, still smiling. "No woman did it."*

*"No woman did it!" Markham's gorge was rising rapidly.*

*"Oh, dear no!"*

*He pointed to the sheet of paper in Markham's hand.*

*"That's just a bit of spoofing, don't y' know. . . . Poor old Mrs. Platz!—she's as innocent as a lamb."*

*Markham threw the paper on the table and sat down. I had never seen him so furious; but he controlled himself admirably.*

*"Y' see, my dear old bean," explained Vance, in his unemotional drawl, "I had an irresistible longing to demonstrate to you how utterly silly your circumst'ntial and material evidence is. I'm rather proud, y' know, of my case against Mrs. Platz. I'm sure you could convict her on the strength of it. But, like the whole theory of your exalted law, it's wholly specious and erroneous. . . . Circumst'ntial evidence, Markham, is the utt'rest tommyrot imag'nable. Its theory is not unlike that of our present-day democracy. The democratic theory is that if you accumulate enough ignorance at the polls, you produce intelligence; and the theory of circumst'ntial evidence is that if you accumulate a sufficient number of weak links, you produce a strong chain."*

*"Did you get me here this morning," demanded Markham coldly, "to give me a dissertation on legal theory?"*

*"Oh, no," Vance blithely assured him. "But I simply must prepare you for the acceptance of my revelation; for I haven't a scrap of material or circumst'ntial evidence against the guilty man. And yet, Markham, I know he's guilty as well as I know you're sitting in that chair planning how you can torture and kill me without being punished."*

*"If you have no evidence, how did you arrive at your conclusion?" Markham's tone was vindictive.*

*"Solely by psychological analysis—by what might be called the science of personal possibilities. A man's psychological nature is as clear a brand to one who can read it as was Hester Prynne's scarlet letter. . . . I never read Hawthorne, by the bye. I can't abide the New England temperament."*

*Markham set his jaw, and gave Vance a look of arctic ferocity.*

*"You expect me to go into court, I suppose, leading your victim by the arm, and say to the judge, 'Here's the man that shot Alvin Benson. I have no evidence against him, but I want you to sentence him to death because my brilliant and sagacious friend, Mr. Philo Vance, the inventor of stuffed perch, says this man has a wicked nature.'"*

*Vance gave an almost imperceptible shrug.*

*"I sha'n't wither away with grief if you don't even arrest the guilty man. But I thought it no more than humane to tell you who he was, if only to stop you from chivvyng all these innocent people."*

*"All right—tell me, and let me get on about my business."*

*I don't believe there was any longer a question in Markham's mind that Vance actually knew who had killed Benson. But it was not until considerably later in the morning that he fully understood why Vance had kept him for days upon tenterhooks. When at last he did understand it, he forgave Vance; but at the moment he was angered to the limit of his control.*

*"There are one or two things that must be done before I can reveal the gentleman's name," Vance told him. "First, let me have a peep at those alibis."*

*Markham took from his pocket a sheaf of typewritten pages and passed them over.*

*Vance adjusted his monocle and read through them carefully. Then he stepped out of the room; and I heard him telephoning. When he returned, he reread the reports. One in particular he lingered over, as if weighing its possibilities.*

*"There's a chance, y' know," he murmured at length, gazing indecisively into the fireplace.*

*He glanced at the report again.*

*"I see here," he said, "that Colonel Ostrander, accompanied by a Bronx alderman named Moriarty, attended the Midnight Follies at the Piccadilly Theatre in Forty-seventh Street on the night of the thirteenth, arriving there a little before twelve and remaining through the performance, which was over about half past two A.M. . . . Are you acquainted with this particular alderman?"*

*Markham's eyes lifted sharply to the other's face. "I've met Mr. Moriarty. What about him?" I thought I detected a note of suppressed excitement in his voice.*

*"Where do Bronx aldermen loll about in the forenoons?" asked Vance.*

*"At home, I should say. Or possibly at the Samoset Club. . . . Sometimes they have business at City Hall."*

*"My word!—such unseemly activity for a politician! . . . Would you mind ascertaining if Mr. Moriarty is at home or at his club. If it's not too much bother, I'd like to have a brief word with him."*

*Markham gave Vance a penetrating gaze. Then, without a word, he went to the telephone in the den.*

*"Mr. Moriarty was at home, about to leave for City Hall," he announced on returning. "I asked him to drop by here on his way downtown."*

*"I do hope he doesn't disappoint us," sighed Vance. "But it's worth trying."*

*"Are you composing a charade?" asked Markham; but there was neither humor nor good nature in the question.*

*"Pon my word, old man, I'm not trying to confuse the main issue," said Vance. "Exert a little of that simple faith with which you are so gen'rously supplied—it's more desirable than Norman blood, y' know. I'll give you the guilty man before the morning's over. But, d' ye see, I must make sure that you'll accept him. These alibis are, I trust, going to prove most profitable in paving the way for my coup de boutoir. . . . An alibi, as I recently confided to you, is a tricky and dang'rous thing, and open to grave suspicion. And the absence of an alibi means nothing at all. For instance, I see by these reports that Miss Hoffman has no alibi for the night of the thirteenth. She says she went to a motion picture theater and then home. But no one saw her at any time. She was prob'bly at Benson's visiting mama until late. Looks suspicious—eh, what? And yet, even if she was there, her only crime that night was filial affection. . . . On the other hand, there are several alibis here which are, as one says, cast iron—silly metaphor: cast iron's easily broken—and I happen to know one of 'em is spurious. So be a good fellow and have patience; for it's most necess'ry that these alibis be minutely inspected."*

*Fifteen minutes later Mr. Moriarty arrived. He was a serious, good-looking, well-dressed youth in his late twenties—not at all my idea of an alderman—and he spoke clear and precise English with almost no trace of the Bronx accent.*

*Markham introduced him and briefly explained why he had been requested to call.*

*"One of the men from the homicide bureau," answered Moriarty, "was asking me about the matter only yesterday."*

*"We have the report," said Vance, "but it's a bit too general. Will you tell us exactly what you did that night after you met Colonel Ostrander?"*

*"The colonel had invited me to dinner and the Follies. I met him at the Marseilles at ten. We had dinner there and went to the*

Piccadilly a little before twelve, where we remained until about two thirty. I walked to the colonel's apartment with him, had a drink and a chat, and then took the subway home about three thirty."

"You told the detective yesterday you sat in a box at the theater."

"That's correct."

"Did you and the colonel remain in the box throughout the performance?"

"No. After the first act a friend of mine came to the box, and the colonel excused himself and went to the washroom. After the second act the colonel and I stepped outside into the alleyway and had a smoke."

"What time, would you say, was the first act over?"

"Twelve thirty or thereabouts."

"And where is this alleyway situated?" asked Vance. "As I recall, it runs along the side of the theater to the street."

"You're right."

"And isn't there an exit door very near the boxes, which leads into the alleyway?"

"There is. We used it that night."

"How long was the colonel gone after the first act?"

"A few minutes—I couldn't say exactly."

"Had he returned when the curtain went up on the second act?"

Moriarty reflected. "I don't believe he had. I think he came back a few minutes after the act began."

"Ten minutes?"

"I couldn't say. Certainly no more."

"Then, allowing for a ten-minute intermission, the colonel might have been away twenty minutes?"

"Yes—it's possible."

This ended the interview; and when Moriarty had gone, Vance lay back in his chair and smoked thoughtfully.

"Surprisin' luck!" he commented. "The Piccadilly Theatre, y' know, is practically round the corner from Benson's house. You grasp the possibilities of the situation, what? . . . The colonel invites an alderman to the Midnight Follies and gets box seats near an exit giving on an alley. At a little before half past twelve he leaves the box, sneaks out via the alley, goes to Benson's, taps and is admitted, shoots his man, and hurries back to the theater. Twenty minutes would have been ample."

Markham straightened up but made no comment.

"And now," continued Vance, "let's look at the indicat'ry circumst'nces and the confirmat'ry facts. . . . Miss St. Clair told us the colonel had lost heavily in a pool of Benson's manipulation and had accused him of crookedness. He hadn't spoken to Benson for a week; so it's plain there was bad blood between 'em. He saw Miss St. Clair at the Marseilles with Benson; and, knowing she always went home at midnight, he chose half past twelve as a propitious hour; although originally he may have intended to wait until much later, say, one thirty or two, before sneaking out of the theater. Being an army officer, he would have had a Colt forty-five, and he was probably a good shot. He was most anxious to have you arrest someone—he didn't seem to care who; and he even phoned you to inquire about it. He was one of the very few persons in the world whom Benson would have admitted, attired as he was. He'd known Benson int'mately for fifteen years, and Mrs. Platz once saw Benson take off his toupee and show it to him. Moreover, he would have known all about the domestic arrangements of the house; he no doubt had slept there many a time when showing his old pal the wonders of New York's night life. . . . How does all that appeal to you?"

Markham had risen and was pacing the floor, his eyes almost closed.

"So that was why you were so interested in the colonel—asking people if they knew him and inviting him to lunch? . . . What gave you the idea, in the first place, that he was guilty?"

"Guilty!" exclaimed Vance. "That priceless old dunderhead guilty! Really, Markham, the notion's prepost'rous. I'm sure he went to the washroom that night to comb his eyebrows and arrange his tie. Sitting, as he was, in a box, the gels on the stage could see him, y' know."

Markham halted abruptly. An ugly color crept into his cheeks, and his eyes blazed. But before he could speak, Vance went on, with serene indifference to his anger.

"And I played in the most astonishin' luck. Still, he's just the kind of ancient popinjay who'd go to the washroom and dandify himself—I rather counted on that, don't y' know. . . . My word! We've made amazin' progress this morning, despite your injured feelings. You now have five different people, any one of whom you can, with a little legal ingenuity, convict of the crime—in any event, you can get indictments against 'em."

He leaned his head back meditatively.

"First, there's Miss St. Clair. You were quite pos'tive she did the deed, and you told the major you were all ready to arrest her. My demonstration of the murderer's height could be thrown out on the grounds that it was intelligent and conclusive and therefore had no place in a court of law. I'm sure the judge would concur. Secondly, I give you Captain Leacock. I actu'ly had to use physical force to keep you from jailing the chap. You had a beautiful case against him—to say nothing of his delightful confession. And if you met with any diff'culties, he'd help you out; he'd adore having you convict him. Thirdly, I submit Leander the Lovely. You had a better case against him than against almost any one of the others—a perfect wealth of circumst'ntial evidence—an *embarras de richesse*, in fact. And any jury would delight in convicting him. I would, myself, if only for the way he dresses. Fourthly, I point with pride to Mrs. Platz. Another perfect circumst'ntial case, fairly bulging with clues and infrences and legal whatnots. Fifthly, I present the colonel. I have just rehearsed your case against him; and I could elab'rate it touchin'ly, given a little more time."

He paused and gave Markham a smile of cynical affability.

"Observe, please, that each member of this quintet meets all the demands of presumptive guilt: each one fulfills the legal requirements as to time, place, opportunity, means, motive, and conduct. The only drawback, d' ye see, is that all five are quite innocent. A most discomposin' fact, but there you are. . . . Now, if all the people against whom there's the slightest suspicion are innocent, what's to be done? . . . Annoyin', ain't it?"

He picked up the alibi reports.

"There's positively nothing to be done but to go on checking up these alibis."

I could not imagine what goal he was trying to reach by these apparently irrelevant digressions; and Markham, too, was mystified. But neither of us doubted for a moment that there was method in his madness.

"Let's see," he mused. "The major's is the next in order. What do you say to tackling it? It shouldn't take long—he lives near here; and the entire alibi hinges on the evidence of the nightboy at his apartment house. Come!" He got up.

"How do you know the boy is there now?" objected Markham.

"I phoned a while ago and found out."

"But this is damned nonsense!"

Vance now had Markham by the arm, playfully urging him toward the door. "Oh, undoubtedly," he agreed. "But I've often told you, old dear, you take life much too seriously."

Markham, protesting vigorously, held back and endeavored to disengage his arm from the other's grip. But Vance was determined; and after a somewhat heated dispute, Markham gave in.

"I'm about through with this hocus-pocus," he growled, as we got into a taxicab.

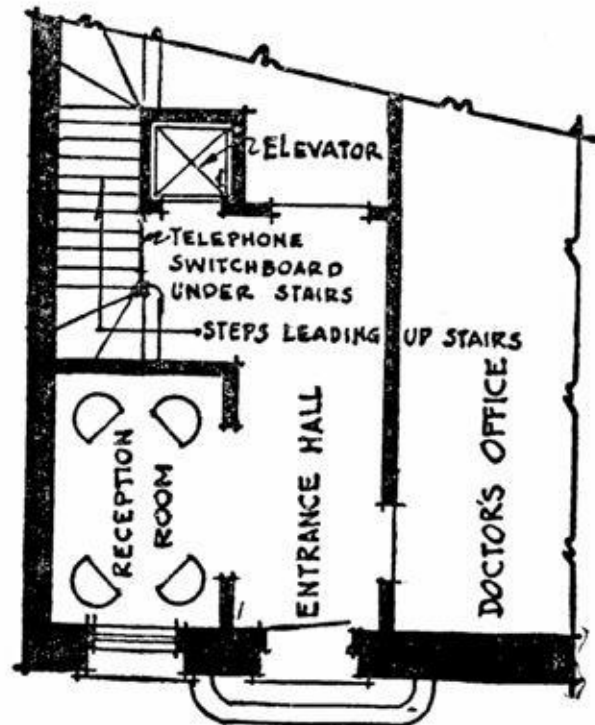
"I'm through already," said Vance.



### 23. CHECKING AN ALIBI

(Thursday, June 20; 10:30 A.M.)

The Chatham Arms, where Major Benson lived, was a small exclusive bachelor apartment house in Forty-sixth Street, midway between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. The entrance, set in a simple and dignified façade, was flush with the street and only two steps above the pavement. The front door opened into a narrow hallway with a small reception room, like a cul-de-sac, on the left. At the rear could be seen the elevator; and beside it, tucked under a narrow flight of iron stairs which led round the elevator shaft, was a telephone switchboard.



WEST 46TH STREET

FIRST FLOOR OF CHATHAM ARMS APARTMENT IN  
WEST FORTY-SIXTH STREET

When we arrived, two youths in uniform were on duty, one lounging in the door of the elevator, the other seated at the switchboard. Vance halted Markham near the entrance.

"One of these boys, I was informed over the telephone, was on duty the night of the thirteenth. Find out which one it was and scare him into submission by your exalted title of District Attorney. Then turn him over to me."

Reluctantly Markham walked down the hallway. After a brief interrogation of the boys he led one of them into the reception room, and peremptorily explained what he wanted.<sup>[19]</sup>

Vance began his questioning with the confident air of one who has no doubt whatever as to another's exact knowledge.

"What time did Major Benson get home the night his brother was shot?"

The boy's eyes opened wide. "He came in about 'leven—right after show time," he answered, with only a momentary hesitation.

(I have set down the rest of the questions and answers in dramatic-dialogue form, for purposes of space economy.)

VANCE: He spoke to you, I suppose?

BOY: Yes, sir. He told me he'd been to the theater, and said what a rotten show it was—and that he had an awful headache.

VANCE: How do you happen to remember so well what he said a week ago?

BOY: Why, his brother was murdered that night!

VANCE: And the murder caused so much excitement that you naturally recalled everything that happened at the time in connection with Major Benson?

BOY: Sure—he was the murdered guy's brother.

VANCE: When he came in that night, did he say anything about the day of the month?

BOY: Nothin' except that he guessed his bad luck in pickin' a bum show was on account of it bein' the thirteenth.

VANCE: Did he say anything else?

BOY (*grinning*): He said he'd make the thirteenth my lucky day, and he gave me all the silver he had in his pocket—nickels and dimes and quarters and one fifty-cent piece.

VANCE: How much altogether?

BOY: Three dollars and forty-five cents.

VANCE: And then he went to his room?

BOY: Yes, sir—I took him up. He lives on the third floor.

VANCE: Did he go out again later?

BOY: No, sir.

VANCE: How do you know?

BOY: I'd've seen him. I was either answerin' the switchboard or runnin' the elevator all night. He couldn't've got out without my seein' him.

VANCE: Were you alone on duty?

BOY: After ten o'clock there's never but one boy on.

VANCE: And there's no other way a person could leave the house except by the front door?

BOY: No, sir.

VANCE: When did you next see Major Benson?

BOY (after thinking a moment): He rang for some cracked ice, and I took it up.

VANCE: What time?

BOY: Why—I don't know exactly. . . . Yes, I do! It was half past twelve.

VANCE (smiling faintly): He asked you the time, perhaps?

BOY: Yes, sir, he did. He asked me to look at his clock in his parlor.

VANCE: How did he happen to do that?

BOY: Well, I took up the ice, and he was in bed; and he asked me to put it in his pitcher in the parlor. When I was doin' it, he called me to look at the clock on the mantel and tell him what time it was. He said his watch had stopped and he wanted to set it.

VANCE: What did he say then?

BOY: Nothin' much. He told me not to ring his bell, no matter who called up. He said he wanted to sleep, and didn't want to be woke up.

VANCE: Was he emphatic about it?

BOY: Well—he meant it, all right.

VANCE: Did he say anything else?

BOY: No. He just said good night and turned out the light, and I came on downstairs.

VANCE: What light did he turn out?

BOY: The one in his bedroom.

VANCE: Could you see into his bedroom from the parlor?

BOY: No. The bedroom's off the hall.

VANCE: How could you tell the light was turned off then?

BOY: The bedroom door was open, and the light was shinin' into the hall.

VANCE: Did you pass the bedroom door when you went out?

BOY: Sure—you have to.

VANCE: And was the door still open?

BOY: Yes.

VANCE: Is that the only door to the bedroom?

BOY: Yes.

VANCE: Where was Major Benson when you entered the apartment?

BOY: In bed.

VANCE: How do you know?

BOY (*mildly indignant*): I saw him.

VANCE (*after a pause*): You're quite sure he didn't come downstairs again?

BOY: I told you I'd've seen him if he had.

VANCE: Couldn't he have walked down at some time when you had the elevator upstairs, without your seeing him?

BOY: Sure, he could. But I didn't take the elevator up after I'd took the major his cracked ice until around two thirty, when Mr. Montagu came in.

VANCE: You took no one up in the elevator, then, between the time you brought Major Benson the ice and when Mr. Montagu came in at two thirty?

BOY: Nobody.

VANCE: And you didn't leave the hall here between those hours?

BOY: No. I was sittin' here all the time.

VANCE: Then the last time you saw him was in bed at twelve thirty?

BOY: Yes—until early in the morning when some dame[20] phoned him and said his brother had been murdered. He came down and went out about ten minutes after.

VANCE (*giving the boy a dollar*): That's all. But don't you open your mouth to anyone about our being here, or you may find yourself in the lockup—understand? . . . Now, get back to your job.

When the boy had left us, Vance turned a pleading gaze upon Markham.

"Now, old man, for the protection of society, and the higher demands of justice, and the greatest good for the greatest number, and *pro bono publico*, and that sort of thing, you must once more adopt a course of conduct contr'y to your innate promptings—or whatever the phrase you used. Vulgarly put, I want to snoop through the major's apartment at once."

"What for?" Markham's tone was one of exclamatory protest. "Have you completely lost your senses? There's no getting round the boy's testimony. I may be weakminded, but I know when a witness like that is telling the truth."

"Certainly, he's telling the truth," agreed Vance serenely. "That's just why I want to go up. Come, my Markham. There's no danger of the major returning *en surprise* at this hour. . . . And"—he smiled cajolingly—"you promised me every assistance don't y' know."

Markham was vehement in his remonstrances, but Vance was equally vehement in his insistence; and a few minutes later we were trespassing, by means of a passkey, in Major Benson's apartment.

The only entrance was a door leading from the public hall into a narrow passageway which extended straight ahead into the living room at the rear. On the right of this passageway, near the entrance, was a door opening into the bedroom.

Vance walked directly back into the living room. On the right-hand wall was a fireplace and a mantel on which sat an old-fashioned mahogany clock. Near the mantel, in the far corner, stood a small table containing a silver ice-water service consisting of a pitcher and six goblets.

"There is our very convenient clock," said Vance. "And there is the pitcher in which the boy put the ice—imitation Sheffield plate."

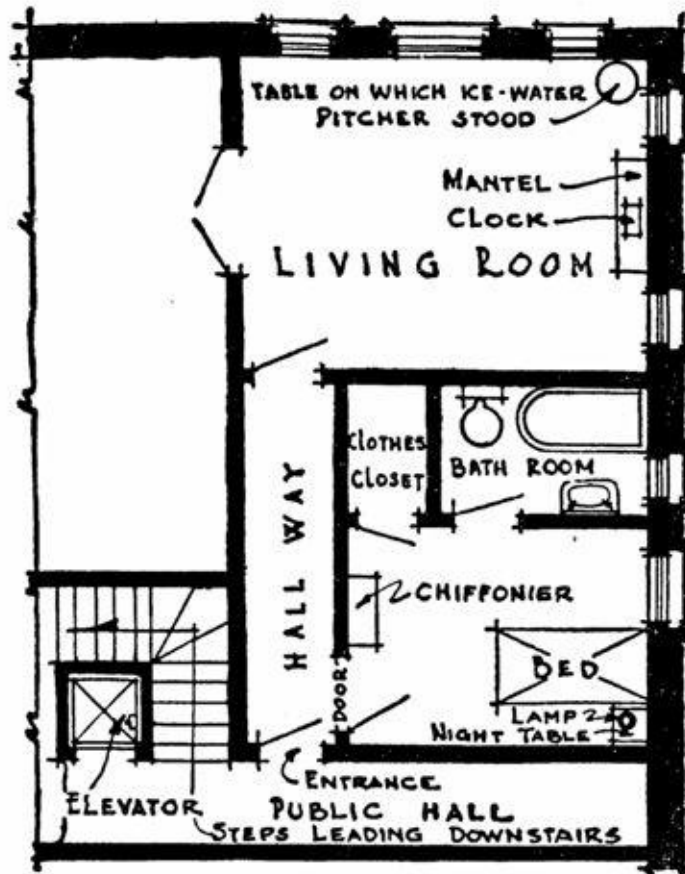
Going to the window, he glanced down into the paved rear court twenty-five or thirty feet below.

"The major certainly couldn't have escaped through the window," he remarked.

He turned and stood a moment looking into the passageway.

"The boy could easily have seen the light go out in the bedroom, if the door was open. The reflection on the glazed white wall of the passage would have been quite brilliant."

Then, retracing his steps, he entered the bedroom. It contained a small canopied bed facing the door, and beside it stood a night table on which was an electric lamp. Sitting down on the edge of the bed, he looked about him and turned the lamp on and off by the socket chain. Presently he fixed his eyes on Markham.



THIRD FLOOR OF CHATHAM ARMS APARTMENT IN  
WEST FORTY-SIXTH STREET

"You see how the major got out without the boy's knowing it—eh, what?"

"By levitation, I suppose," submitted Markham.

"It amounted to that, at any rate," replied Vance, "Deuced ingenious, too. . . . Listen, Markham:—At half past twelve the major rang for cracked ice. The boy brought it, and when he entered, he looked in through the door, which was open, and saw the major in bed. The major told him to put the ice in the pitcher in the living room. The boy walked on down the passage and across the living room to the table in the corner. The major then called to him to learn the time by the clock on the mantel. The boy looked: it was half past twelve. The major replied that he was not to be disturbed again, said good night, turned off this light on this night table, jumped out of bed—he was dressed, of course—and stepped quickly out into the public hall before the boy had time to empty the ice and return to the passage. The major ran down the stairs and was in the street before the elevator descended. The boy, when he passed the bedroom door on his way out, could not have seen whether the major was still in bed or not, even if he had looked in, for the room was then in darkness—Clever, what?"

"The thing would have been possible, of course," conceded Markham. "But your specious imaginings fail to account for his return."

"That was the simplest part of the scheme. He prob'ly waited in a doorway across the street for some other tenant to go in. The boy said a Mr. Montagu returned about two thirty. Then the major slipped in when he knew the elevator had ascended, and walked up the stairs."

Markham, smiling patiently, said nothing.

"You perceived," continued Vance, "the pains taken by the major to establish the date and the hour, and to impress them on the boy's mind. Poor show—headache—unlucky day. Why unlucky? The thirteenth, to be sure. But lucky for the boy. A handful of money—all silver. Singular way of tipping, what? But a dollar bill might have been forgotten."

A shadow clouded Markham's face, but his voice was as indulgently impersonal as ever. "I prefer your case against Mrs. Platz."

"Ah, but I've not finished." Vance stood up. "I have hopes of finding the weapon, don't y' know."

Markham now studied him with amused incredulity. "That, of course, would be a contributory factor. . . . You really expect to find it?"

"Without the slightest difficulty," Vance pleasantly assured him.

He went to the chiffonier and began opening the drawers. "Our absent host didn't leave the pistol at Alvin's house; and he was far too canny to throw it away. Being a major in the late war, he'd be expected to have such a weapon: in fact, several persons may actually have known he possessed one. And if he is innocent—as he fully expects us to assume—why shouldn't it be in its usual place? Its absence, d' ye see, would be more incriminating than its presence. Also, there's a most interesting psychological factor involved. An innocent person who was afraid of being thought guilty, would have hidden it, or thrown it away—like Captain Leacock, for example. But a guilty man, wishing to create an appearance of innocence, would have put it back exactly where it was before the shooting."

He was still searching through the chiffonier.

"Our only problem, then, is to discover the customary abiding place of the major's gun. . . . It's not here in the chiffonier," he added, closing the last drawer.

He opened a kit bag standing at the foot of the bed and rifled its contents. "Nor here," he murmured indifferently. "The clothes closet is the only other likely place."

Going across the room, he opened the closet door. Unhurriedly he switched on the light. There, on the upper shelf, in plain view, lay an army belt with a bulging holster.

Vance lifted it with extreme delicacy and placed it on the bed near the window.

"There you are, old chap," he cheerfully announced, bending over it closely. "Please take particular note that the entire belt and holster—with only the exception of the holster's flap—is thickly coated with dust. The flap is comparatively clean, showing it has been opened recently. . . . Not conclusive, of course; but you're so partial to clues, Markham."

He carefully removed the pistol from the holster.

"Note, also, that the gun itself is innocent of dust. It has been recently cleaned, I surmise."

His next act was to insert a corner of his handkerchief into the barrel. Then, withdrawing it, he held it up.

"You see—eh, what? Even the inside of the barrel is immaculate. . . . And I'll wager all my Cézannes against an LL.B. degree that there isn't a cartridge missing."

He extracted the magazine and poured the cartridges onto the night table, where they lay in a neat row before us. There were seven—the full number for that style of gun.

"Again, Markham, I present you with one of your revered clues. Cartridges that remain in a magazine for a long time become slightly tarnished, for the catch plate is not airtight. But a fresh box of cartridges is well sealed, and its contents retain their luster much longer."

He pointed to the first cartridge that had rolled out of the magazine.

"Observe that this one cartridge—the last to be inserted into the magazine—is a bit brighter than its fellows. The inference is—you're an adept at inferences, y' know—that it is a newer cartridge and was placed in the magazine rather recently."

He looked straight into Markham's eyes. "It was placed there to take the place of the one which Captain Hagedorn is keeping."

Markham lifted his head jerkily, as if shaking himself out of an encroaching spell of hypnosis. He smiled but with an effort.

"I still think your case against Mrs. Platz is your masterpiece."

"My picture of the major is merely blocked in," answered Vance. "The revealing touches are to come. But first, a brief catechism:—How did the major know that brother Alvin would be home at twelve thirty on the night of the thirteenth?—He heard Alvin invite Miss St. Clair to dinner—remember Miss Hoffman's story of his eavesdropping?—and he also heard her say she'd unfailingly leave at midnight. When I said yesterday, after we had left Miss St. Clair, that something she told us would help convict the guilty person, I referred to her statement that midnight was her invariable hour of departure. The major therefore knew Alvin would be home about half past twelve, and he was pretty sure that no one else would be there. In any event, he could have waited for him, what? . . . Could he have secured an immediate audience with his brother *en déshabillé*?—Yes. He tapped on the window; his voice was recognized beyond any shadow of doubt; and he was admitted instantly. Alvin had no sartorial modesties in front of his brother and would have thought nothing of receiving him without his teeth and toupee. . . . Is the major the right height?—He is. I purposely stood beside him in your office the other day; and he is almost exactly five feet, ten and a half."

Markham sat staring silently at the disemboweled pistol. Vance had been speaking in a voice quite different from that he had used when constructing his hypothetical cases against the others; and Markham had sensed the change.

"We now come to the jewels," Vance was saying. "I once expressed the belief, you remember, that when we found the security for Pfyfe's note, we would put our hands on the murderer. I thought then the major had the jewels; and after Miss Hoffman told us of his requesting her not to mention the package, I was sure of it. Alvin took them home on the afternoon of the thirteenth, and the major undoubtedly knew it. This fact, I imagine, influenced his decision to end Alvin's life that night. He wanted those baubles, Markham."

He rose jauntily and stepped to the door.

"And now it remains only to find 'em. . . . The murderer took 'em away with him; they couldn't have left the house any other way. Therefore, they're in this apartment. If the major had taken them to the office, someone might have seen them; and if he had placed them in a safe deposit box, the clerk at the bank might have remembered the episode. Moreover, the same psychology that applied to the gun applies to the jewels. The major has acted throughout on the assumption of his innocence; and, as a matter of fact, the trinkets were safer here than elsewhere. There'd be time enough to dispose of them when the affair blew over. . . . Come with me a moment, Markham. It's painful, I know; and your heart's too weak for an anaesthetic."

Markham followed him down the passageway in a kind of daze. I felt a great sympathy for the man, for now there was no question that he knew Vance was serious in his demonstration of the major's guilt. Indeed, I have always felt that Markham suspected the true purpose of Vance's request to investigate the major's alibi, and that his opposition was due as much to his fear of the results as to his impatience with the other's irritating methods. Not that he would have balked ultimately at the truth, despite his long friendship for Major Benson; but he was struggling—as I see it now—with the inevitability of circumstances, hoping against hope that he had read Vance incorrectly and that, by vigorously contesting each step of the way, he might alter the very shape of destiny itself.

Vance led the way to the living room and stood for five minutes inspecting the various pieces of furniture, while Markham remained in the doorway watching him through narrowed lids, his hands crowded deep into his pockets.

"We could, of course, have an expert searcher rake the apartment over inch by inch," observed Vance. "But I don't think it necessary. The major's a bold, cunning soul. Witness his wide square forehead, the dominating stare of his globular eyes, the perpendicular spine, and the indrawn abdomen. He's forthright in all his mental operations. Like Poe's Minister D——, he would recognize the futility of painstakingly secreting the jewels in some obscure corner. And anyhow, he had no object in secreting them. He merely wished to hide 'em where there'd be no chance of their being seen. This naturally suggests a lock and key, what? There was no such cache in the bedroom—which is why I came here."

He walked to a squat rosewood desk in the corner, and tried all its drawers; but they were unlocked. He next tested the table drawer; but that, too, was unlocked. A small Spanish cabinet by the window proved equally disappointing.

"Markham, I simply must find a locked drawer," he said.

He inspected the room again and was about to return to the bedroom when his eye fell on a Circassian-walnut humidor half hidden by a pile of magazines on the undershelf of the center table. He stopped abruptly and, going quickly to the box, endeavored to lift the top. It was locked.

"Let's see," he mused: "what does the major smoke? Romeo y Julieta Perfeccionados, I believe—but they're not sufficiently valuable to keep under lock and key."

He picked up a strong bronze paper knife lying on the table and forced its point into the crevice of the humidor just above the lock.

"You can't do that!" cried Markham; and there was as much pain as reprimand in his voice.

Before he could reach Vance, however, there was a sharp click, and the lid flew open. Inside was a blue velvet jewel case.

"Ah! 'Dumb jewels more quick than words,'" said Vance, stepping back. Markham stood staring into the humidor with an expression of tragic distress. Then slowly he turned and sank heavily into a chair.

"Good God!" he murmured. "I don't know what to believe."

"In that respect," returned Vance, "you're in the same disheartenin' predic'ment as all the philosophers. But you were ready enough, don't y' know, to believe in the guilt of half a dozen innocent people. Why should you gag at the major, who actu'ly is guilty?"

His tone was contemptuous, but a curious, inscrutable look in his eyes belied his voice; and I remembered that, although these two men were welded in an indissoluble friendship, I had never heard a word of sentiment, or even sympathy, pass between them.

Markham had leaned forward in an attitude of hopelessness, elbows on knees, his head in his hands.

"But the motive!" he urged. "A man doesn't shoot his brother for a handful of jewels."

"Certainly not," agreed Vance. "The jewels were a mere addendum. There was a vital motive—rest assured. And, I fancy, when you get your report from the expert accountant, all—or at least a goodly part—will be revealed."

"So that was why you wanted his books examined?"

Markham stood up resolutely. "Come. I'm going to see this thing through."

Vance did not move at once. He was intently studying a small antique candlestick of oriental design on the mantel.

"I say!" he muttered. "That's a dev'lish fine copy!"

## 24. THE ARREST

(Thursday, June 20; noon.)

On leaving the apartment, Markham took with him the pistol and the case of jewels. In the drug store at the corner of Sixth Avenue he telephoned Heath to meet him immediately at the office and to bring Captain Hagedorn. He also telephoned Stitt, the public accountant, to report as soon as possible.

"You observe, I trust," said Vance, when we were in the taxicab headed for the Criminal Courts Building, "the great advantage of my methods over yours. When one knows at the outset who committed a crime, one isn't misled by appearances. Without that foreknowledge, one is apt to be deceived by a clever alibi, for example. . . . I asked you to secure the alibis because, knowing the major was guilty, I thought he'd have prepared a good one."

"But why ask for all of them? And why waste time trying to disprove Colonel Ostrander's?"

"What chance would I have had of securing the major's alibi if I had not injected his name surreptitiously, as it were, into a list of other names? . . . And had I asked you to check the major's alibi first, you'd have refused. I chose the colonel's alibi to start with because it seemed to offer a loophole—and I was lucky in the choice. I knew that if I could puncture one of the other alibis, you would be more inclined to help me test the major's."

"But if, as you say, you knew from the first that the major was guilty, why, in God's name, didn't you tell me, and save me this week of anxiety?"

"Don't be ingenuous, old man," returned Vance. "If I had accused the major at the beginning, you'd have had me arrested for *scandalum magnatum* and criminal libel. It was only by deceivin' you every minute about the major's guilt, and drawing a whole school of red herrings across the trail, that I was able to get you to accept the fact even today. And yet, not once did I actu'lly lie to you. I was constantly throwing out suggestions, and pointing to significant facts, in the hope that you'd see the light for yourself; but you ignored all my intimations, or else misinterpreted them, with the most irritatin' perversity."

Markham was silent a moment. "I see what you mean. But why did you keep setting up these straw men and then knocking them over?"

"You were bound, body and soul, to circumst'ntial evidence," Vance pointed out. "It was only by letting you see that it led you nowhere that I was able to foist the major on you. There was no evidence against him—he naturally saw to that. No one even regarded him as a possibility: fratricide has been held as inconceivable—a *lusus naturae*—since the days of Cain. Even with all my finessing you fought every inch of the way, objectin' to this and that, and doing everything imag'nable to thwart my humble efforts. . . . Admit, like a good fellow, that, had it not been for my assiduousness, the major would never have been suspected."

Markham nodded slowly.

"And yet, there are some things I don't understand even now. Why, for instance, should he have objected so strenuously to my arresting the captain?"

Vance wagged his head.

"How deuced obvious you are! Never attempt a crime, my Markham, you'd be instantly apprehended. I say, can't you see how much more impregnable the major's position would be if he showed no int'rest in your arrests—if, indeed, he appeared actu'lly to protest against your incarceration of a victim. Could he, by any other means, have elim'nated so completely all possible suspicion against himself? Moreover, he knew very well that nothing he could say would swerve you from your course. You're so noble, don't y' know."

"But he did give me the impression once or twice that he thought Miss St. Clair was guilty."

"Ah! There you have a shrewd intelligence taking advantage of an opportunity. The major unquestionably planned the crime so as to cast suspicion on the captain. Leacock had publicly threatened his brother in connection with Miss St. Clair; and the lady was about to dine alone with Alvin. When, in the morning, Alvin was found shot with an army Colt, who but the captain would be suspected? The major knew the captain lived alone, and that he would have difficulty in establishing an alibi. Do you now see how cunning he was in recommending Pfyfe as a source of information? He knew that if you interviewed Pfyfe, you'd hear of the threat. And don't ignore the fact that his suggestion of Pfyfe was an apparent afterthought; he wanted to make it appear casual, don't y' know.—Astute devil, what?"

Markham, sunk in gloom, was listening closely.

"Now for the opportunity of which he took advantage," continued Vance. "When you upset his calculations by telling him you knew whom Alvin dined with, and that you had almost enough evidence to ask for an indictment, the idea appealed to him. He knew no charmin' lady could ever be convicted of murder in this most chivalrous city, no matter what the evidence; and he had enough of the sporting instinct in him to prefer that no one should actu'lly be punished for the crime. Cons'quently, he was willing to switch you back to the lady. And he played his hand cleverly, making it appear that he was most reluctant to involve her."

"Was that why, when you wanted me to examine his books and to ask him to the office to discuss the confession, you told me to intimate that I had Miss St. Clair in mind?"

"Exactly!"

"And the person the major was shielding—"

"Was himself. But he wanted you to think it was Miss St. Clair."

"If you were certain he was guilty, why did you bring Colonel Ostrander into the case?"

"In the hope that he could supply us with faggots for the major's funeral pyre. I knew he was acquainted intimately with Alvin Benson and his entire camarilla; and I knew, too, that he was an egregious quidnunc who might have got wind of some enmity between the Benson boys and have suspected the truth. And I also wanted to get a line on Pfyfe, by way of elim'nating every remote counterpossibility."



"But we already had a line on Pfyfe."

"Oh, I don't mean material clues. I wanted to learn about Pfyfe's nature—his psychology, y' know—particularly his personality as a gambler. Y' see, it was the crime of a calculating, cold-blooded gambler; and no one but a man of that particular type could possibly have committed it."

Markham apparently was not interested just now in Vance's theories.

"Did you believe the major," he asked, "when he said his brother had lied to him about the presence of the jewels in the safe?"

"The wily Alvin prob'bly never mentioned 'em to Anthony," rejoined Vance. "An ear at the door during one of Pfyfe's visits was, I fancy, his source of information. . . . And speaking of the major's eavesdropping, it was that which suggested to me a possible motive for the crime. Your man Stitt, I hope, will clarify that point."

"According to your theory, the crime was rather hastily conceived." Markham's statement was in reality a question.

"The details of its execution were hastily conceived," corrected Vance. "The major undoubtedly had been contemplating for some time elim'nating his brother. Just how or when he was to do it he hadn't decided. He may have thought out and rejected a dozen plans. Then, on the thirteenth, came the opportunity: all the conditions adjusted themselves to his purpose. He heard Miss St. Clair's promise to go to dinner; and he therefore knew that Alvin would prob'bly be home alone at twelve thirty, and that, if he were done away with at that hour, suspicion would fall on Captain Leacock. He saw Alvin take home the jewels—another prov'dential circumst'nce. The propitious moment for which he had been waiting, d' ye see, was at hand. All that remained was to establish an alibi and work out a *modus operandi*. How he did this, I've already elucidated."

Markham sat thinking for several minutes. At last he lifted his head.

"You've about convinced me of his guilt," he admitted. "But damn it, man! I've got to prove it; and there's not much actual legal evidence."

Vance gave a slight shrug.

"I'm not int'rested in your stupid courts and your silly rules of evidence. But, since I've convinced you, you can't charge me with not having met your challenge, don't y' know."

"I suppose not," Markham assented gloomily.

Slowly the muscles about his mouth tightened.

"You've done your share, Vance, I'll carry on."

Heath and Captain Hagedorn were waiting when we arrived at the office, and Markham greeted them in his customary reserved, matter-of-fact way. By now he had himself well in hand and he went about the task before him with the somber forcefulness that characterized him in the discharge of all his duties.

"I think we at last have the right man, Sergeant," he said. "Sit down, and I'll go over the matter with you in a moment. There are one or two things I want to attend to first."

He handed Major Benson's pistol to the firearms expert.

"Look that gun over, Captain, and tell me if there's any way of identifying it as the weapon that killed Benson."

Hagedorn moved ponderously to the window. Laying the pistol on the sill, he took several tools from the pockets of his voluminous coat and placed them beside the weapon. Then, adjusting a jeweler's magnifying glass to his eye, he began what seemed an interminable series of tinkering. He opened the plates of the stock and, drawing back the sear, took out the firing pin. He removed the slide, unscrewed the link, and extracted the recoil spring. I thought he was going to take the weapon entirely apart, but apparently he merely wanted to let light into the barrel; for presently he held the gun to the window and placed his eye at the muzzle. He peered into the barrel for nearly five minutes, moving it slightly back and forth to catch the reflection of the sun on different points of the interior.

At last, without a word, he slowly and painstakingly went through the operation of reintegrating the weapon. Then he lumbered back to his chair and sat blinking heavily for several moments.

"I'll tell you," he said, thrusting his head forward and gazing at Markham over the tops of his steel-rimmed spectacles. "This, now, may be the right gun. I wouldn't say for sure. But when I saw the bullet the other morning, I noticed some peculiar rifling marks on it; and the rifling in this gun here looks to me as though it would match up with the marks on the bullet. I'm not certain. I'd like to look at this barrel through my helixometer.[\[21\]](#)"

"But you believe it's the gun?" insisted Markham.

"I couldn't say, but I think so. I might be wrong."

"Very good, Captain. Take it along and call me the minute you've inspected it thoroughly."

"It's the gun, all right," asserted Heath, when Hagedorn had gone. "I know that bird. He wouldn't've said as much as he did if he hadn't been sure. . . . Whose gun is it, sir?"

"I'll answer you presently." Markham was still battling against the truth—withholding, even from himself, his pronouncement of the major's guilt until every loophole of doubt should be closed. "I want to hear from Stitt before I say anything. I sent him to look over Benson and Benson's books. He'll be here any moment."

After a wait of a quarter of an hour, during which time Markham attempted to busy himself with other matters, Stitt came in. He said a somber good-morning to the district attorney and Heath; then, catching sight of Vance, smiled appreciatively.

"That was a good tip you gave me. You had the dope. If you'd kept Major Benson away longer, I could have done more. While he was there he was watching me every minute."

"I did the best I could," sighed Vance. He turned to Markham. "Y' know, I was wondering all through lunch yesterday how I could remove the major from his office during Mr. Stitt's investigation; and when we learned of Leacock's confession, it gave me just the excuse I needed. I really didn't want the major here—I simply wished to give Mr. Stitt a free hand."

"What did you find out?" Markham asked the accountant.

"Plenty!" was the laconic reply.

He took a sheet of paper from his pocket and placed it on the desk.

"There's a brief report. . . . I followed Mr. Vance's suggestion and took a look at the stock record and the cashier's collateral blotter,

and traced the transfer receipts. I ignored the journal entries against the ledger, and concentrated on the activities of the firm heads. Major Benson, I found, has been consistently hypothecating securities transferred to him as collateral for marginal trading, and has been speculating steadily in mercantile curb stocks. He has lost heavily—how much, I can't say."

"And Alvin Benson?" asked Vance.

"He was up to the same tricks. But he played in luck. He made a wad on a Columbus Motors pool a few weeks back; and he has been salting the money away in his safe—or, at least, that's what the secretary told me."

"And if Major Benson has possession of the key to that safe," suggested Vance, "then it's lucky for him his brother was shot."

"Lucky?" retorted Stitt. "It'll save him from state prison."

When the accountant had gone, Markham sat like a man of stone, his eyes fixed on the wall opposite. Another straw at which he had grasped in his instinctive denial of the major's guilt had been snatched from him.

The telephone rang. Slowly he took up the receiver, and as he listened I saw a look of complete resignation come into his eyes. He leaned back in his chair, like a man exhausted.

"It was Hagedorn," he said. "That was the right gun."

Then he drew himself up and turned to Heath. "The owner of that gun, Sergeant, was Major Benson."

The detective whistled softly and his eyes opened slightly with astonishment. But gradually his face assumed its habitual stolidity of expression. "Well, it don't surprise me any," he said.

Markham rang for Swacker.

"Get Major Benson on the wire and tell him—tell him I'm about to make an arrest and would appreciate his coming here immediately." His deputizing of the telephone call to Swacker was understood by all of us, I think.

Markham then summarized, for Heath's benefit, the case against the major. When he had finished, he rose and rearranged the chairs at the table in front of his desk.

"When Major Benson comes, Sergeant," he said, "I am going to seat him here." He indicated a chair directly facing his own. "I want you to sit at his right; and you'd better get Phelps—or one of the other men, if he isn't in—to sit at his left. But you're not to make any move until I give the signal. Then you can arrest him."

When Heath had returned with Phelps and they had taken their seats at the table, Vance said, "I'd advise you, Sergeant, to be on your guard. The minute the major knows he's in for it, he'll go bald-headed for you."

Heath smiled with heavy contempt.

"This isn't the first man I've arrested, Mr. Vance—with many thanks for your advice. And what's more, the major isn't that kind; he's too nery."

"Have it your own way," replied Vance indifferently. "But I've warned you. The major is cool-headed; he'd take big chances and he could lose his last dollar without turning a hair. But when he is finally cornered and sees ultimate defeat, all his repressions of a lifetime, having had no safety valve, will explode physically. When a man lives without passions or emotions or enthusiasms, there's bound to be an outlet sometime. Some men explode and some commit suicide—the principle is the same: it's a matter of psychological reaction. The major isn't the self-destructive type—that's why I say he'll blow up."

Heath snorted. "We may be short on psychology down here," he rejoined, "but we know human nature pretty well."

Vance stifled a yawn and carelessly lit a cigarette. I noticed, however, that he pushed his chair back a little from the end of the table where he and I were sitting.

"Well, Chief," rasped Phelps, "I guess your troubles are about over—though I sure did think that fellow Leacock was your man. . . . Who got the dope on this Major Benson?"

"Sergeant Heath and the homicide bureau will receive entire credit for the work," said Markham; and added, "I'm sorry, Phelps, but the district attorney's office, and everyone connected with it, will be kept out of it altogether."

"Oh, well, it's all in a lifetime," observed Phelps philosophically.

We sat in strained silence until the major arrived. Markham smoked abstractedly. He glanced several times over the sheet of notations left by Stitt and once he went to the water cooler for a drink. Vance opened at random a law book before him and perused with an amused smile a bribery case decision by a Western judge. Heath and Phelps, habituated to waiting, scarcely moved.

When Major Benson entered Markham greeted him with exaggerated casualness and busied himself with some papers in a drawer to avoid shaking hands. Heath, however, was almost jovial. He drew out the major's chair for him and uttered a ponderous banality about the weather. Vance closed the law book and sat erect with his feet drawn back.

Major Benson was cordially dignified. He gave Markham a swift glance; but if he suspected anything, he showed no outward sign of it.

"Major, I want you to answer a few questions—if you care to." Markham's voice, though low, had in it a resonant quality.

"Anything at all," returned the other easily.

"You own an army pistol, do you not?"

"Yes—a Colt automatic," he replied, with a questioning lift of the eyebrows.

"When did you last clean and refill it?"

Not a muscle of the major's face moved. "I don't exactly remember," he said. "I've cleaned it several times. But it hasn't been refilled since I returned from overseas."

"Have you lent it to anyone recently?"

"Not that I recall."

Markham took up Stitt's report and looked at it a moment. "How did you hope to satisfy your clients if suddenly called upon for their marginal securities?"

The major's upper lip lifted contemptuously, exposing his teeth.

"So! That was why, under the guise of friendship, you sent a man to look over my books!" I saw a red blotch of color appear on the back of his neck and swell upward to his ears.

"It happens that I didn't send him there for that purpose." The accusation had cut Markham. "But I did enter your apartment this morning."

"You're a housebreaker, too, are you?" The man's face was now crimson; the veins stood out on his forehead.

"And I found Mrs. Banning's jewels. . . . How did they get there, Major?"

"It's none of your damned business how they got there," he said, his voice as cold and even as ever.

"Why did you tell Miss Hoffman not to mention them to me?"

"That's none of your damned business either."

"Is it any of my business," asked Markham quietly, "that the bullet which killed your brother was fired from your gun?"

The major looked at him steadily, his mouth a sneer.

"That's the kind of double-crossing you do!—invite me here to arrest me and then ask me questions to incriminate myself when I'm unaware of your suspicions. A fine dirty sport *you* are!"

Vance leaned forward. "You fool!" His voice was very low, but it cut like a whip. "Can't you see he's your friend and is asking you these questions in a last desp'rate hope that you're not guilty?"

The major swung round on him hotly. "Keep out of this—you damned sissy!"

"Oh, quite," murmured Vance.

"And as for *you*"—he pointed a quivering finger at Markham—"I'll make you sweat for this! . . ."

Vituperation and profanity poured from the man. His nostrils were expanded, his eyes blazing. His wrath seemed to surpass all human bounds; he was like a person in an apoplectic fit—contorted, repulsive, insensate.

Markham sat through it patiently, his head resting on his hands, his eyes closed. When, at length, the major's rage became inarticulate, he looked up and nodded to Heath. It was the signal the detective had been watching for.

But before Heath could make a move, the major sprang to his feet. With the motion of rising he swung his body swiftly about and brought his fist against Heath's face with terrific impact. The sergeant went backward in his chair and lay on the floor dazed. Phelps leaped forward, crouching; but the major's knee shot upward and caught him in the lower abdomen. He sank to the floor, where he rolled back and forth groaning.

The major then turned on Markham. His eyes were glaring like a maniac's, and his lips were drawn back. His nostrils dilated with each stertorous breath. His shoulders were hunched, and his arms hung away from his body, his fingers rigidly flexed. His attitude was the embodiment of a terrific, uncontrolled malignity.

"You're next!" The words, guttural and venomous, were like a snarl.

As he spoke he sprang forward.

Vance, who had sat quietly during the melee, looking on with half-closed eyes and smoking indolently, now stepped sharply round the end of the table. His arms shot forward. With one hand he caught the major's right wrist; with the other he grasped the elbow. Then he seemed to fall back with a swift pivotal motion. The major's pinioned arm was twisted upward behind his shoulder blades. There was a cry of pain, and the man suddenly relaxed in Vance's grip.

By this time Heath had recovered. He scrambled quickly to his feet and stepped up. There was the click of handcuffs, and the major dropped heavily into a chair, where he sat moving his shoulder back and forth painfully.

"It's nothing serious," Vance told him. "The capsular ligament is torn a little. It'll be all right in a few days."

Heath came forward and, without a word, held out his hand to Vance. The action was at once an apology and a tribute. I liked Heath for it.

When he and his prisoner had gone, and Phelps had been assisted into an easy chair, Markham put his hand on Vance's arm.

"Let's get away," he said. "I'm done up."

## 25. VANCE EXPLAINS HIS METHODS

(Thursday, June 20; 9 P.M.)

That same evening, after a Turkish bath and dinner, Markham, grim and weary, and Vance, bland and debonair, and myself were sitting together in the alcove of the Stuyvesant Club's lounge room.

We had smoked in silence for half an hour or more, when Vance, as if giving articulation to his thoughts, remarked, "And it's stubborn, unimaginative chaps like Heath who constitute the human barrage between the criminal and society! . . . Sad, sad."

"We have no Napoleons today," Markham observed. "And if we had, they'd probably not be detectives."

"But even should they have yearnings toward that profession," said Vance, "they would be rejected on their physical measurements. As I understand it, your policemen are chosen by their height and weight; they must meet certain requirements as to heft—as though the only crimes they had to cope with were riots and gang feuds. Bulk—the great American ideal, whether in art, architecture, table d'hôte meals, or detectives. An entrancin' notion."

"At any rate, Heath has a generous nature," said Markham palliatingly. "He has completely forgiven you for everything."

Vance smiled. "The amount of credit and emulsification he received in the afternoon papers would have mellowed anyone. He should even forgive the major for hitting him. A clever blow, that, based on rotary leverage. Heath's constitution must be tough, or he wouldn't have recovered so quickly. . . . And poor Phelps! He'll have a horror of knees the rest of his life."

"You certainly guessed the major's reaction," said Markham. "I'm almost ready to grant there's something in your psychological flummery, after all. Your aesthetic deductions seemed to put you on the right track."

After a pause he turned and looked inquisitively at Vance. "Tell me exactly why, at the outset, you were convinced of the major's guilt?"

Vance settled back in his chair.

"Consider, for a moment, the characteristics—the outstanding features—of the crime. Just before the shot was fired, Benson and the murderer undoubtedly had been talking or arguing, the one seated, the other standing. Then Benson had pretended to read, he had said all he had to say. His reading was his gesture of finality; for one doesn't read when conversing with another unless for a purpose. The murderer, seeing the hopelessness of the situation and having come prepared to meet it heroically, took out a gun, aimed it at Benson's temple, and pulled the trigger. After that, he turned out the lights and went away. . . . Such are the facts indicated and actual."

He took several puffs on his cigarette.

"Now, let's analyze 'em. . . . As I pointed out to you, the murderer didn't fire at the body, where, though the chances of hitting would have been much greater, the chances of death would have been less. He chose the more difficult and hazardous—and, at the same time, the more certain and efficient—course. His technique, so to speak, was bold, direct, and fearless. Only a man with iron nerves and a highly developed gambler's instinct would have done it in just this forthright and audacious fashion. Therefore, all nervous, hotheaded, impulsive, or timid persons were automatically eliminated as suspects. The neat, businesslike aspect of the crime, together with the absence of any material clues that could possibly have incriminated the culprit, indicated unmistakably that it had been premeditated and planned with coolness and precision, by a person of tremendous self-assurance, and one used to taking risks. There was nothing subtle or in the least imaginative about the crime. Every feature of it pointed to an aggressive, blunt mind—a mind at once static, determined, and intrepid, and accustomed to dealing with facts and situations in a direct, concrete, and unequivocal manner. . . . I say, Markham, surely you're a good enough judge of human nature to read the indications, what?"

"I think I get the drift of your reasoning," the other admitted a little doubtfully.

"Very well, then," Vance continued. "Having determined the exact psychological nature of the deed, it only remained to find some interested person whose mind and temperament were such that if he undertook a task of this kind in the given circumstances, he would inevitably do it in precisely the manner in which it was done. As it happened, I had known the major for a long time; and so it was obvious to me, the moment I had looked over the situation that first morning, that he had done it. The crime, in every respect and feature, was a perfect psychological expression of his character and mentality. But even had I not known him personally, I would have been able—since I possessed so clear and accurate a knowledge of the murderer's personality—to pick him out from any number of suspects."

"But suppose another person of the major's type had done it?" asked Markham.

"We all differ in our natures, however similar two persons may appear at times," Vance explained. "And while, in the present case, it is barely conceivable that another man of the major's type and temperament might have done it, the law of probability must be taken into account. Even supposing there were two men almost identical in personality and instincts in New York, what would be the chance of their both having had a reason to kill Benson? However, despite the remoteness of the possibility, when Pfyfe came into the case and I learned he was a gambler and a hunter, I took occasion to look into his qualifications. Not knowing him personally, I appealed to Colonel Ostrander for my information; and what he told me put Pfyfe at once *hors de propos*."

"But he had nerve. He was a rash plunger; and he certainly had enough at stake," objected Markham.

"Ah! But between a rash plunger and a bold, levelheaded gambler like the major there is a great difference—a psychological abyss. In fact, their animating impulses are opposites. The plunger is actuated by fear and hope and desire; the cool-headed gambler is actuated by expediency and belief and judgment. The one is emotional, the other mental. The major, unlike Pfyfe, is a born gambler and infinitely self-confident. This kind of self-confidence, however, is not the same as recklessness, though superficially the two bear a close resemblance. It is based on an instinctive belief in one's own infallibility and safety. It's the reverse of what the Freudians call the inferiority complex—a form of egomania, a variety of *folie de grandeur*. The major possessed it, but it was absent from Pfyfe's composition; and as the crime indicated its possession by the perpetrator, I knew Pfyfe was innocent."

"I begin to grasp the thing in a nebulous sort of way," said Markham after a pause.

"But there were other indications, psychological and otherwise," Vance went on—"the undress attire of the body, the toupee and teeth upstairs, the inferred familiarity of the murderer with the domestic arrangements, the fact that he had been admitted by Benson himself, and his knowledge that Benson would be at home alone at that time—all pointing to the major as the guilty person. Another thing—the height of the murderer corresponded to the major's height. This indication, though, was of minor importance; for had my measurements not tallied with the major, I would have known that the bullet had been deflected, despite the opinions of all the Captain Hagedorns in the universe."

"Why were you so positive a woman couldn't have done it?"

"To begin with, it wasn't a woman's crime—that is, no woman would have done it in the way it was done. The most mentalized women are emotional when it comes to a fundamental issue like taking a life. That a woman could have coldly planned such a murder and then executed it with such businesslike efficiency—aiming a single shot at her victim's temple at a distance of five or six feet—would be contr'ry, d' ye see, to everything we know of human nature. Again, women don't stand up to argue a point before a seated antagonist. Somehow they seem to feel more secure sitting down. They talk better sitting; whereas men talk better standing. And even had a woman stood before Benson, she could not have taken out a gun and aimed it without his looking up. A man's reaching in his pocket is a natural action; but a woman has no pockets and no place to hide a gun except her handbag. And a man is always on guard when an angry woman opens a handbag in front of him—the very uncertainty of women's natures has made men suspicious of their actions when aroused. . . . But—above all—it was Benson's bald pate and bedroom slippers that made the woman hypothesis untenable."

"You remarked a moment ago," said Markham, "that the murderer went there that night prepared to take heroic measures if necessary. And yet you say he planned the murder."

"True. The two statements don't conflict, y' know. The murder was planned—without doubt. But the major was willing to give his victim a last chance to save his life. My theory is this: The major, being in a tight financial hole with state prison looming before him, and knowing that his brother had sufficient funds in the safe to save him, plotted the crime and went to the house that night prepared to commit it. First, however, he told his brother of his predicament and asked for the money; and Alvin prob'bly told him to go to the devil. The major may even have pleaded a bit in order to avoid killing him; but when the liter'ry Alvin turned to reading, he saw the futility of appealing further, and proceeded with the dire business."

Markham smoked awhile.

"Granting all you've said," he remarked at length, "I still don't see how you could know, as you asserted this morning, that the major had planned the murder so as to throw suspicion deliberately on Captain Leacock."

"Just as a sculptor, who thoroughly understands the principles of form and composition, can accurately supply any missing integral part of a statue," Vance explained, "so can the psychologist who understands the human mind supply any missing factor in a given human action. I might add, parenthetically, that all this blather about the missing arms of the Aphrodite of Melos—the Milo Venus, y' know—is the utt'rest fiddle-faddle. Any competent artist who knew the laws of aesthetic organization could restore the arms exactly as they were originally. Such restorations are merely a matter of context—the missing factor, d' ye see, simply has to conform and harmonize with what is already known."

He made one of his rare gestures of delicate emphasis.

"Now, the problem of circumventing suspicion is an important detail in every deliberated crime. And since the general conception of this particular crime was positive, conclusive, and concrete, it followed that each one of its component parts would be positive, conclusive, and concrete. Therefore, for the major merely to have arranged things so that he himself should *not* be suspected would have been too negative a conception to fit consistently with the other psychological aspects of the deed. It would have been too vague, too indirect, too indefinite. The type of literal mind which conceived this crime would logically have provided a specific and tangible object of suspicion. Cons'quently, when the material evidence began to pile up against the captain, and the major waxed vehement in defending him, I knew he had been chosen as the dupe. At first, I admit, I suspected the major of having selected Miss St. Clair as the victim; but when I learned that the presence of her gloves and handbag at Benson's was only an accident, and remembered that the major had given us Pfyfe as a source of information about the captain's threat, I realized that her projection into the role of murderer was unpremeditated."

A little later Markham rose and stretched himself.

"Well, Vance," he said, "your task is finished. Mine has just begun. And I need sleep."

Before a week had passed, Major Anthony Benson was indicted for the murder of his brother. His trial before Judge Rudolph Hansacker, as you remember, created a nationwide sensation. The Associated Press sent columns daily to its members; and for weeks the front pages of the country's newspapers were emblazoned with spectacular reports of the proceedings. How the district attorney's office won the case after a bitter struggle; how, because of the indirect character of the evidence, the verdict was for murder in the second degree; and how, after a retrial in the court of appeals, Anthony Benson finally received a sentence of from twenty years to life—all these facts are a matter of official and public record.

Markham personally did not appear as public prosecutor. Having been a lifelong friend of the defendant's, his position was an unenviable and difficult one, and no word of criticism was directed against his assignment of the case to Chief Assistant District Attorney Sullivan. Major Benson surrounded himself with an array of counsel such as is rarely seen in our criminal courts. Both Blashfield and Bauer were among the attorneys for the defense—Blashfield fulfilling the duties of the English solicitor, and Bauer acting as advocate. They fought with every legal device at their disposal, but the accumulation of evidence against their client overwhelmed them.

After Markham had been convinced of the major's guilt, he had made a thorough examination of the business affairs of the two brothers and found the situation even worse than had been indicated by Stitt's first report. The firm's securities had been systematically appropriated for private speculations; but whereas Alvin Benson had succeeded in covering himself and making a large profit, the major had been almost completely wiped out by his investments. Markham was able to show that the major's only hope of replacing the diverted securities and saving himself from criminal prosecution lay in Alvin Benson's immediate death. It was also brought out at

the trial that the major, on the very day of the murder, had made emphatic promises which could have been kept only in the event of his gaining access to his brother's safe. Furthermore, these promises had involved specific amounts in the other's possession; and, in one instance, he had put up, on a forty-eight-hour note, a security already pledged—a fact which, in itself would have exposed his hand had his brother lived.

Miss Hoffman was a helpful and intelligent witness for the prosecution. Her knowledge of conditions at the Benson and Benson offices went far toward strengthening the case against the major.

Mrs. Platz also testified to overhearing acrimonious arguments between the brothers. She stated that less than a fortnight before the murder the major, after an unsuccessful attempt to borrow \$50,000 from Alvin, had threatened him, saying, "If I ever have to choose between your skin and mine, it won't be mine that'll suffer."

Theodore Montagu, the man who, according to the story of the elevator boy at the Chatham Arms, had returned at half past two on the night of the murder, testified that as his taxicab turned in front of the apartment house the headlights flashed on a man standing in a tradesmen's entrance across the street, and that the man looked like Major Benson. This evidence would have had little effect had not Pfyfe come forward after the arrest and admitted seeing the major crossing Sixth Avenue at Forty-sixth Street when he had walked to Pietro's for his drink of Haig and Haig. He explained that he had attached no importance to it at the time, thinking the major was merely returning home from some Broadway restaurant. He himself had not been seen by the major.

This testimony, in connection with Mr. Montagu's, annihilated the major's carefully planned alibi; and though the defense contended stubbornly that both witnesses had been mistaken in their identification, the jury was deeply impressed by the evidence, especially when Assistant District Attorney Sullivan, under Vance's tutoring, painstakingly explained, with diagrams, how the major could have gone out and returned that night without being seen by the boy.

It was also shown that the jewels could not have been taken from the scene of the crime except by the murderer; and Vance and I were called as witnesses to the finding of them in the major's apartment. Vance's demonstration of the height of the murderer was shown in court, but, curiously, it carried little weight, as the issue was confused by a mass of elaborate scientific objections. Captain Hagedorn's identification of the pistol was the most difficult obstacle with which the defense had to contend.

The trial lasted three weeks, and much evidence of a scandalous nature was taken, although, at Markham's suggestion, Sullivan did his best to minimize the private affairs of those innocent persons whose lives unfortunately touched upon the episode. Colonel Ostrander, however, has never forgiven Markham for not having had him called as a witness.

During the last week of the trial Miss Muriel St. Clair appeared as prima donna in a large Broadway light opera production which ran successfully for nearly two years. She has since married her chivalrous Captain Leacock, and they appear perfectly happy.

Pfyfe is still married and as elegant as ever. He visits New York regularly, despite the absence of his "dear old Alvin"; and I have occasionally seen him and Mrs. Banning together. Somehow, I shall always like that woman. Pfyfe raised the \$10,000—how, I have no idea—and reclaimed her jewels. Their ownership, by the way, was not divulged at the trial, for which I was very glad.

On the evening of the day the verdict was brought in against the major, Vance and Markham and I were sitting in the Stuyvesant Club. We had dined together, but no word of the events of the past few weeks had passed between us. Presently, however, I saw an ironic smile creep slowly to Vance's lips.

"I say, Markham," he drawled, "what a grotesque spectacle the trial was! The real evidence, y' know, wasn't even introduced. Benson was convicted entirely on suppositions, presumptions, implications and inferences. . . . God help the innocent Daniel who inadvertently falls into a den of legal lions!"

Markham, to my surprise, nodded gravely.

"Yes," he concurred; "but if Sullivan had tried to get a conviction on your so-called psychological theories, he'd have been adjudged insane."

"Doubtless," sighed Vance. "You illuminati of the law would have little to do if you went about your business intelligently."

"Theoretically," replied Markham at length, "your theories are clear enough; but I'm afraid I've dealt too long with material facts to forsake them for psychology and art. . . . However," he added lightly, "if my legal evidence should fail me in the future, may I call on you for assistance?"

"I'm always at your service, old chap, don't y' know," Vance rejoined. "I rather fancy, though, that it's when your legal evidence is leading you irresistibly to your victim that you'll need me most, what?"

And the remark, though intended merely as a good-natured sally, proved strangely prophetic.

## Footnotes

[1] As a matter of fact, the same watercolors that Vance obtained for \$250 and \$300 were bringing three times as much four years later.

[2] I am thinking particularly of Bronzino's portraits of Pietro de' Medici and Cosimo de' Medici, in the National Gallery, and of Vasari's medallion portrait of Lorenzo de' Medici in the Vecchio Palazzo, Florence.

[3] Once when Vance was suffering from sinusitis, he had an X-ray photograph of his head made; and the accompanying chart described him as a "marked dolichocephalic" and a "disharmonious Nordic." It also contained the following data:—cephalic index 75; nose, leptorhine, with an index of 48; facial angle, 85°; vertical index, 72; upper facial index, 54; interpupillary width, 67; chin, masognathous, with an index of 103; sella turcica, abnormally large.

[4] "Culture," Vance said to me shortly after I had met him, "is polyglot; and the knowledge of many tongues is essential to an understanding of the world's intellectual and aesthetic achievements. Especially are the Greek and Latin classics vitiated by translation." I quote the remark here because his omnivorous reading in languages other than English, coupled with his amazingly retentive memory, had a tendency to affect his own speech. And while it may appear to some that his speech was at times pedantic, I have tried, throughout these chronicles to quote him literally, in the hope of presenting a portrait of the man as he was.

[5] The book was O. Henry's *Strictly Business*, and the place at which it was being held open was, curiously enough, the story entitled "A Municipal Report."

[6] Inspector Moran (as I learned later) had once been the president of a large upstate bank that had failed during the panic of 1907, and during the Gaynor Administration had been seriously considered for the post of Police Commissioner.

[7] Vance's eyes were slightly bifocal. His right eye was 1.2 astigmatic, whereas his left eye was practically normal.

[8] Even the famous Elwell case, which came several years later and bore certain points of similarity to the Benson case, created no greater sensation, despite the fact that Elwell was more widely known than Benson, and the persons involved were more prominent socially. Indeed, the Benson case was referred to several times in descriptions of the Elwell case; and one anti-administration paper regretted editorially that John F.-X. Markham was no longer district attorney of New York.

[9] Vance, who had lived many years in England, frequently said "ain't"—a contraction which is regarded there more leniently than in this country. He also pronounced *ate* as if it were spelled *et*; and I can not remember his ever using the word "stomach" or "bug," both of which are under the social ban in England.

[10] The following conversation in which Vance explains his psychological methods of criminal analysis, is, of course, set down from memory. However, a proof of this passage was sent to him with a request that he revise and alter it in whatever manner he chose; so that, as it now stands, it describes Vance's theory in practically his own words.

[11] I don't know what case Vance was referring to; but there are several instances of this device on record, and writers of detective fiction have often used it. The latest instance is to be found in G. K. Chesterton's *The Innocence of Father Brown*, in the story entitled "The Wrong Shape."

[12] It was Pearson and Goring who, about twenty years ago, made an extensive investigation and tabulation of professional criminals in England, the results of which showed (1) that criminal careers began mostly between the ages of 16 and 21; (2) that over ninety percent of criminals were mentally normal; and (3) that more criminals had criminal older brothers than criminal fathers.

[13] Sir Basil Thomson, K.C.B., former Assistant Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, London, writing in the *Saturday Evening Post* several years after this conversation, said: "Take, for example, the proverb that murder will out, which is employed whenever one out of many thousands of undiscovered murderers is caught through a chance coincidence that captures the popular imagination. It is because murder will not out that the pleasant shock of surprise when it does out calls for a proverb to enshrine the phenomenon. The poisoner who is brought to justice has almost invariably proved to have killed other victims without exciting suspicion until he has grown careless."

[14] In "Popular Fallacies About Crime" (*Saturday Evening Post*; April 21, 1923, p. 8) Sir Basil Thomson also upheld this point of view.

[15] For years the famous *Concert Champêtre* in the Louvre was officially attributed to Titian. Vance, however, took it upon himself to convince the Curator, M. Lepelletier, that it was a Giorgione, with the result that the painting is now credited to that artist.

[16] Obviously a reference to Tetrassini's performance in *La Bohème* at the Manhattan Opera House in 1908.

[17] This quotation from Ecclesiastes reminds me that Vance regularly read the Old Testament. "When I weary of the professional liter'ry man," he once said, "I find stimulation in the majestic prose of the Bible. If the moderns feel that they simply must write, they should be made to spend at least two hours a day with the Biblical historians."

[18] The book—or a part of it—has, I believe, been recently translated into English.

[19] The boy was Jack Prisco, of 621 Kelly Street.

[20] Obviously Mrs. Platz.

[21] A helixometer, I learned later, is an instrument that makes it possible to examine every portion of the inside of a gun's barrel through a microscope.



## 02. CANARY

### 1. THE "CANARY"

In the offices of the Homicide Bureau of the Detective Division of the New York Police Department, on the third floor of the police headquarters building in Centre Street, there is a large steel filing cabinet; and within it, among thousands of others of its kind, there reposes a small green index card on which is typed: "ODELL, MARGARET. 184 West 71st Street. Sept. 10. Murder: Strangled about 11 P.M. Apartment ransacked. Jewelry stolen. Body found by Amy Gibson, maid."

Here, in a few commonplace words, is the bleak, unadorned statement of one of the most astonishing crimes in the police annals of this country—a crime so contradictory, so baffling, so ingenious, so unique, that for many days the best minds of the police department and the district attorney's office were completely at a loss as to even a method of approach. Each line of investigation only tended to prove that Margaret Odell could not possibly have been murdered. And yet, huddled on the great silken davenport in her living room lay the girl's strangled body, giving the lie to so grotesque a conclusion.

The true story of this crime, as it eventually came to light after a disheartening period of utter darkness and confusion, revealed many strange and bizarre ramifications, many dark recesses of man's unexplored nature, and the uncanny subtlety of a human mind sharpened by desperate and tragic despair. And it also revealed a hidden page of passionate melodrama which, in its essence and organisms, was no less romantic and fascinating than that vivid, theatrical section of the *Comédie Humaine* which deals with the fabulous love of Baron Nucingen for Esther van Gobseck, and with the unhappy Torpille's tragic death.

Margaret Odell was a product of the bohemian demimonde of Broadway—a scintillant figure who seemed somehow to typify the gaudy and spurious romance of transient gaiety. For nearly two years before her death she had been the most conspicuous and, in a sense, popular figure of the city's night life. In our grandparents' day she might have had conferred upon her that somewhat questionable designation "the toast of the town"; but today there are too many aspirants for this classification, too many cliques and violent schisms in the Lepidoptera of our café life, to permit of any one competitor being thus singled out. But, for all the darlings of both professional and lay press agents, Margaret Odell was a character of unquestioned fame in her little world.

Her notoriety was due in part to certain legendary tales of her affairs with one or two obscure potentates in the backwash of Europe. She had spent two years abroad after her first success in *The Bretonne Maid*—a popular musical comedy in which she had been mysteriously raised from obscurity to the rank of "star"—and, one may cynically imagine, her press agent took full advantage of her absence to circulate vermilion tales of her conquests.

Her appearances went far toward sustaining her somewhat equivocal fame. There was no question that she was beautiful in a hard, slightly flamboyant way. I remember seeing her dancing one night at the Antlers Club—a famous rendezvous for postmidnight pleasure-seekers, run by the notorious Red Raegan.<sup>[1]</sup> She impressed me then as a girl of uncommon loveliness, despite the calculating, predatory cast of her features. She was of medium height, slender, graceful in a leonine way, and, I thought, a trifle aloof and even haughty in manner—a result, perhaps, of her reputed association with European royalty. She had the traditional courtesan's full, red lips, and the wide, mongoose eyes of Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel." There was in her face that strange combination of sensual promise and spiritual renunciation with which the painters of all ages have sought to endow their conceptions of the Eternal Magdalene. Hers was the type of face, voluptuous and with a hint of mystery, which rules man's emotions and, by subjugating his mind, drives him to desperate deeds.

Margaret Odell had received the sobriquet of Canary as a result of a part she had played in an elaborate ornithological ballet of the *Follies*, in which each girl had been gowned to represent a variety of bird. To her had fallen the role of canary; and her costume of white and yellow satin, together with her mass of shining golden hair and pink and white complexion, had distinguished her in the eyes of the spectators as a creature of outstanding charm. Before a fortnight had passed—so eulogistic were her press notices, and so unerringly did the audience single her out for applause—the "Bird Ballet" was changed to the "Canary Ballet," and Miss Odell was promoted to the rank of what might charitably be called *première danseuse*, at the same time having a solo waltz and a song<sup>[2]</sup> interpolated for the special display of her charms and talents.

She had quitted the *Follies* at the close of the season, and during her subsequent spectacular career in the haunts of Broadway's night life she had been popularly and familiarly called the Canary. Thus it happened that when her dead body was found, brutally strangled, in her apartment, the crime immediately became known, and was always thereafter referred to, as the Canary murder.

My own participation in the investigation of the Canary murder case—or rather my role of Boswellian spectator—constituted one of the most memorable experiences of my life. At the time of Margaret Odell's murder John F.-X. Markham was district attorney of New York, having taken office the preceding January. I need hardly remind you that during the four years of his incumbency he distinguished himself by his almost uncanny success as a criminal investigator. The praise which was constantly accorded him, however, was highly distasteful to him; for, being a man with a keen sense of honor, he instinctively shrank from accepting credit for achievements not wholly his own. The truth is that Markham played only a subsidiary part in the majority of his most famous criminal cases. The credit for their actual solution belonged to one of Markham's very close friends, who refused, at the time, to permit the facts to be made public.

This man was a young social aristocrat, whom, for purposes of anonymity, I have chosen to call Philo Vance.

Vance had many amazing gifts and capabilities. He was an art collector in a small way, a fine amateur pianist, and a profound student of aesthetics and psychology. Although an American, he had largely been educated in Europe, and still retained a slight English accent and intonation. He had a liberal independent income, and spent considerable time fulfilling the social obligations which devolved on him as a result of family connections; but he was neither an idler nor a dilettante. His manner was cynical and aloof; and those who met him only casually set him down as a snob. But knowing Vance, as I did, intimately, I was able to glimpse the real man beneath the surface indications; and I knew that his cynicism and aloofness, far from being a pose, sprang instinctively from a nature which was at once sensitive and solitary.

Vance was not yet thirty-five, and, in a cold, sculptural fashion, was impressively good-looking. His face was slender and mobile;



but there was a stern, sardonic expression to his features, which acted as a barrier between him and his fellows. He was not emotionless, but his emotions were, in the main, intellectual. He was often criticized for his asceticism, yet I have seen him exhibit rare bursts of enthusiasm over an aesthetic or psychological problem. However, he gave the impression of remaining remote from all mundane matters; and, in truth, he looked upon life like a dispassionate and impersonal spectator at a play, secretly amused and debonairly cynical at the meaningless futility of it all. Withal, he had a mind avid for knowledge, and few details of the human comedy that came within his sphere of vision escaped him.

It was as a direct result of this intellectual inquisitiveness that he became actively, though unofficially, interested in Markham's criminal investigations.

I kept a fairly complete record of the cases in which Vance participated as a kind of *amicus curiae*, little thinking that I would ever be privileged to make them public; but Markham, after being defeated, as you remember, on a hopelessly split ticket at the next election, withdrew from politics; and last year Vance went abroad to live, declaring he would never return to America. As a result, I obtained permission from both of them to publish my notes in full. Vance stipulated only that I should not reveal his name; but otherwise no restrictions were placed upon me.

I have related elsewhere<sup>[3]</sup> the peculiar circumstances which led to Vance's participation in criminal research, and how, in the face of almost insuperable contradictory evidence, he solved the mysterious shooting of Alvin Benson. The present chronicle deals with his solution of Margaret Odell's murder, which took place in the early fall of the same year, and which, you will recall, created an even greater sensation than its predecessor.<sup>[4]</sup>

A curious set of circumstances was accountable for the way in which Vance was shouldered with this new investigation. Markham for weeks had been badgered by the antiadministration newspapers for the signal failures of his office in obtaining convictions against certain underworld offenders whom the police had turned over to him for prosecution. As a result of prohibition a new and dangerous, and wholly undesirable, kind of night life had sprung up in New York. A large number of well-financed cabarets, calling themselves nightclubs, had made their appearance along Broadway and in its side streets; and already there had been an appalling number of serious crimes, both passionate and monetary, which, it was said, had had their inception in these unsavory resorts.

At last, when a case of murder accompanying a holdup and jewel robbery in one of the family hotels uptown was traced directly to plans and preparations made in one of the nightclubs, and when two detectives of the Homicide Bureau investigating the case were found dead one morning in the neighborhood of the club, with bullet wounds in their backs, Markham decided to pigeonhole the other affairs of his office and take a hand personally in the intolerable criminal conditions that had arisen.<sup>[5]</sup>

## 2. FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW

(Sunday, September 9)

On the day following his decision, Markham and Vance and I were sitting in a secluded corner of the lounge room of the Stuyvesant Club. We often came together there, for we were all members of the club, and Markham frequently used it as a kind of unofficial uptown headquarters.<sup>[6]</sup>

"It's bad enough to have half the people in this city under the impression that the district attorney's office is a kind of high-class collection agency," he remarked that night, "without being necessitated to turn detective because I'm not given sufficient evidence, or the right kind of evidence, with which to secure convictions."

Vance looked up with a slow smile and regarded him quizzically.

"The difficulty would seem to be," he returned, with an indolent drawl, "that the police, being unversed in the exquisite abracadabra of legal procedure, labor under the notion that evidence which would convince a man of ordin'ry intelligence, would also convince a court of law. A silly notion, don't y' know. Lawyers don't really want evidence; they want erudite technicalities. And the average policeman's brain is too forthright to cope with the pedantic demands of jurisprudence."

"It's not as bad as that," Markham retorted, with an attempt at good nature, although the strain of the past few weeks had tended to upset his habitual equanimity. "If there weren't rules of evidence, grave injustice would too often be done innocent persons. And even a criminal is entitled to protection in our courts."

Vance yawned mildly.

"Markham, you should have been a pedagogue. It's positively amazin' how you've mastered all the standard oratorical replies to criticism. And yet, I'm unconvinced. You remember the Wisconsin case of the kidnapped man whom the courts declared presumably dead. Even when he reappeared, hale and hearty, among his former neighbors, his status of being presumably dead was not legally altered. The visible and demonstrable fact that he was actually alive was regarded by the court as an immaterial and impertinent side issue.<sup>[7]</sup> . . . Then there's the touchin' situation—so prevalent in this fair country—of a man being insane in one state and sane in another. . . . Really, y' know, you can't expect a mere lay intelligence, unskilled in the benign processes of legal logic, to perceive such subtle nuances. Your layman, swaddled in the darkness of ordin'ry common sense, would say that a person who is a lunatic on one bank of a river would still be a lunatic if he was on the opposite bank. And he'd also hold—erroneously, no doubt—that if a man was living, he would presumably be alive."

"Why this academic dissertation?" asked Markham, this time a bit irritably.

"It seems to touch rather vitally on the source of your present predicament," Vance explained equably. "The police, not being lawyers, have apparently got you into hot water, what? . . . Why not start an agitation to send all detectives to law school?"

"You're a great help," retorted Markham.

Vance raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Why disparage my suggestion? Surely you must perceive that it has merit. A man without legal training, when he knows a thing to be true, ignores all incompetent testimony to the contr'y, and clings to the facts. A court of law listens solemnly to a mass of worthless testimony, and renders a decision not on the facts but according to a complicated set of rules. The result, d' ye see, is that a court often acquits a prisoner, realizing full well that he is guilty. Many a judge has said, in effect, to a culprit, 'I know, and the jury knows, that you committed the crime, but in view of the legally admissible evidence, I declare you innocent. Go and sin again.'"

Markham grunted. "I'd hardly endear myself to the people of this country if I answered the current strictures against me by recommending law courses for the police department."

"Permit me, then, to suggest the alternative of Shakespeare's butcher: 'Let's kill all the lawyers.'"

"Unfortunately, it's a situation, not a utopian theory, that has to be met."

"And just how," asked Vance lazily, "do you propose to reconcile the sensible conclusions of the police with what you touchingly call correctness of legal procedure?"

"To begin with," Markham informed him, "I've decided henceforth to do my own investigating of all important nightclub criminal cases. I called a conference of the heads of my departments yesterday, and from now on there's going to be some real activity radiating direct from my office. I intend to produce the kind of evidence I need for convictions."

Vance slowly took a cigarette from his case and tapped it on the arm of his chair. "Ah! So you are going to substitute the conviction of the innocent for the acquittal of the guilty?"

Markham was nettled; turning in his chair, he frowned at Vance. "I won't pretend not to understand your remark," he said acidulously. "You're back again on your favorite theme of the inadequacy of circumstantial evidence as compared with your psychological theories and aesthetic hypotheses."

"Quite so," agreed Vance carelessly. "Y' know, Markham, your sweet and charmin' faith in circumstantial evidence is positively disarming. Before it, the ordin'ry powers of ratiocination are benumbed. I tremble for the innocent victims you are about to gather into your legal net. You'll eventually make the mere attendance at any cabaret a frightful hazard."

Markham smoked awhile in silence. Despite the seeming bitterness at times in the discussions of these two men, there was at bottom no animosity in their attitude toward each other. Their friendship was of long standing, and, despite the dissimilarity of their temperaments and the marked difference in their points of view, a profound mutual respect formed the basis of their intimate relationship.

At length Markham spoke. "Why this sweeping deprecation of circumstantial evidence? I admit that at times it may be misleading; but it often forms powerful presumptive proof of guilt. Indeed, Vance, one of our greatest legal authorities has demonstrated that it is the most powerful actual evidence in existence. Direct evidence, in the very nature of crime, is almost always unavailable. If the courts

had to depend on it, the great majority of criminals would still be at large."

"I was under the impression that this precious majority had always enjoyed its untrammelled freedom."

Markham ignored the interruption. "Take this example: A dozen adults see an animal running across the snow, and testify that it was a chicken; whereas a child sees the same animal, and declares it was a duck. They thereupon examine the animal's footprints and find them to be the webfooted tracks made by a duck. Is it not conclusive, then, that the animal was a duck and not a chicken, despite the preponderance of direct evidence?"

"I'll grant you your duck," acceded Vance indifferently.

"And having gratefully accepted the gift," pursued Markham, "I propound a corollary: A dozen adults see a human figure crossing the snow, and take oath it was a woman; whereas a child asserts that the figure was a man. Now, will you not also grant that the circumstantial evidence of a man's footprints in the snow would supply incontrovertible proof that it was, in fact, a man, and not a woman?"

"Not at all, my dear Justinian," replied Vance, stretching his legs languidly in front of him; "unless, of course, you could show that a human being possesses no higher order of brain than a duck."

"What have brains to do with it?" Markham asked impatiently. "Brains don't affect one's footprints."

"Not those of a duck, certainly. But brains might very well—and, no doubt, often do—affect the footprints of a human being."

"Am I having a lesson in anthropology, Darwinian adaptability, or merely metaphysical speculation?"

"In none of those abstruse subjects," Vance assured him. "I'm merely stating a simple fact culled from observation."

"Well, according to your highly and peculiarly developed processes of reasoning, would the circumstantial evidence of those masculine footprints indicate a man or a woman?"

"Not necessarily either," Vance answered, "or, rather, a possibility of each. Such evidence, when applied to a human being—to a creature, that is, with a reasoning mind—would merely mean to me that the figure crossing the snow was either a man in his own shoes or a woman in man's shoes; or perhaps, even, a long-legged child. In short, it would convey to my purely unlegal intelligence only that the tracks were made by some descendant of the *Pithecanthropus erectus* wearing men's shoes on his nether limbs—sex and age unknown. A duck's spoor, on the other hand, I might be tempted to take at their face value."

"I'm delighted to observe," said Markham, "that at least you repudiate the possibility of a duck dressing itself up in the gardener's boots."

Vance was silent for a moment; then he said, "The trouble with you modern Solons, d' ye see, is that you attempt to reduce human nature to a formula; whereas the truth is that man, like life, is infinitely complex. He's shrewd and tricky—skilled for centuries in all the most diabolical chicaneries. He is a creature of low cunning, who, even in the normal course of his vain and idiotic struggle for existence, instinctively and deliberately tells ninety-nine lies to one truth. A duck, not having had the heaven-kissing advantages of human civilization, is a straightforward and eminently honest bird."

"How," asked Markham, "since you jettison all the ordinary means of arriving at a conclusion, would you decide the sex or species of this person who left the masculine footprints in the snow?"

Vance blew a spiral of smoke toward the ceiling.

"First, I'd repudiate all the evidence of the twelve astigmatic adults and the one bright-eyed child. Next, I'd ignore the footprints in the snow. Then, with a mind unprejudiced by dubious testimony and uncluttered with material clues, I'd determine the exact nature of the crime which this fleeing person had committed. After having analyzed its various factors, I could infallibly tell you not only whether the culprit was a man or a woman, but I could describe his habits, character, and personality. And I could do all this whether the fleeing figure left male or female or kangaroo tracks, or used stilts, or rode off on a velocipede, or levitated without leaving tracks at all."

Markham smiled broadly. "You'd be worse than the police in the matter of supplying me legal evidence, I fear."

"I, at least, wouldn't procure evidence against some unsuspecting person whose boots had been appropriated by the real culprit," retorted Vance. "And, y' know, Markham, as long as you pin your faith to footprints, you'll inevitably arrest just those persons whom the actual criminals want you to—namely, persons who have had nothing to do with the criminal conditions you're about to investigate."

He became suddenly serious.

"See here, old man; there are some shrewd intelligences at present allied with what the theologians call the powers of darkness. The surface appearances of many of these crimes that are worrying you are palpably deceptive. Personally, I don't put much stock in the theory that a malevolent gang of cutthroats have organized an American camorra and made the silly nightclubs their headquarters. The idea is too melodramatic. It smacks too much of the gaudy journalistic imagination; it's too Eugène Sue-ish. Crime isn't a mass instinct except during wartime, and then it's merely an obscene sport. Crime, d' ye see, is a personal and individual business. One doesn't make up a *partie carée* for a murder as one does for a bridge game. . . . Markham, old dear, don't let this romantic criminological idea lead you astray. And don't scrutinize the figurative footprints in the snow too closely. They'll confuse you most horribly—you're far too trustin' and literal for this wicked world. I warn you that no clever criminal is going to leave his own footprints for your tape measure and calipers."

He sighed deeply and gave Markham a look of bantering commiseration. "And have you paused to consider that your first case may even be devoid of footprints? . . . Alas! What, then, will you do?"

"I could overcome that difficulty by taking you along with me," suggested Markham, with a touch of irony. "How would you like to accompany me on the next important case that breaks?"

"I am ravished by the idea," said Vance.

Two days later the front pages of our metropolitan press carried glaring headlines telling of the murder of Margaret Odell.

### 3. THE MURDER

(Tuesday, September 11; 8:30 A.M.)

It was barely half past eight on that momentous morning of September the 11th when Markham brought word to us of the event.

I was living temporarily with Vance at his home in East 38th Street—a large remodeled apartment occupying the two top floors of a beautiful mansion. For several years I had been Vance's personal legal representative and adviser, having resigned from my father's law firm of Van Dine, Davis, and Van Dine to devote myself to his needs and interests. His affairs were by no means voluminous, but his personal finances, together with his numerous purchases of paintings and *objets d'art*, occupied my full time without burdening me. This monetary and legal stewardship was eminently congenial to my tastes; and my friendship with Vance, which had dated from our undergraduate days at Harvard, supplied the social and human element in an arrangement which otherwise might easily have degenerated into one of mere drab routine.

On this particular morning I had risen early and was working in the library when Currie, Vance's valet and majordomo, announced Markham's presence in the living room. I was considerably astonished at this early morning visit, for Markham well knew that Vance, who rarely rose before noon, resented any intrusion upon his matutinal slumbers. And in that moment I received the curious impression that something unusual and portentous was toward.

I found Markham pacing restlessly up and down, his hat and gloves thrown carelessly on the center table. As I entered he halted and looked at me with harassed eyes. He was a moderately tall man, clean-shaven, gray-haired, and firmly set up. His appearance was distinguished, and his manner courteous and kindly. But beneath his gracious exterior there was an aggressive sternness, an indomitable, grim strength, that gave one the sense of dogged efficiency and untiring capability.

"Good morning, Van," he greeted me, with impatient perfunctoriness. "There's been another half-world murder—the worst and ugliest thus far. . . ." He hesitated and regarded me searchingly. "You recall my chat with Vance at the club the other night? There was something damned prophetic in his remarks. And you remember I half promised to take him along on the next important case. Well, the case has broken—with a vengeance. Margaret Odell, whom they called the Canary, has been strangled in her apartment; and from what I just got over the phone, it looks like another nightclub affair. I'm headed for the Odell apartment now. . . . What about rousing out the sybarite?"

"By all means," I agreed, with an alacrity which, I fear, was in large measure prompted by purely selfish motives. The Canary! If one had sought the city over for a victim whose murder would stir up excitement, there could have been but few selections better calculated to produce this result.

Hastening to the door, I summoned Currie and told him to call Vance at once.

"I'm afraid, sir—" began Currie, politely hesitant.

"Calm your fears," cut in Markham. "I'll take all responsibility for waking him at this indecent hour."

Currie sensed an emergency and departed.

A minute or two later Vance, in an elaborately embroidered silk kimono and sandals, appeared at the living room door.

"My word!" he greeted us, in mild astonishment, glancing at the clock. "Haven't you chaps gone to bed yet?"

He strolled to the mantel and selected a gold-tipped Régie cigarette from a small Florentine humidor.

Markham's eyes narrowed; he was in no mood for levity.

"The Canary has been murdered," I blurted out.

Vance held his wax vesta poised and gave me a look of indolent inquisitiveness. "Whose canary?"

"Margaret Odell was found strangled this morning," amended Markham brusquely. "Even *you*, wrapped in your scented cotton-wool, have heard of her. And you can realize the significance of the crime. I'm personally going to look for those footprints in the snow; and if you want to come along, as you intimated the other night, you'll have to get a move on."

Vance crushed out his cigarette.

"Margaret Odell, eh?—Broadway's blond Aspasia—or was it Phryne who had the *coiffure d'or*? . . . Most distressin'!" Despite his offhand manner, I could see he was deeply interested. "The base enemies of law and order are determined to chivvy you most horribly, aren't they, old dear? Deuced inconsiderate of 'em! . . . Excuse me while I seek habiliments suitable to the occasion."

He disappeared into his bedroom, while Markham took out a large cigar and resolutely prepared it for smoking, and I returned to the library to put away the papers on which I had been working.

In less than ten minutes Vance reappeared, dressed for the street.

"Bien, mon vieux," he announced gaily, as Currie handed him his hat and gloves and a malacca cane. "*Allons-y!*"

We rode uptown along Madison Avenue, turned into Central Park, and came out by the West 72d Street entrance. Margaret Odell's apartment was at 184 West 71st Street, near Broadway; and as we drew up to the curb, it was necessary for the patrolman on duty to make a passage for us through the crowd that had already gathered as a result of the arrival of the police.

Feathergill, an assistant district attorney, was waiting in the main hall for his chief's arrival.

"It's too bad, sir," he lamented. "A rotten show all round. And just at this time! . . ." He shrugged his shoulders discouragingly.

"It may collapse quickly," said Markham, shaking the other's hand. "How are things going? Sergeant Heath phoned me right after you called, and said that, at first glance, the case looked a bit stubborn."

"Stubborn?" repeated Feathergill lugubriously. "It's downright impervious. Heath is spinning round like a turbine. He was called off the Boyle case, by the way, to devote his talents to this new shocker. Inspector Moran arrived ten minutes ago and gave him the official imprimatur."

"Well, Heath's a good man," declared Markham. "We'll work it out. . . . Which is the apartment?"

Feathergill led the way to a door at the rear of the main hall. "Here you are, sir," he announced. "I'll be running along now. I need

sleep. Good luck!" And he was gone.

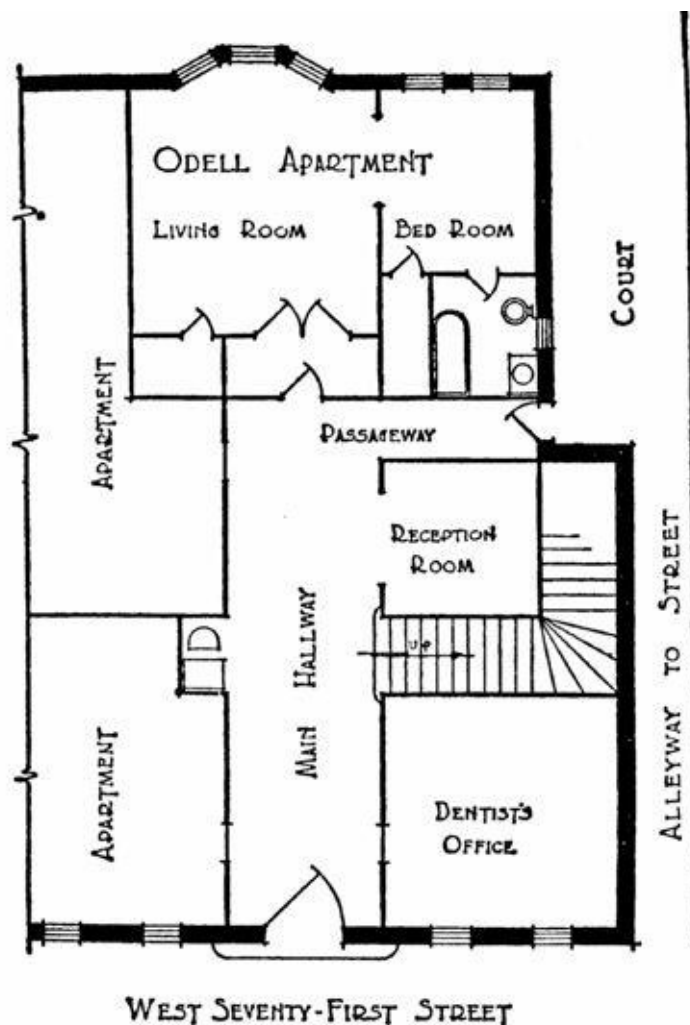
It will be necessary to give a brief description of the house and its interior arrangement, for the somewhat peculiar structure of the building played a vital part in the seemingly insoluble problem posed by the murder.

The house, which was a four-story stone structure originally built as a residence, had been remodeled, both inside and outside, to meet the requirements of an exclusive individual apartment dwelling. There were, I believe, three or four separate suites on each floor; but the quarters upstairs need not concern us. The main floor was the scene of the crime, and here there were three apartments and a dentist's office.

The main entrance to the building was directly on the street, and extending straight back from the front door was a wide hallway. Directly at the rear of this hallway, and facing the entrance, was the door to the Odell apartment, which bore the numeral "3." About halfway down the front hall, on the right-hand side, was the stairway leading to the floors above; and directly beyond the stairway, also on the right, was a small reception room with a wide archway instead of a door. Directly opposite to the stairway, in a small recess, stood the telephone switchboard. There was no elevator in the house.

Another important feature of this ground-floor plan was a small passageway at the rear of the main hall and at right angles to it, which led past the front walls of the Odell apartment to a door opening on a court at the west side of the building. This court was connected with the street by an alley four feet wide.

In the accompanying diagram this arrangement of the ground floor can be easily visualized, and I suggest that the reader fix it in his mind; for I doubt if ever before so simple and obvious an architectural design played such an important part in a criminal mystery. By its very simplicity and almost conventional familiarity—indeed, by its total lack of any puzzling complications—it proved so baffling to the investigators that the case threatened, for many days, to remain forever insoluble.



As Markham entered the Odell apartment that morning Sergeant Ernest Heath came forward at once and extended his hand. A look of relief passed over his broad, pugnacious features and it was obvious that the animosity and rivalry which always exist between the detective division and the district attorney's office during the investigation of any criminal case had no place in his attitude on this

occasion.

"I'm glad you've come, sir," he said, and meant it.

He then turned to Vance with a cordial smile, and held out his hand.[8]

"So the amachoor sleuth is with us again!" His tone held a friendly banter.

"Oh, quite," murmured Vance. "How's your induction coil working this beautiful September morning, Sergeant?"

"I'd hate to tell you!" Then Heath's face grew suddenly grave, and he turned to Markham. "It's a raw deal, sir. Why in hell couldn't they have picked someone besides the Canary for their dirty work? There's plenty of Janes on Broadway who coulda faded from the picture without causing a second alarm; but they gotta go and bump off the Queen of Sheba!"

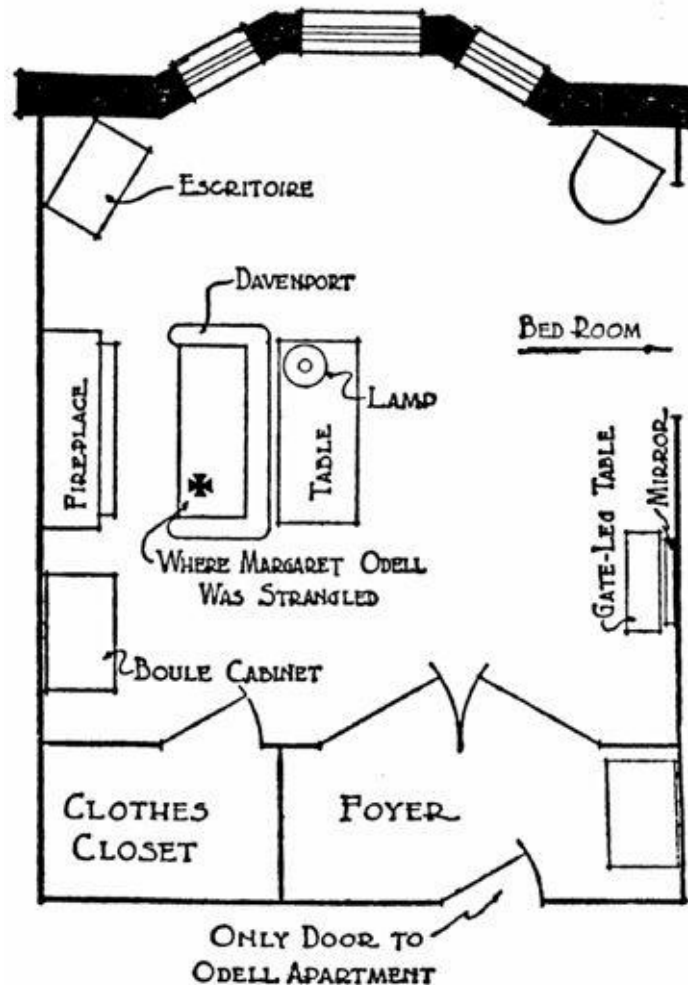
As he spoke, William M. Moran, the commanding officer of the detective bureau, came into the little foyer and performed the usual handshaking ceremony. Though he had met Vance and me but once before, and then casually, he remembered us both and addressed us courteously by name.

"Your arrival," he said to Markham, in a well-bred, modulated voice, "is very welcome. Sergeant Heath will give you what preliminary information you want. I'm still pretty much in the dark myself—only just arrived."

"A lot of information *I've* got to give," grumbled Heath, as he led the way into the living room.

Margaret Odell's apartment was a suite of two fairly large rooms connected by a wide archway draped with heavy damask portieres. The entrance door from the main hall of the building led into a small rectangular foyer about eight feet long and four feet deep, with double Venetian-glass doors opening into the main room beyond. There was no other entrance to the apartment, and the bedroom could be reached only through the archway from the living room.

There was a large davenport, covered with brocaded silk, in front of the fireplace in the left-hand wall of the living room, with a long narrow library table of inlaid rosewood extending along its back. On the opposite wall, between the foyer and the archway into the bedroom, hung a triplicate Marie Antoinette mirror, beneath which stood a mahogany gate-legged table. On the far side of the archway, near the large oriel window, was a baby grand Steinway piano with a beautifully designed and decorated case of Louis-Seize ornamentation. In the corner to the right of the fireplace was a spindle-legged *escritoire* and a square hand-painted wastepaper basket of vellum. To the left of the fireplace stood one of the loveliest *Boule* cabinets I have ever seen. Several excellent reproductions of Boucher, Fragonard, and Watteau hung about the walls. The bedroom contained a chest of drawers, a dressing table, and several gold-leaf chairs. The whole apartment seemed eminently in keeping with the Canary's fragile and evanescent personality.



As we stepped from the little foyer into the living room and stood for a moment looking about, a scene bordering on wreckage met our eyes. The rooms had apparently been ransacked by someone in a frenzy of haste, and the disorder of the place was appalling.

"They didn't exactly do the job in dainty fashion," remarked Inspector Moran.

"I suppose we oughta be grateful they didn't blow the joint up with dynamite," returned Heath acridly.

But it was not the general disorder that most attracted us. Our gaze was almost immediately drawn and held by the body of the dead girl, which rested in an unnatural, semirecumbent attitude in the corner of the davenport nearest to where we stood. Her head was turned backward, as if by force, over the silken tufted upholstery; and her hair had come unfastened and lay beneath her head and over her bare shoulder like a frozen cataract of liquid gold. Her face, in violent death, was distorted and unlovely. Her skin was discolored; her eyes were staring; her mouth was open, and her lips were drawn back. Her neck, on either side of the thyroid cartilage, showed ugly dark bruises. She was dressed in a flimsy evening gown of black Chantilly lace over cream-colored chiffon, and across the arm of the davenport had been thrown an evening cape of cloth-of-gold trimmed with ermine.

There were evidences of her ineffectual struggle with the person who had strangled her. Besides the disheveled condition of her hair, one of the shoulder straps of her gown had been severed, and there was a long rent in the fine lace across her breast. A small corsage of artificial orchids had been torn from her bodice, and lay crumpled in her lap. One satin slipper had fallen off, and her right knee was twisted inward on the seat of the davenport, as if she had sought to lift herself out of the suffocating clutches of her antagonist. Her fingers were still flexed, no doubt as they had been at the moment of her capitulation to death, when she had relinquished her grip upon the murderer's wrists.

The spell of horror cast over us by the sight of the tortured body was broken by the matter-of-fact tones of Heath.

"You see, Mr. Markham, she was evidently sitting in the corner of this settee when she was grabbed suddenly from behind."

Markham nodded. "It must have taken a pretty strong man to strangle her so easily."

"I'll say!" agreed Heath. He bent over and pointed to the girl's fingers, on which showed several abrasions. "They stripped her rings off, too; and they didn't go about it gentle, either." Then he indicated a segment of fine platinum chain, set with tiny pearls, which hung over one of her shoulders. "And they grabbed whatever it was hanging around her neck, and broke the chain doing it. They weren't overlooking anything, or losing any time. . . . A swell, gentlemanly job. Nice and refined."

"Where's the medical examiner?" asked Markham.

"He's coming," Heath told him. "You can't get Doc Doremus to go anywheres without his breakfast."

"He may find something else—something that doesn't show."

"There's plenty showing for me," declared Heath. "Look at this apartment. It wouldn't be much worse if a Kansas cyclone had struck it."

We turned from the depressing spectacle of the dead girl and moved toward the center of the room.

"Be careful not to touch anything, Mr. Markham," warned Heath. "I've sent for the fingerprint experts—they'll be here any minute now."

Vance looked up in mock astonishment.

"Fingerprints? You don't say—really! How delightful!—Imagine a johnnie in this enlightened day leaving his fingerprints for you to find."

"All crooks aren't clever, Mr. Vance," declared Heath combatively.

"Oh, dear, no! They'd never be apprehended if they were. But, after all, Sergeant, even an authentic fingerprint merely means that the person who made it was dallying around at some time or other. It doesn't indicate guilt."

"Maybe so," conceded Heath doggedly. "But I'm here to tell you that if I get any good honest-to-God fingerprints outa this devastated area, it's not going so easy with the bird that made 'em."

Vance appeared to be shocked. "You positively terrify me, Sergeant. Henceforth I shall adopt mittens as a permanent addition to my attire. I'm always handling the furniture and the teacups and the various knickknacks in the houses where I call, don't y' know."

Markham interposed himself at this point and suggested they make a tour of inspection while waiting for the medical examiner.

"They didn't add anything much to the usual methods," Heath pointed out. "Killed the girl, and then ripped things wide open."

The two rooms had apparently been thoroughly ransacked. Clothes and various articles were strewn about the floor. The doors of both clothes closets (there was one in each room) were open, and to judge from the chaos in the bedroom closet, it had been hurriedly searched; although the closet off the living room, which was given over to the storage of infrequently used items, appeared to have been ignored. The drawers of the dressing table and chest had been partly emptied on to the floor, and the bedclothes had been snatched away and the mattress turned back. Two chairs and a small occasional table were upset; several vases were broken, as if they had been searched and then thrown down in the wrath of disappointment; and the Marie Antoinette mirror had been broken. The *escritoire* was open, and its pigeonholes had been emptied in a jumbled pile upon the blotter. The doors of the *Boule* cabinet swung wide, and inside there was the same confusion of contents that marked the interior of the *escritoire*. The bronze-and-porcelain lamp on the end of the library table was lying on its side, its satin shade torn where it had struck the sharp corner of a silver *bonbonnière*.

Two objects in the general disarray particularly attracted my attention—a black metal document box of the kind purchasable at any stationery store, and a large jewel case of sheet steel with a circular inset lock. The latter of these objects was destined to play a curious and sinister part in the investigation to follow.

The document box, which was now empty, had been placed on the library table, next to the overturned lamp. Its lid was thrown back, and the key was still in the lock. In all the litter and disorganization of the room, this box seemed to be the one outstanding indication of calm and orderly activity on the part of the wrecker.

The jewel case, on the other hand, had been violently wrenched open. It sat on the dressing table in the bedroom, dented and twisted out of shape by the terrific leverage that had been necessary to force it, and beside it lay a brass-handled, cast iron poker which had evidently been brought from the living room and used as a makeshift chisel with which to prize open the lock.

Vance had glanced but casually at the different objects in the rooms as we made our rounds, but when he came to the dressing table, he paused abruptly. Taking out his monocle, he adjusted it carefully, and leaned over the broken jewel case.

"Most extr'ordin'ry!" he murmured, tapping the edge of the lid with his gold pencil. "What do you make of that, Sergeant?"

Heath had been eyeing Vance with narrowed lids as the latter bent over the dressing table.

"What's in your mind, Mr. Vance?" he, in turn, asked.

"Oh, more than you could ever guess," Vance answered lightly. "But just at the moment I was toying with the idea that this steel case was never torn open by that wholly inadequate iron poker, what?"

Heath nodded his head approvingly. "So you, too, noticed that, did you? . . . And you're dead right. That poker might've twisted the box a little, but it never snapped that lock."

He turned to Inspector Moran.

"That's the puzzler I've sent for 'Prof' Brenner to clean up—if he can. The jimmying of that jewel case looks to me like a high-class professional job. No Sunday school superintendent did it."

Vance continued for a while to study the box, but at length he turned away with a perplexed frown.

"I say!" he commented. "Something devilish queer took place here last night."

"Oh, not so queer," Heath amended. "It was a thorough job, all right, but there's nothing mysterious about it."

Vance polished his monocle and put it away.

"If you go to work on that basis, Sergeant," he returned carelessly, "I greatly fear you'll run aground on a reef. And may kind Heaven bring you safe to shore!"



#### 4. THE PRINT OF A HAND

(Tuesday, September 11, 9:30 A.M.)

A few minutes after we had returned to the living room Doctor Doremus, the chief medical examiner, arrived, jaunty and energetic. Immediately in his train came three other men, one of whom carried a bulky camera and a folded tripod. These were Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy, fingerprint experts, and Peter Quackenbush, the official photographer.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Doctor Doremus. "Quite a gathering of the clans. More trouble, eh? . . . I wish your friends, Inspector, would choose a more respectable hour for their little differences. This early rising upsets my liver."

He shook hands with everybody in a brisk, businesslike manner.

"Where's the body?" he demanded breezily, looking about the room. He caught sight of the girl on the davenport. "Ah! A lady."

Stepping quickly forward, he made a rapid examination of the dead girl, scrutinizing her neck and fingers, moving her arms and head to determine the condition of *rigor mortis*, and finally unflexing her stiffened limbs and laying her out straight on the long cushions, preparatory to a more detailed necropsy.

The rest of us moved toward the bedroom, and Heath motioned to the fingerprint men to follow.

"Go over everything," he told them. "But take a special look at this jewel case and the handle of this poker, and give that document box in the other room a close up—and—down."

"Right," assented Captain Dubois. "We'll begin in here while the doc's busy in the other room." And he and Bellamy set to work.

Our interest naturally centered on the captain's labors. For fully five minutes we watched him inspecting the twisted steel sides of the jewel case and the smooth, polished handle of the poker. He held the objects gingerly by their edges, and, placing a jeweler's glass in his eye, flashed his pocket light on every square inch of them. At length he put them down, scowling.

"No fingerprints here," he announced. "Wiped clean."

"I mighta known it," grumbled Heath. "It was a professional job, all right." He turned to the other expert. "Found anything, Bellamy?"

"Nothing to help," was the grumpy reply. "A few old smears with dust over 'em."

"Looks like a washout," Heath commented irritably; "though I'm hoping for something in the other room."

At this moment Doctor Doremus came into the bedroom and, taking a sheet from the bed, returned to the davenport and covered the body of the murdered girl. Then he snapped shut his case and, putting on his hat at a rakish angle, stepped forward with the air of a man in great haste to be on his way.

"Simple case of strangulation from behind," he said, his words running together. "Digital bruises about the front of the throat; thumb bruises in the suboccipital region. Attack must have been unexpected. A quick, competent job though deceased evidently battled a little."

"How do you suppose her dress became torn, Doctor?" asked Vance.

"Oh, that? Can't tell. She may have done it herself—instinctive motions of clutching for air."

"Not likely though, what?"

"Why not? The dress was torn and the bouquet was ripped off, and the fellow who was choking her had both hands on her throat. Who else could've done it?"

Vance shrugged his shoulders and began lighting a cigarette.

Heath, annoyed by his apparently inconsequential interruption, put the next question.

"Don't those marks on the fingers mean that her rings were stripped off?"

"Possibly. They're fresh abrasions. Also, there's a couple of lacerations on the left wrist and slight contusions on the thenar eminence, indicating that a bracelet may have been forcibly pulled over her hand."

"That fits O.K.," pronounced Heath, with satisfaction. "And it looks like they snatched a pendant of some kind off her neck."

"Probably," indifferently agreed Doctor Doremus. "The piece of chain had cut into her flesh a little behind the right shoulder."

"And the time?"

"Nine or ten hours ago. Say, about eleven thirty—maybe a little before. Not after midnight, anyway." He had been teetering restlessly on his toes. "Anything else?"

Heath pondered.

"I guess that's all, doc," he decided. "I'll get the body to the mortuary right away. Let's have the postmortem as soon as you can."

"You'll get a report in the morning." And despite his apparent eagerness to be off, Doctor Doremus stepped into the bedroom and shook hands with Heath and Markham and Inspector Moran before he hurried out.

Heath followed him to the door, and I heard him direct the officer outside to telephone the Department of Public Welfare to send an ambulance at once for the girl's body.

"I positively adore that official archiater of yours," Vance said to Markham. "Such detachment! Here are you stewing most distressingly over the passing of one damsel fair and frail, and that blithe *medicus* is worrying only over a sluggish liver brought on by early rising."

"What has he to be upset over?" complained Markham. "The newspapers are not riding him with spurs. . . . And by the way, what was the point of your questions about the torn dress?"

Vance lazily inspected the tip of his cigarette. "Consider," he said. "The lady was evidently taken by surprise; for, had there been a struggle beforehand, she would not have been strangled from behind while sitting down. Therefore, her gown and corsage were undoubtedly intact at the time she was seized. But, despite the conclusion of your dashing Paracelsus, the damage to her toilet was not of a nature that could have been self-inflicted in her struggle for air. If she had felt the constriction of the gown across her breast, she

would have snatched the bodice itself by putting her fingers inside the band. But, if you noticed, her bodice was intact; the only thing that had been torn was the deep lace flounce on the outside; and it had been torn, or rather ripped, by a strong lateral pull; whereas, in the circumstances, any wrench on her part would have been downward or outward."

Inspector Moran was listening intently, but Heath seemed restless and impatient; apparently he regarded the torn gown as irrelevant to the simple main issue.

"Moreover," Vance went on, "there is the corsage. If she herself had torn it off while being strangled, it would doubtless have fallen to the floor; for, remember, she offered considerable resistance. Her body was twisted sidewise; her knee was drawn up, and one slipper had been kicked off. Now, no bunch of silken posies is going to remain in a lady's lap during such a commotion. Even when ladies sit still, their gloves and handbags and handkerchiefs and programs and serviettes are forever sliding off of their laps onto the floor, don't y' know."

"But if your argument's correct," protested Markham, "then, the tearing of the lace and the snatching off of the corsage could have been done only after she was dead. And I can't see any object in such senseless vandalism."

"Neither can I," sighed Vance. "It's all devilish queer."

Heath looked up at him sharply. "That's the second time you've said that. But there's nothing what you'd call queer about this mess. It is a straightaway case." He spoke with an overtone of insistence, like a man arguing against his own insecurity of opinion. "The dress might've been torn almost anytime," he went on stubbornly. "And the flower might've got caught in the lace of her skirt so it couldn't roll off."

"And how would you explain the jewel case, Sergeant?" asked Vance.

"Well, the fellow might've tried the poker and then, finding it wouldn't work, used his jimmy."

"If he had the efficient jimmy," countered Vance, "why did he go to the trouble of bringing the silly poker from the living room?"

The sergeant shook his head perplexedly.

"You never can tell why some of these crooks act the way they do."

"Tut, tut!" Vance chided him. "There should be no such word as *never* in the bright lexicon of detecting."

Heath regarded him sharply. "Was there anything else that struck you as queer?" His subtle doubts were welling up again.

"Well, there's the lamp on the table in the other room."

We were standing near the archway between the two rooms, and Heath turned quickly and looked blankly at the fallen lamp.

"I don't see anything queer about that."

"It has been upset—eh, what?" suggested Vance.

"What if it has?" Heath was frankly puzzled. "Damn near everything in this apartment has been knocked crooked."

"Ah! But there's a reason for most of the other things having been disturbed—like the drawers and pigeonholes and closets and vases. They all indicate a search; they're consistent with a raid for loot. But that lamp, now, d' ye see, doesn't fit into the picture. It's a false note. It was standing on the opposite end of the table to where the murder was committed, at least five feet away; and it couldn't possibly have been knocked over in the struggle. . . . No, it won't do. It's got no business being upset, any more than that pretty mirror over the gate-legged table has any business being broken. That's why it's queer."

"What about those chairs and the little table?" asked Heath, pointing to two small gilded chairs which had been overturned, and a fragile tip-table that lay on its side near the piano.

"Oh, they fit into the ensemble," returned Vance. "They're all light pieces of furniture which could easily have been knocked over, or thrown aside, by the hasty gentleman who rifled these rooms."

"The lamp might've been knocked over in the same way," argued Heath. Vance shook his head. "Not tenable, Sergeant. It has a solid bronze base and isn't at all top-heavy; and, being set well back on the table, it wasn't in anyone's way. . . . That lamp was upset deliberately."

The sergeant was silent for a while. Experience had taught him not to underestimate Vance's observations; and, I must confess, as I looked at the lamp lying on its side on the end of the library table, well removed from any of the other disordered objects in the room, Vance's argument seemed to possess considerable force. I tried hard to fit it into a hasty reconstruction of the crime but was utterly unable to do so.

"Anything else that don't seem to fit into the picture?" Heath at length asked.

Vance pointed with his cigarette toward the clothes closet in the living room. This closet was alongside of the foyer, in the corner near the Boule cabinet, directly opposite to the end of the davenport.

"You might let your mind dally a moment with the condition of that clothes press," suggested Vance carelessly. "You will note that, though the door's ajar, the contents have not been touched. And it's about the only area in the apartment that hasn't been disturbed."

Heath walked over and looked into the closet.

"Well, anyway, I'll admit that's queer," he finally conceded.

Vance had followed him indolently and stood gazing over his shoulder.

"And my word!" he exclaimed suddenly. "The key's on the inside of the lock. Fancy that, now! One can't lock a closet door with the key on the inside—can one, Sergeant?"

"The key may not mean anything," Heath observed hopefully. "Maybe the door was never locked. Anyhow, we'll find out about that pretty soon. I'm holding the maid outside, and I'm going to have her on the carpet as soon as the captain finishes his job here."

He turned to Dubois, who, having completed his search for fingerprints in the bedroom, was now inspecting the piano.

"Any luck yet?"

The captain shook his head.

"Gloves," he answered succinctly.

"Same here," supplemented Bellamy gruffly, on his knees before the escritoire.

Vance, with a sardonic smile, turned and walked to the window, where he stood looking out and smoking placidly, as if his entire interest in the case had evaporated.

At this moment the door from the main hall opened, and a short, thin little man, with gray hair and a scraggly gray beard, stepped inside and stood blinking against the vivid sunlight.

"Good morning, Professor," Heath greeted the newcomer. "Glad to see you. I've got something nifty, right in your line."

Deputy Inspector Conrad Brenner was one of that small army of obscure, but highly capable, experts who are connected with the New York Police Department, and who are constantly being consulted on abstruse technical problems, but whose names and achievements rarely get into the public prints. His specialty was locks and burglars' tools; and I doubt if, even among those exhaustively painstaking criminologists of the University of Lausanne, there was a more accurate reader of the evidential signs left by the implements of housebreakers. In appearance and bearing he was like a withered little college professor.<sup>[9]</sup> His black, unpressed suit was old-fashioned in cut; and he wore a very high stiff collar, like a *fin-de-siècle* clergyman, with a narrow black string tie. His gold-rimmed spectacles were so thick-lensed that the pupils of his eyes gave the impression of acute belladonna poisoning.

When Heath had spoken to him, he merely stood staring with a sort of detached expectancy; he seemed utterly unaware that there was anyone else in the room. The sergeant, evidently familiar with the little man's idiosyncrasies of manner, did not wait for a response, but started at once for the bedroom.

"This way, please, Professor," he directed cajolingly, going to the dressing table and picking up the jewel case. "Take a squint at this and tell me what you see."

Inspector Brenner followed Heath, without looking to right or left, and, taking the jewel case, went silently to the window and began to examine it. Vance, whose interest seemed suddenly to be reawakened, came forward and stood watching him.

For fully five minutes the little expert inspected the case, holding it within a few inches of his myopic eyes. Then he lifted his glance to Heath and winked several times rapidly.

"Two instruments were used in opening this case." His voice was small and high-pitched, but there was in it an undeniable quality of authority. "One bent the lid and made several fractures on the baked enamel. The other was, I should say, a steel chisel of some kind, and was used to break the lock. The first instrument, which was blunt, was employed amateurishly, at the wrong angle of leverage; and the effort resulted only in twisting the overhang of the lid. But the steel chisel was inserted with a knowledge of the correct point of oscillation, where a minimum of leverage would produce the counteracting stress necessary to displace the lockbolts."

"A professional job?" suggested Heath.

"Highly so," answered the inspector, again blinking. "That is to say, the forcing of the lock was professional. And I would even go so far as to advance the opinion that the instrument used was one especially constructed for such illegal purposes."

"Could this have done the job?" Heath held out the poker.

The other looked at it closely and turned it over several times. "It might have been the instrument that bent the cover, but it was not the one used for prying open the lock. This poker is cast iron and would have snapped under any great pressure; whereas this box is of cold rolled eighteen-gauge steel plate, with an inset cylinder pin-tumbler lock taking a paracentric key. The leverage force necessary to distort the flange sufficiently to lift the lid could have been made only by a steel chisel."

"Well, that's that." Heath seemed well satisfied with Inspector Brenner's conclusion. "I'll send the box down to you, Professor, and you can let me know what else you find out."

"I'll take it along, if you have no objection." And the little man tucked it under his arm and shuffled out without another word.

Heath grinned at Markham. "Queer bird. He ain't happy unless he's measuring jimmy marks on doors and windows and things. He couldn't wait till I sent him the box. He'll hold it lovingly on his lap all the way down in the subway, like a mother with a baby."

Vance was still standing near the dressing table, gazing perplexedly into space. "Markham," he said, "the condition of that jewel case is positively astounding. It's unreasonable, illogical—insane. It complicates the situation most damnably. That steel box simply couldn't have been chiseled open by a professional burglar . . . and yet, don't y' know, it actually was."

Before Markham could reply, a satisfied grunt from Captain Dubois attracted our attention. "I've got something for you, Sergeant," he announced.

We moved expectantly into the living room. Dubois was bending over the end of the library table almost directly behind the place where Margaret Odell's body had been found. He took out an insufflator, which was like a very small hand bellows, and blew a fine light-yellow powder evenly over about a square foot of the polished rosewood surface of the table top. Then he gently blew away the surplus powder, and there appeared the impression of a human hand distinctly registered in saffron. The bulb of the thumb and each fleshy hummock between the joints of the fingers and around the palm stood out like tiny circular islands. All the papillary ridges were clearly discernible. The photographer then hooked his camera to a peculiar adjustable tripod and, carefully focusing his lens, took two flashlight pictures of the hand mark.

"This ought to do." Dubois was pleased with his find. "It's the right hand—a clear print—and the guy who made it was standing right behind the dame. . . . And it's the newest print in the place."

"What about this box?" Heath pointed to the black document box on the table near the overturned lamp.

"Not a mark—wiped clean."

Dubois began putting away his paraphernalia.

"I say, Captain Dubois," interposed Vance, "did you take a good look at the inside doorknob of that clothes press?"

The man swung about abruptly and gave Vance a glowering look. "People ain't in the habit of handling the inside knobs of closet doors. They open and shut closets from the outside."

Vance raised his eyebrows in simulated astonishment.

"Do they, now, really?—Fancy that! . . . Still, don't y' know, if one were inside the closet, one couldn't reach the outside knob."

"The people I know don't shut themselves in clothes closets." Dubois' tone was ponderously sarcastic.

"You positively amaze me!" declared Vance. "All the people I know are addicted to the habit—a sort of daily pastime, don't y' know."

Markham, always diplomatic, intervened. "What idea have you about that closet, Vance?"

"Alas! I wish I had one," was the dolorous answer. "It's because I can't, for the life of me, make sense of its neat and orderly

appearance that I'm so interested in it. Really, y' know, it should have been artistically looted."

Heath was not entirely free from the same vague misgivings that were disturbing Vance, for he turned to Dubois and said, "You might go over the knob, Captain. As this gentleman says, there's something funny about the condition of that closet."

Dubois, silent and surly, went to the closet door and sprayed his yellow powder over the inside knob. When he had blown the loose particles away, he bent over it with his magnifying glass. At length he straightened up and gave Vance a look of ill-natured appraisal.

"There's fresh prints on it, all right," he grudgingly admitted; "and, unless I'm mistaken, they were made by the same hand as those on the table. Both thumb marks are ulnar loops, and the index fingers are both whorl patterns. . . . Here, Pete," he ordered the photographer, "make some shots of that knob."

When this had been done, Dubois, Bellamy, and the photographer left us. A few minutes later, after an interchange of pleasantries, Inspector Moran also departed. At the door he passed two men in the white uniforms of interns, who had come to take away the girl's body.

## 5. THE BOLTED DOOR

(Tuesday, September 11; 10:30 A.M.)

Markham and Heath and Vance and I were now alone in the apartment. Dark, low-hanging clouds had drifted across the sun, and the gray spectral light intensified the tragic atmosphere of the rooms. Markham had lighted a cigar, and stood leaning against the piano, looking about him with a disconsolate but determined air. Vance had moved over to one of the pictures on the side wall of the living room—Boucher's "La Bergère Endormie" I think it was—and stood looking at it with cynical contempt.

"Dimpled nudities, gamboling Cupids and woolly clouds for royal cocottes," he commented. His distaste for all the painting of the French decadence under Louis XV was profound. "One wonders what pictures courtesans hung in their boudoirs before the invention of these amorous eclogues, with their blue verdure and beribboned sheep."

"I'm more interested at present in what took place in this particular boudoir last night," retorted Markham impatiently.

"There's not much doubt about that, sir," said Heath encouragingly. "And I've an idea that when Dubois checks up those fingerprints with our files, we'll about know who did it."

Vance turned toward him with a rueful smile. "You're so trusting, Sergeant. I, in turn, have an idea that, long before this touchin' case is clarified, you'll wish the irascible captain with the insect powder had never found those fingerprints." He made a playful gesture of emphasis. "Permit me to whisper into your ear that the person who left his sign manuals on yonder rosewood table and cutglass doorknob had nothing whatever to do with the precipitate demise of the fair Mademoiselle Odell."

"What is it you suspect?" demanded Markham sharply.

"Not a thing, old dear," blandly declared Vance. "I'm wandering about in a mental murk as empty of signposts as interplanetary space. The jaws of darkness do devour me up; I'm in the dead vast and middle of the night. My mental darkness is Egyptian, Stygian, Cimmerian—I'm in a perfect Erebus of tenebrosity."

Markham's jaw tightened in exasperation; he was familiar with this evasive loquacity of Vance's. Dismissing the subject, he addressed himself to Heath.

"Have you done any questioning of the people in the house here?"

"I talked to Odell's maid and to the janitor and the switchboard operators, but I didn't go much into details—I was waiting for you. I'll say this, though: what they did tell me made my head swim. If they don't back down on some of their statements, we're up against it."

"Let's have them in now, then," suggested Markham; "the maid first." He sat down on the piano bench with his back to the keyboard.

Heath rose but, instead of going to the door, walked to the oriel window. "There's one thing I want to call your attention to, sir, before you interview these people, and that's the matter of entrances and exits in this apartment."

He drew aside the gold-gauze curtain. "Look at that iron grating. All the windows in this place, including the ones in the bathroom, are equipped with iron bars just like these. It's only eight or ten feet to the ground here, and whoever built this house wasn't taking any chances of burglars getting in through the windows."

He released the curtain and strode into the foyer. "Now, there's only one entrance to this apartment, and that's this door here opening off the main hall. There isn't a transom or an airshaft or a dumbwaiter in the place, and that means that the only way—the *only way*—that anybody can get in or out of this apartment is through this door. Just keep that fact in your mind, sir, while you're listening to the stories of these people. . . . Now, I'll have the maid brought in."

In response to Heath's order a detective led in a mulatto woman about thirty years old. She was neatly dressed and gave one the impression of capability. When she spoke, it was with a quiet, clear enunciation which attested to a greater degree of education than is ordinarily found in members of her class.

Her name, we learned, was Amy Gibson; and the information elicited by Markham's preliminary questioning consisted of the following facts:

She had arrived at the apartment that morning a few minutes after seven, and, as was her custom, had let herself in with her own key, as her mistress generally slept till late.

Once or twice a week she came early to do sewing and mending for Miss Odell before the latter arose. On this particular morning she had come early to make an alteration in a gown.

As soon as she had opened the door, she had been confronted by the disorder of the apartment, for the Venetian-glass doors of the foyer were wide open; and almost simultaneously she had noticed the body of her mistress on the davenport.

She had called at once to Jessup, the night telephone operator then on duty, who, after one glance into the living room, had notified the police. She had then sat down in the public reception room and waited for the arrival of the officers.

Her testimony had been simple and direct and intelligently stated. If she was nervous or excited, she managed to keep her feelings well under control.

"Now," continued Markham, after a short pause, "let us go back to last night. At what time did you leave Miss Odell?"

"A few minutes before seven, sir," the woman answered, in a colorless, even tone which seemed to be characteristic of her speech.

"Is that your usual hour for leaving?"

"No; I generally go about six. But last night Miss Odell wanted me to help her dress for dinner."

"Don't you always help her dress for dinner?"

"No, sir. But last night she was going with some gentleman to dinner and the theater, and wanted to look specially nice."

"Ah!" Markham leaned forward. "And who was this gentleman?"

"I don't know, sir—Miss Odell didn't say."

"And you couldn't suggest who it might have been?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

"And when did Miss Odell tell you that she wanted you to come early this morning?"

"When I was leaving last night."

"So she evidently didn't anticipate any danger, or have any fear of her companion."

"It doesn't look that way." The woman paused, as if considering. "No, I know she didn't. She was in good spirits."

Markham turned to Heath.

"Any other questions you want to ask, Sergeant?"

Heath removed an unlighted cigar from his mouth, and bent forward, resting his hands on his knees.

"What jewelry did this Odell woman have on last night?" he demanded gruffly.

The maid's manner became cool and a bit haughty.

"Miss Odell"—she emphasized the "Miss," by way of reproaching him for the disrespect implied in his omission—"wore all her rings, five or six of them, and three bracelets—one of square diamonds, one of rubies, and one of diamonds and emeralds. She also had on a sunburst of pear-shaped diamonds on a chain round her neck, and she carried a platinum lorgnette set with diamonds and pearls."

"Did she own any other jewelry?"

"A few small pieces, maybe, but I'm not sure."

"And did she keep 'em in the steel jewel case in the room?"

"Yes—when she wasn't wearing them." There was more than a suggestion of sarcasm in the reply.

"Oh, I thought maybe she kept 'em locked up when she had 'em on." Heath's antagonism had been aroused by the maid's attitude; he could not have failed to note that she had consistently omitted the punctilious "sir" when answering him. He now stood up and pointed loweringly to the black document box on the rosewood table.

"Ever see that before?"

The woman nodded indifferently. "Many times."

"Where was it generally kept?"

"In that thing." She indicated the Boule cabinet with a motion of the head.

"What was in the box?"

"How should I know?"

"You don't know—huh?" Heath thrust out his jaw, but his bullying attitude had no effect upon the impassive maid.

"I've got no idea," she replied calmly. "It was always kept locked, and I never saw Miss Odell open it."

The sergeant walked over to the door of the living room closet.

"See that key?" he asked angrily.

Again the woman nodded; but this time I detected a look of mild astonishment in her eyes.

"Was that key always kept on the inside of the door?"

"No, it was always on the outside."

Heath shot Vance a curious look. Then, after a moment's frowning contemplation of the knob, he waved his hand to the detective who had brought the maid in.

"Take her back to the reception room, Snitkin, and get a detailed description from her of all the Odell jewelry. . . . And keep her outside; I'll want her again."

When Snitkin and the maid had gone out, Vance lay back lazily on the davenport, where he had sat during the interview, and sent a spiral of cigarette smoke toward the ceiling.

"Rather illuminatin', what?" he remarked. "The dusky demoiselle got us considerably forrader. Now we know that the closet key is on the wrong side of the door, and that our *fille de joie* went to the theater with one of her favorite *inamorati*, who presumably brought her home shortly before she took her departure from this wicked world."

"You think that's helpful, do you?" Heath's tone was contemptuously triumphant. "Wait till you hear the crazy story the telephone operator's got to tell."

"All right, Sergeant," put in Markham impatiently. "Suppose we get on with the ordeal."

"I'm going to suggest, Mr. Markham, that we question the janitor first. And I'll show you why." Heath went to the entrance door of the apartment, and opened it. "Look here for just a minute, sir."

He stepped out into the main hall and pointed down the little passageway on the left. It was about ten feet in length and ran between the Odell apartment and the blank rear wall of the reception room. At the end of it was a solid oak door which gave on the court at the side of the house.

"That door," explained Heath, "is the only side or rear entrance to this building; and when that door is bolted, nobody can get into the house except by the front entrance. You can't even get into the building through the other apartments, for every window on this floor is barred. I checked up on that point as soon as I got here."

He led the way back into the living room.

"Now, after I'd looked over the situation this morning," he went on, "I figured that our man had entered through that side door at the end of the passageway, and had slipped into this apartment without the night operator seeing him. So I tried the side door to see if it was open. But it was bolted on the inside—not locked, mind you, but bolted. And it wasn't a slip bolt, either, that could have been jimmied or worked open from the outside, but a tough old-fashioned turn bolt of solid brass. . . . And now I want you to hear what the janitor's got to say about it."

Markham nodded acquiescence, and Heath called an order to one of the officers in the hall. A moment later a stolid, middle-aged German, with sullen features and high cheekbones, stood before us. His jaw was clamped tight, and he shifted his eyes from one to the other of us suspiciously.

Heath straightway assumed the role of inquisitor. "What time do you leave here at night?" He had, for some reason, assumed a belligerent manner.

"Six o'clock—sometimes earlier, sometimes later." The man spoke in a surly monotone. He was obviously resentful at this unexpected intrusion upon his orderly routine.

"And what time do you get here in the morning?"

"Eight o'clock, regular."

"What time did you go home last night?"

"About six—maybe quarter past."

Heath paused and finally lighted the cigar on which he had been chewing at intervals during the past hour.

"Now, tell me about that side door," he went on, with undiminished aggressiveness. "You told me you lock it every night before you leave—is that right?"

"Ja—that's right." The man nodded his head affirmatively several times. "Only I don't lock it—I bolt it."

"All right, you bolt it, then." As Heath talked his cigar bobbed up and down between his lips; smoke and words came simultaneously from his mouth. "And last night you bolted it as usual about six o'clock?"

"Maybe a quarter past," the janitor amended, with Germanic precision.

"You're sure you bolted it last night?" The question was almost ferocious.

"Ja, ja. Sure, I am. I do it every night. I never miss."

The man's earnestness left no doubt that the door in question had indeed been bolted on the inside at about six o'clock of the previous evening. Heath, however, belabored the point for several minutes, only to be reassured doggedly that the door had been bolted. At last the janitor was dismissed.

"Really, y' know, Sergeant," remarked Vance with an amused smile, "that honest Rheinlander bolted the door."

"Sure, he did," spluttered Heath, "and I found it still bolted this morning at quarter of eight. That's just what messes things up so nice and pretty. If that door was bolted from six o'clock last evening until eight o'clock this morning, I'd appreciate having someone drive up in a hearse and tell me how the Canary's little playmate got in here last night. And I'd also like to know how he got out."

"Why not through the main entrance?" asked Markham. "It seems the only logical way left, according to your own findings."

"That's how I had it figured out, sir," returned Heath. "But wait till you hear what the phone operator has to say."

"And the phone operator's post," mused Vance, "is in the main hall halfway between the front door and this apartment. Therefore, the gentleman who caused all the disturbance hereabouts last night would have had to pass within a few feet of the operator both on arriving and departing—eh, what?"

"That's it!" snapped Heath. "And, according to the operator, no such person came or went."

Markham seemed to have absorbed some of Heath's irritability. "Get the fellow in here, and let me question him," he ordered.

Heath obeyed with a kind of malicious alacrity.

## 6. A CALL FOR HELP

(Tuesday, September 11; 11 A.M.)

Jessup made a good impression from the moment he entered the room. He was a serious, determined-looking man in his early thirties, rugged and well built; and there was a squareness to his shoulders that carried a suggestion of military training. He walked with a decided limp—his right foot dragged perceptibly—and I noted that his left arm had been stiffened into a permanent arc, as if by an unreduced fracture of the elbow. He was quiet and reserved, and his eyes were steady and intelligent. Markham at once motioned him to a wicker chair beside the closet door, but he declined it, and stood before the district attorney in a soldierly attitude of respectful attention. Markham opened the interrogation with several personal questions. It transpired that Jessup had been a sergeant in the World War, [10] had twice been seriously wounded, and had been invalided home shortly before the armistice. He had held his present post of telephone operator for over a year.

"Now, Jessup," continued Markham, "there are things connected with last night's tragedy that you can tell us."

"Yes, sir." There was no doubt that this ex-soldier would tell us accurately anything he knew, and also that, if he had any doubt as to the correctness of his information, he would frankly say so. He possessed all the qualities of a careful and well-trained witness.

"First of all, what time did you come on duty last night?"

"At ten o'clock, sir." There was no qualification to this blunt statement; one felt that Jessup would arrive punctually at whatever hour he was due. "It was my short shift. The day man and myself alternate in long and short shifts."

"And did you see Miss Odell come in last night after the theater?"

"Yes, sir. Everyone who comes in has to pass the switchboard."

"What time did she arrive?"

"It couldn't have been more than a few minutes after eleven."

"Was she alone?"

"No, sir. There was a gentleman with her."

"Do you know who he was?"

"I don't know his name, sir. But I have seen him several times before when he has called on Miss Odell."

"You could describe him, I suppose."

"Yes, sir. He's tall and clean-shaven except for a very short gray moustache, and is about forty-five, I should say. He looks—if you understand me, sir—like a man of wealth and position."

Markham nodded. "And now, tell me: did he accompany Miss Odell into her apartment or did he go immediately away?"

"He went in with Miss Odell and stayed about half an hour."

Markham's eyes brightened, and there was a suppressed eagerness in his next words. "Then he arrived about eleven, and was alone with Miss Odell in her apartment until about half past eleven. You're sure of these facts?"

"Yes, sir, that's correct," the man affirmed.

Markham paused and leaned forward.

"Now, Jessup, think carefully before answering: did any one else call on Miss Odell at any time last night?"

"No one, sir," was the unhesitating reply.

"How can you be so sure?"

"I would have seen them, sir. They would have had to pass the switchboard in order to reach this apartment."

"And don't you ever leave the switchboard?" asked Markham.

"No, sir," the man assured him vigorously, as if protesting against the implication that he would desert a post of duty. "When I want a drink of water, or go to the toilet, I use the little lavatory in the reception room; but I always hold the door open and keep my eye on the switchboard in case the pilot light should show up for a telephone call. Nobody could walk down the hall, even if I was in the lavatory, without my seeing them."

One could well believe that the conscientious Jessup kept his eye at all times on the switchboard lest a call should flash and go unanswered. The man's earnestness and reliability were obvious; and there was no doubt in any of our minds, I think, that if Miss Odell had had another visitor that night, Jessup would have known of it.

But Heath, with the thoroughness of his nature, rose quickly and stepped out into the main hall. In a moment he returned, looking troubled but satisfied.

"Right!" He nodded to Markham. "The lavatory door's on a direct unobstructed line with the switchboard."

Jessup took no notice of this verification of his statement, and stood, his eyes attentively on the district attorney, awaiting any further questions that might be asked him. There was something both admirable and confidence-inspiring in his unruffled demeanor.

"What about last night?" resumed Markham. "Did you leave the switchboard often, or for long?"

"Just once, sir; and then only to go to the lavatory for a minute or two. But I watched the board the whole time."

"And you'd be willing to state on oath that no one else called on Miss Odell from ten o'clock on, and that no one, except her escort, left her apartment after that hour?"

"Yes, sir, I would."

He was plainly telling the truth, and Markham pondered several moments before proceeding.

"What about the side door?"

"That's kept locked all night, sir. The janitor bolts it when he leaves and unbolts it in the morning. I never touch it."

Markham leaned back and turned to Heath.

"The testimony of the janitor and Jessup here," he said, "seems to limit the situation pretty narrowly to Miss Odell's escort. If, as



seems reasonable to assume, the side door was bolted all night, and if no other caller came or went through the front door, it looks as if the man we wanted to find was the one who brought her home."

Heath gave a short, mirthless laugh. "That would be fine, sir, if something else hadn't happened around here last night." Then to Jessup: "Tell the district attorney the rest of the story about this man."

Markham looked toward the operator with expectant interest; and Vance, lifting himself on one elbow, listened attentively.

Jessup spoke in a level voice, with the alert and careful manner of a soldier reporting to his superior officer.

"It was just this, sir. When the gentleman came out of Miss Odell's apartment at about half past eleven, he stopped at the switchboard and asked me to get him a Yellow Taxicab. I put the call through, and while he was waiting for the car, Miss Odell screamed and called for help. The gentleman turned and rushed to the apartment door, and I followed quickly behind him. He knocked, but at first there was no answer. Then he knocked again, and at the same time called out to Miss Odell and asked her what was the matter. This time she answered. She said everything was all right, and told him to go home and not to worry. Then he walked back with me to the switchboard, remarking that he guessed Miss Odell must have fallen asleep and had a nightmare. We talked for a few minutes about the war, and then the taxicab came. He said good night and went out, and I heard the car drive away."

It was plain to see that this epilogue of the departure of Miss Odell's anonymous escort completely upset Markham's theory of the case. He looked down at the floor with a baffled expression and smoked vigorously for several moments. At last he said:

"How long was it after this man came out of the apartment that you heard Miss Odell scream?"

"About five minutes. I had put my connection through to the taxicab company, and it was a minute or so later that she screamed."

"Was the man near the switchboard?"

"Yes, sir. In fact, he had one arm resting on it."

"How many times did Miss Odell scream? And just what did she say when she called for help?"

"She screamed twice and then cried, 'Help! Help!'"

"And when the man knocked on the door the second time, what did he say?"

"As near as I can recollect, sir, he said, 'Open the door, Margaret! What's the trouble?'"

"And can you remember her exact words when she answered him?"

Jessup hesitated and frowned reflectively. "As I recall, she said, 'There's nothing the matter. I'm sorry I screamed. Everything's all right, so please go home, and don't worry.' . . . Of course, that may not be exactly what she said, but it was something very close to it."

"You could hear her plainly through the door, then?"

"Oh, yes. These doors are not very thick."

Markham rose and began pacing meditatively. At length, halting in front of the operator, he asked another question:

"Did you hear any other suspicious sounds in this apartment after the man left?"

"Not a sound of any kind, sir," Jessup declared. "Someone from outside the building, however, telephoned Miss Odell about ten minutes later, and a man's voice answered from her apartment."

"What's this!" Markham spun round, and Heath sat up at attention, his eyes wide. "Tell me every detail of that call."

Jessup complied unemotionally.

"About twenty minutes to twelve a trunk light flashed on the board, and when I answered it, a man asked for Miss Odell. I plugged the connection through, and after a short wait the receiver was lifted from her phone—you can tell when a receiver's taken off the hook, because the guide light on the board goes out—and a man's voice answered 'Hello.' I pulled the listening-in key over, and, of course, didn't hear any more."

There was silence in the apartment for several minutes. Then Vance, who had been watching Jessup closely during the interview, spoke.

"By the bye, Mr. Jessup," he asked carelessly, "were you yourself, by any chance, a bit fascinated—let us say—by the charming Miss Odell?"

For the first time since entering the room the man appeared ill at ease. A dull flush overspread his cheeks. "I thought she was a very beautiful lady," he answered resolutely.

Markham gave Vance a look of disapproval, and then addressed himself abruptly to the operator. "That will be all for the moment, Jessup."

The man bowed stiffly and limped out.

"This case is becoming positively fascinatin'," murmured Vance, relaxing once more upon the davenport.

"It's comforting to know that someone's enjoying it," said Markham, relaxing once more upon the davenport. "And what, may I ask, was the object of your question concerning Jessup's sentiments toward the dead woman?"

"Oh, just a vagrant notion struggling in my brain," returned Vance. "And then, y' know, a bit of *boudoir racontage* always enlivens a situation, what?"

Heath, rousing himself from gloomy abstraction, spoke up.

"We've still got the fingerprints, Mr. Markham. And I'm thinking that they're going to locate our man for us."

"But even if Dubois does identify those prints," said Markham, "we'll have to show how the owner of them got into this place last night. He'll claim, of course, they were made prior to the crime."

"Well, it's a sure thing," declared Heath stubbornly, "that there was some man in here last night when Odell got back from the theater, and that he was still here until after the other man left at half past eleven. The woman's screams and the answering of that phone call at twenty minutes to twelve prove it. And since Doc Doremus said that the murder took place before midnight, there's no getting away from the fact that the guy who was hiding in here did the job."

"That appears incontrovertible," agreed Markham. "And I'm inclined to think it was someone she knew. She probably screamed when he first revealed himself, and then, recognizing him, calmed down and told the other man out in the hall that nothing was the matter. . . . Later on he strangled her."

"And, I might suggest," added Vance, "that his place of hiding was that clothes press."

"Sure," the sergeant concurred. "But what's bothering me is how he got in here. The day operator who was at the switchboard until ten last night told me that the man who called and took Odell out to dinner was the only visitor she had."

Markham gave a grunt of exasperation.

"Bring the day man in here," he ordered. "We've got to straighten this thing out. *Somebody* got in here last night, and before I leave, I'm going to find out how it was done."

Vance gave him a look of patronizing amusement.

"Y' know, Markham," he said, "I'm not blessed with the gift of psychic inspiration, but I have one of those strange, indescribable feelings, as the minor poets say, that if you really contemplate remaining in this bestrewn boudoir till you've discovered how the mysterious visitor gained admittance here last night, you'd do jolly well to send for your toilet access'ries and several changes of fresh linen—not to mention your pyjamas. The chap who engineered this little soiree planned his entrance and exit most carefully and perspicaciously."

Markham regarded Vance dubiously but made no reply.

## 7. A NAMELESS VISITOR

(Tuesday, September 11; 11:15 A.M.)

Heath had stepped out into the hall, and now returned with the day telephone operator, a sallow, thin young man who, we learned, was named Spively. His almost black hair, which accentuated the pallor of his face, was sleeked back from his forehead with pomade; and he wore a very shallow moustache which barely extended beyond the alae of his nostrils. He was dressed in an exaggeratedly dapper fashion, in a dazzling chocolate-colored suit cut very close to his figure, a pair of cloth-topped buttoned shoes, and a pink shirt with a stiff turn-over collar to match. He appeared nervous, and immediately sat down in the wicker chair by the door, fingering the sharp creases of his trousers, and running the tip of his tongue over his lips.

Markham went straight to the point.

"I understand you were at the switchboard yesterday afternoon and last night until ten o'clock. Is that correct?"

Spively swallowed hard and nodded his head. "Yes, sir."

"What time did Miss Odell go out to dinner?"

"About seven o'clock. I'd just sent to the restaurant next door for some sandwiches—"

"Did she go alone?" Markham interrupted his explanation.

"No. A fella called for her."

"Did you know this 'fella'?"

"I'd seen him a couple of times calling on Miss Odell, but I didn't know who he was."

"What did he look like?" Markham's question was uttered with hurried impatience.

Spively's description of the girl's escort tallied with Jessup's description of the man who had accompanied her home, though Spively was more voluble and less precise than Jessup had been. Patently, Miss Odell had gone out at seven and returned at eleven with the same man.

"Now," resumed Markham, putting an added stress on his words, "I want to know who else called on Miss Odell between the time she went out to dinner and ten o'clock when you left the switchboard."

Spively was puzzled by the question, and his thin arched eyebrows lifted and contracted. "I—don't understand," he stammered. "How could any one call on Miss Odell when she was out?"

"Someone evidently did," said Markham. "And he got into her apartment and was there when she returned at eleven."

The youth's eyes opened wide, and his lips fell apart. "My God, sir!" he exclaimed. "So that's how they murdered her!—laid in wait for her! . . ." He stopped abruptly, suddenly realizing his own proximity to the mysterious chain of events that had led up to the crime. "But nobody got into her apartment while I was on duty," he blurted, with frightened emphasis. "Nobody! I never left the board from the time she went out until quitting time."

"Couldn't anyone have come in the side door?"

"What! Was it unlocked?" Spively's tone was startled. "It never is unlocked at night. The janitor bolts it when he leaves at six."

"And you didn't unbolt it last night for any purpose? Think!"

"No, sir, I didn't!" He shook his head earnestly.

"And you are positive that no one got into the apartment through the front door after Miss Odell left?"

"Positive! I tell you I didn't leave the board the whole time, and nobody could've got by me without my knowing it. There was only one person that called and asked for her—"

"Oh! So someone did call!" snapped Markham. "When was it? And what happened?—Jog your memory before you answer."

"It wasn't anything important," the youth assured him, genuinely frightened. "Just a fella who came in and rang her bell and went right out again."

"Never mind whether it was important or not." Markham's tone was cold and peremptory. "What time did he call?"

"About half past nine."

"And who was he?"

"A young fella I've seen come here several times to see Miss Odell. I don't know his name."

"Tell me exactly what took place," pursued Markham.

Again Spively swallowed hard and wetted his lips.

"It was like this," he began, with effort. "The fella came in and started walking down the hall and I said to him, 'Miss Odell isn't in.' But he kept on going and said, 'Oh, well, I'll ring the bell anyway to make sure.' A telephone call came through just then, and I let him go on. He rang the bell and knocked on the door, but of course there wasn't any answer; and pretty soon he came on back and said, 'I guess you were right.' Then he tossed me half a dollar and went out."

"You actually saw him go out?" There was a note of disappointment in Markham's voice.

"Sure, I saw him go out. He stopped just inside the front door and lit a cigarette. Then he opened the door and turned toward Broadway."

"One by one the rosy petals fall," came Vance's indolent voice. "A most amusin' situation!"

Markham was loath to relinquish his hope in the criminal possibilities of this one caller who had come and gone at half past nine.

"What was this man like?" he asked. "Can you describe him?"

Spively sat up straight, and when he answered, it was with an enthusiasm that showed he had taken special note of the visitor.

"He was good-looking, not so old—maybe thirty. And he had on a full-dress suit and patent-leather pumps, and a pleated silk shirt—"

"What, what?" demanded Vance, in simulated unbelief, leaning over the back of the davenport. "A silk shirt with evening dress!

Most extr'ordin'ry!"

"Oh, a lot of the best dressers are wearing them," Spively explained, with condescending pride. "It's all the fashion for dancing."

"You don't say—really!" Vance appeared dumbfounded. "I must look into this. . . . And, by the bye, when this Beau Brummel of the silk shirt paused by the front door, did he take his cigarette from a long flat silver case carried in his lower waistcoat pocket?"

The youth looked at Vance in admiring astonishment.

"How did you know?" he exclaimed.

"Simple deduction," Vance explained, resuming his recumbent posture. "Large metal cigarette cases carried in the waistcoat pocket somehow go with silk shirts for evening wear."

Markham, clearly annoyed at the interruption, cut in sharply with a demand for the operator to proceed with his description.

"He wore his hair smoothed down," Spively continued, "and you could see it was kind of long; but it was cut in the latest style. And he had a small waxed moustache; and there was a big carnation in the lapel of his coat, and he had on chamois gloves. . . ."

"My word!" murmured Vance. "A gigolo!"

Markham, with the incubus of the nightclubs riding him heavily, frowned and took a deep breath. Vance's observation evidently had launched him on an unpleasant train of thought.

"Was this man short or tall?" he asked next.

"He wasn't so tall—about my height," Spively explained. "And he was sort of thin."

There was an easily recognizable undercurrent of admiration in his tone, and I felt that this youthful telephone operator had seen in Miss Odell's caller a certain physical and sartorial ideal. This palpable admiration, coupled with the somewhat *outré* clothes affected by the youth, permitted us to read between the lines of his remarks a fairly accurate description of the man who had unsuccessfully rung the dead girl's bell at half past nine the night before.

When Spively had been dismissed, Markham rose and strode about the room, his head enveloped in a cloud of cigar smoke, while Heath sat stolidly watching him, his brows knit.

Vance stood up and stretched himself.

"The absorbin' problem, it would seem, remains *in statu quo*," he remarked airily. "How, oh, how, did the fair Margaret's executioner get in?"

"You know, Mr. Markham," rumbled Heath sententiously, "I've been thinking that the fellow may have come here earlier in the afternoon—say, before that side door was locked. Odell herself may have let him in and hidden him when the other man came to take her to dinner."

"It looks that way," Markham admitted. "Bring the maid in here again, and we'll see what we can find out."

When the woman had been brought in, Markham questioned her as to her actions during the afternoon, and learned that she had gone out at about four to do some shopping and had returned about half past five.

"Did Miss Odell have any visitor with her when you got back?"

"No, sir," was the prompt answer. "She was alone."

"Did she mention that anyone had called?"

"No, sir."

"Now," continued Markham, "could anyone have been hidden in this apartment when you went home at seven?"

The maid was frankly astonished and even a little horrified. "Where could anyone hide?" she asked, looking round the apartment.

"There are several possible places," Markham suggested: "in the bathroom, in one of the clothes closets, under the bed, behind the window draperies. . . ."

The woman shook her head decisively. "No one could have been hidden," she declared. "I was in the bathroom half a dozen times, and I got Miss Odell's gown out of the clothes closet in the bedroom. As soon as it began to get dark, I drew all the window shades myself. And as for the bed, it's built almost down to the floor; no one could squeeze under it." (I glanced closely at the bed and realized that this statement was quite true.)

"What about the clothes closet in this room?" Markham put the question hopefully, but again the maid shook her head.

"Nobody was in there. That's where I keep my own hat and coat, and I took them out myself when I was getting ready to go. I even put away one of Miss Odell's old dresses in that closet before I left."

"And you are absolutely certain," reiterated Markham, "that no one could have been hidden anywhere in these rooms at the time you went home?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"Do you happen to remember if the key of this clothes closet was on the inside or the outside of the lock when you opened the door to get your hat?"

The woman paused and looked thoughtfully at the closet door. "It was on the outside, where it always was," she announced, after several moments' reflection. "I remember because it caught in the chiffon of the old dress I put away."

Markham frowned and then resumed his questioning. "You say you don't know the name of Miss Odell's dinner companion last night. Can you tell us the names of any men she was in the habit of going out with?"

"Miss Odell never mentioned any names to me," the woman said. "She was very careful about it, too—secretive, you might say. You see, I'm only here in the daytime, and the gentlemen she knew generally came in the evening."

"And you never heard her speak of anyone of whom she was frightened—anyone she had reason to fear?"

"No, sir—although there was one man she was trying to get rid of. He was a bad character—I wouldn't have trusted him anywhere—and I told Miss Odell she'd better look out for him. But she'd known him a long time, I guess, and had been pretty soft on him once."

"How do you happen to know this?"

"One day, about a week ago," the maid explained, "I came in after lunch, and he was with her in the other room. They didn't hear me, because the portieres were drawn. He was demanding money, and when she tried to put him off, he began threatening her. And she said something that showed she'd given him money before. I made a noise, and then they stopped arguing; and pretty soon he went

out."

"What did this man look like?" Markham's interest was reviving.

"He was kind of thin—not very tall—and I'd say he was around thirty. He had a hard face—good-looking, some would say—and pale blue eyes that gave you the shivers. He always wore his hair greased back, and he had a little yellow moustache pointed at the ends."

"Ah!" said Vance. "Our gigolo!"

"Has this man been here since?" asked Markham.

"I don't know, sir—not when I was here."

"That will be all," said Markham; and the woman went out.

"She didn't help us much," complained Heath.

"What!" exclaimed Vance. "I think she did remarkably well. She cleared up several moot points."

"And just what portions of her information do you consider particularly illuminating?" asked Markham, with ill-concealed annoyance.

"We now know, do we not," rejoined Vance serenely, "that no one was lying *perdu* in here when the *bonne* departed yesterevening."

"Instead of that fact being helpful," retorted Markham, "I'd say it added materially to the complications of the situation."

"It would appear that way, wouldn't it, now? But, then—who knows?—it may prove to be your brightest and most comfortin' clue. . . . Furthermore, we learned that someone evidently locked himself in that clothes press, as witness the shifting of the key, and that, moreover, this occultation did not occur until the abigail had gone, or, let us say, after seven o'clock."

"Sure," said Heath with sour facetiousness; "when the side door was bolted and an operator was sitting in the front hall, who swears nobody came in that way."

"It is a bit mystifyin'," Vance conceded sadly.

"Mystifying? It's impossible!" grumbled Markham.

Heath, who was now staring with meditative pugnacity into the closet, shook his head helplessly.

"What I don't understand," he ruminated, "is why, if the fellow was hiding in the closet, he didn't ransack it when he came out, like he did all the rest of the apartment."

"Sergeant," said Vance, "you've put your finger on the crux of the matter. . . . Y' know, the neat, undisturbed aspect of that closet rather suggests that the crude person who rifled these charming rooms omitted to give it his attention because it was locked on the inside and he couldn't open it."

"Come, come!" protested Markham. "That theory implies that there were two unknown persons in here last night."

Vance sighed. "Harrow and alas! I know it. And we can't introduce even one into this apartment logically. . . . Distressin', ain't it?"

Heath sought consolation in a new line of thought.

"Anyway," he submitted, "we know that the fancy fellow with the patent-leather pumps who called here last night at half past nine was probably Odell's lover, and was grafting on her."

"And in just what recondite way does that obvious fact help to roll the clouds away?" asked Vance. "Nearly every modern Delilah has an avaricious *amoroso*. It would be rather singular if there wasn't such a chap in the offing, what?"

"That's all right, too," returned Heath. "But I'll tell you something, Mr. Vance, that maybe you don't know. The men that these girls lose their heads over are generally crooks of some kind—professional criminals, you understand. That's why, knowing that this job was the work of a professional, it don't leave me cold, as you might say, to learn that this fellow who was threatening Odell and grafting on her was the same one who was prowling round here last night. . . . And I'll say this, too: the description of him sounds a whole lot like the kind of high-class burglars that hang out at these swell all-night cafes."

"You're convinced, then," asked Vance mildly, "that this job, as you call it, was done by a professional criminal?"

Heath was almost contemptuous in his reply. "Didn't the guy wear gloves and use a jimmy? It was a yeggman's job, all right."

## 8. THE INVISIBLE MURDERER

(Tuesday, September 11; 11:45 A.M.)

Markham went to the window and stood, his hands behind him, looking down into the little paved rear yard. After several minutes he turned slowly.

"The situation, as I see it," he said, "boils down to this:—The Odell girl has an engagement for dinner and the theater with a man of some distinction. He calls for her a little after seven, and they go out together. At eleven o'clock they return. He goes with her into her apartment and remains half an hour. He leaves at half past eleven and asks the phone operator to call him a taxi. While he is waiting the girl screams and calls for help, and, in response to his inquiries, she tells him nothing is wrong and bids him go away. The taxi arrives, and he departs in it. Ten minutes later someone telephones her, and a man answers from her apartment. This morning she is found murdered, and the apartment ransacked."

He took a long draw on his cigar.

"Now, it is obvious that when she and her escort returned last night, there was another man in this place somewhere; and it is also obvious that the girl was alive after her escort had departed. Therefore, we must conclude that the man who was already in the apartment was the person who murdered her. This conclusion is further corroborated by Doctor Doremus's report that the crime occurred between eleven and twelve. But since her escort did not leave till half past eleven, and spoke with her after that time, we can put the actual hour of the murder as between half past eleven and midnight. . . . These are the inferable facts from the evidence thus far adduced."

"There's not much getting away from 'em," agreed Heath.

"At any rate, they're interestin'," murmured Vance.

Markham, walking up and down earnestly, continued: "The features of the situation revolving round these inferable facts are as follows:—There was no one hiding in the apartment at seven o'clock—the hour the maid went home. Therefore, the murderer entered the apartment later. First, then, let us consider the side door. At six o'clock, an hour before the maid's departure, the janitor bolted it on the inside, and both operators disavow emphatically that they went near it. Moreover, you, Sergeant, found it bolted this morning. Hence, we may assume that the door was bolted on the inside all night, and that nobody could have entered that way. Consequently, we are driven to the inevitable alternative that the murderer entered by the front door. Now, let us consider this other means of entry. The phone operator who was on duty until ten o'clock last night asserts positively that the only person who entered the front door and passed down the main hall to this apartment was a man who rang the bell and, getting no answer, immediately walked out again. The other operator, who was on duty from ten o'clock until this morning, asserts with equal positiveness that no one entered the front door and passed the switchboard coming to this apartment. Add to all this the fact that every window on this floor is barred, and that no one from upstairs can descend into the main hall without coming face to face with the operator, and we are, for the moment, confronted with an impasse."

Heath scratched his head and laughed mirthlessly. "It don't make sense, does it, sir?"

"What about the next apartment?" asked Vance, "the one with the door facing the rear passageway—No. 2, I think?"

Heath turned to him patronizingly. "I looked into that the first thing this morning. Apartment No. 2 is occupied by a single woman; and I woke her up at eight o'clock and searched the place. Nothing there. Anyway, you have to walk past the switchboard to reach her apartment the same as you do to reach this one; and nobody called on her or left her apartment last night. What's more, Jessup, who's a shrewd sound lad, told me this woman is a quiet, ladylike sort, and that she and Odell didn't even know each other."

"You're so thorough, Sergeant!" murmured Vance.

"Of course," put in Markham, "it would have been possible for someone from the other apartment to have slipped in here behind the operator's back between seven and eleven, and then to have slipped back after the murder. But as Sergeant Heath's search this morning failed to uncover anyone, we can eliminate the possibility of our man having operated from that quarter."

"I dare say you're right," Vance indifferently admitted. "But it strikes me, Markham old dear, that your own affectin' recapitulation of the situation jolly well eliminates the possibility of your man's having operated from any quarter. . . . And yet he came in, garroted the unfortunate damsel, and departed—eh, what? . . . It's a charmin' little problem. I wouldn't have missed it for worlds."

"It's uncanny," pronounced Markham gloomily.

"It's positively spiritualistic," amended Vance. "It has the caressin' odor of a séance. Really, y' know, I'm beginning to suspect that some medium was hovering in the vicinage last night doing some rather tip-top materializations. . . . I say, Markham, could you get an indictment against an ectoplasmic emanation?"

"It wasn't no spook that made those fingerprints," growled Heath, with surly truculence.

Markham halted his nervous pacing and regarded Vance irritably. "Damn it! This is rank nonsense. The man got in some way, and he got out, too. There's something wrong somewhere. Either the maid is mistaken about someone being here when she left, or else one of those phone operators went to sleep and won't admit it."

"Or else one of 'em's lying," supplemented Heath.

Vance shook his head. "The dusky *fille de chambre*, I'd say, is eminently trustworthy. And if there was any doubt about anyone's having come in the front door unnoticed, the lads on the switchboard would, in the present circumstances, be only too eager to admit it. . . . No, Markham, you'll simply have to approach this affair from the astral plane, so to speak."

Markham grunted his distaste of Vance's jocularity. "That line of investigation I leave to you with your metaphysical theories and esoteric hypotheses."

"But, consider," protested Vance banteringly. "You've proved conclusively—or, rather, you've demonstrated legally—that no one could have entered or departed from this apartment last night; and, as you've often told me, a court of law must decide all matters, not

in accord with the known or suspected facts, but according to the evidence; and the evidence in this case would prove a sound alibi for every corporeal being extant. And yet, it's not exactly tenable, d' ye see, that the lady strangled herself. If only it had been poison, what an exquisite and satisfyin' suicide case you'd have! . . . Most inconsiderate of her homicidal visitor not to have used arsenic instead of his hands!"

"Well, he strangled her," pronounced Heath. "Furthermore, I'll lay my money on the fellow who called here last night at half past nine and couldn't get in. He's the bird I want to talk to."

"Indeed?" Vance produced another cigarette. "I shouldn't say, to judge from our description of him, that his conversation would prove particularly fascinatin'."

An ugly light came into Heath's eyes. "We've got ways," he said through his teeth, "of getting damn interesting conversation outta people who haven't no great reputation for repartee."

Vance sighed. "How the Four Hundred needs you, my Sergeant!"

Markham looked at his watch.

"I've got pressing work at the office," he said, "and all this talk isn't getting us anywhere." He put his hand on Heath's shoulder. "I leave you to go ahead. This afternoon I'll have these people brought down to my office for another questioning—maybe I can jog their memories a bit. . . . You've got some line of investigation planned?"

"The usual routine," replied Heath drearily. "I'll go through Odell's papers, and I'll have three or four of my men check up on her."

"You'd better get after the Yellow Taxicab Company right away," Markham suggested. "Find out, if you can, who the man was who left here at half past eleven last night, and where he went."

"Do you imagine for one moment," asked Vance, "that if this man knew anything about the murder, he would have stopped in the hall and asked the operator to call a taxi for him?"

"Oh, I don't look for much in that direction." Markham's tone was almost listless. "But the girl may have said something to him that'll give us a lead."

Vance shook his head facetiously. "O welcome pure-ey'd Faith, white-handed Hope, thou hovering angel, girt with golden wings!"

Markham was in no mood for chaffing. He turned to Heath, and spoke with forced cheeriness. "Call me up later this afternoon. I may get some new evidence out of the outfit we've just interviewed. . . . And," he added, "be sure to put a man on guard here. I want this apartment kept just as it is until we see a little more light."

"I'll attend to that," Heath assured him.

Markham and Vance and I went out and entered the car. A few minutes later we were winding rapidly across town through Central Park.

"Recall our recent *conversazione* about footprints in the snow?" asked Vance, as we emerged into Fifth Avenue and headed south.

Markham nodded abstractedly.

"As I remember," mused Vance, "in the hypothetical case you presented there were not only footprints but a dozen or more witnesses—including a youthful prodigy—who saw a figure of some kind cross the hibernal landscape. . . . *Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie!* Here you are in a most beastly pother because of the disheartenin' fact that there are neither footprints in the snow nor witnesses who saw a fleeing figure. In short, you are bereft of both direct and circumstantial evidence. . . . Sad, sad."

He wagged his head dolefully.

"Y' know, Markham, it appears to me that the testimony in this case constitutes conclusive legal proof that no one could have been with the deceased at the hour of her passing, and that, *ergo*, she is presumably alive. The strangled body of the lady is, I take it, simply an irrelevant circumstance from the standpoint of legal procedure. I know that you learned lawyers won't admit a murder without a body; but how, in sweet Heaven's name, do you get around a *corpus delicti* without a murder?"

"You're talking nonsense," Markham rebuked him, with a show of anger.

"Oh, quite," agreed Vance. "And yet, it's a distressin' thing for a lawyer not to have footprints of some kind, isn't it, old dear? It leaves one so up in the air."

Suddenly Markham swung round. "*You*, of course, don't need footprints, or any other kind of material clues," he flung at Vance tauntingly. "*You* have powers of divination such as are denied ordinary mortals. If I remember correctly, you informed me, somewhat grandiloquently, that, knowing the nature and conditions of a crime, you could lead me infallibly to the culprit, whether he left footprints or not. You recall that boast? . . . Well, here's a crime, and the perpetrator left no footprints coming or going. Be so kind as to end my suspense by confiding in me who killed the Odell girl."

Vance's serenity was not ruffled by Markham's ill-humored challenge. He sat smoking lazily for several minutes; then he leaned over and flicked his cigarette ash out of the window.

"Pon my word, Markham," he rejoined evenly, "I'm half inclined to look into this silly murder. I think I'll wait, though, and see whom the nonplussed Heath turns up with his inquiries."

Markham grunted scoffingly and sank back on the cushions. "Your generosity wrings me," he said.

## 9. THE PACK IN FULL CRY

(Tuesday, September 11; afternoon)

On our way downtown that morning we were delayed for a considerable time in the traffic congestion just north of Madison Square, and Markham anxiously looked at his watch.

"It's past noon," he said. "I think I'll stop at the club and have a bite of lunch. . . . I presume that eating at this early hour would be too plebeian for so exquisite a hothouse flower as you."

Vance considered the invitation.

"Since you deprived me of my breakfast," he decided, "I'll permit you to buy me some eggs *Bénédictine*."

A few minutes later we entered the almost empty grill of the Stuyvesant Club and took a table near one of the windows looking southward over the treetops of Madison Square.

Shortly after we had given our order a uniformed attendant entered and, bowing deferentially at the district attorney's elbow, held out an unaddressed communication sealed in one of the club's envelopes. Markham read it with an expression of growing curiosity, and as he studied the signature a look of mild surprise came into his eyes. At length he looked up and nodded to the waiting attendant. Then, excusing himself, he left us abruptly. It was fully twenty minutes before he returned.

"Funny thing," he said. "That note was from the man who took the Odell woman to dinner and the theater last night. . . . A small world," he mused. "He's staying here at the club—he's a nonresident member and makes it his headquarters when he's in town."

"You know him?" Vance put the question disinterestedly.

"I've met him several times—chap named Spotswoode." Markham seemed perplexed. "He's a man of family, lives in a country house on Long Island, and is regarded generally as a highly respectable member of society—one of the last persons I'd suspect of being mixed up with the Odell girl. But, according to his own confession, he played around a good deal with her during his visits to New York—'sowing a few belated wild oats,' as he expressed it—and last night took her to Francelle's for dinner and to the Winter Garden afterwards."

"Not my idea of an intellectual, or even edifyin', evening," commented Vance. "And he selected a deuced unlucky day for it I say, imagine opening the morning paper and learning that your *petite dame* of the preceding evening had been strangled! Disconcertin', what?"

"He's certainly disconcerted," said Markham. "The early afternoon papers were out about an hour ago, and he'd been phoning my office every ten minutes, when I suddenly walked in here. He's afraid his connection with the girl will leak out and disgrace him."

"And won't it?"

"I hardly see the necessity. No one knows who her escort was last evening; and since he obviously had nothing to do with the crime, what's to be gained by dragging him into it? He told me the whole story, and offered to stay in the city as long as I wanted him to."

"I infer, from the cloud of disappointment that enveloped you when you returned just now, that his story held nothing hopeful for you in the way of clues."

"No," Markham admitted. "The girl apparently never spoke to him of her intimate affairs; and he couldn't give me a single helpful suggestion. His account of what happened last night agreed perfectly with Jessup's. He called for the girl at seven, brought her home at about eleven, stayed with her half an hour or so, and then left her. When he heard her call for help, he was frightened, but on being assured by her there was nothing wrong, he concluded she had dozed off into a nightmare, and thought no more of it. He drove direct to the club here, arriving about ten minutes to twelve. Judge Redfern, who saw him descend from the taxi, insisted on his coming upstairs and playing poker with some men who were waiting in the judge's rooms for him. They played until three o'clock this morning."

"Your Long Island Don Juan has certainly not supplied you with any footprints in the snow."

"Anyway, his coming forward at this time closes one line of inquiry over which we might have wasted considerable time."

"If many more lines of inquiry are closed," remarked Vance dryly, "you'll be in a distressin' dilemma, don't y' know."

"There are enough still open to keep me busy," said Markham, pushing back his plate and calling for the check. He rose; then pausing, regarded Vance meditatively. "Are you sufficiently interested to want to come along?"

"Eh, what? My word! . . . Charmed, I'm sure. But, I say, sit down just a moment—there's a good fellow!—till I finish my coffee."

I was considerably astonished at Vance's ready acceptance, careless and bantering though it was, for there was an exhibition of old Chinese prints at the Montross Galleries that afternoon, which he had planned to attend. A Riokai and a Moyeki, said to be very fine examples of Sung painting, were to be shown; and Vance was particularly eager to acquire them for his collection.

We rode with Markham to the Criminal Courts building and, entering by the Franklin Street door, took the private elevator to the district attorney's spacious but dingy private office, which overlooked the gray-stone ramparts of the Tombs. Vance seated himself in one of the heavy leather-upholstered chairs near the carved oak table on the right of the desk and lighted a cigarette with an air of cynical amusement.

"I await with anticipat'ry delight the grinding of the wheels of justice," he confided, leaning back lazily.

"You are doomed not to hear the first turn of those wheels," retorted Markham. "The initial revolution will take place outside of this office." And he disappeared through a swinging door which led to the judge's chambers.

Five minutes later he returned and sat down in the high-backed swivel chair at his desk, with his back to the four tall narrow windows in the south wall of the office.

"I just saw Judge Redfern," he explained—"it happened to be the midday recess—and he verified Spotswoode's statement in regard to the poker game. The judge met him outside of the club at ten minutes before midnight, and was with him until three in the morning. He noted the time because he had promised his guests to be back at half past eleven and was twenty minutes late."



"Why all this substantiation of an obviously unimportant fact?" asked Vance.

"A matter of routine," Markham told him, slightly impatient. "In a case of this kind every factor, however seemingly remote to the main issue, must be checked."

"Really, y' know, Markham"—Vance laid his head back on the chair and gazed dreamily at the ceiling—"one would think that this eternal routine, which you lawyer chaps worship so devoutly, actually got one somewhere occasionally; whereas it never gets one anywhere. Remember the Red Queen in 'Through the Looking-Glass—'"

"I'm too busy at present to debate the question of routine *versus* inspiration," Markham answered brusquely, pressing a button beneath the edge of his desk.

Swacker, his youthful and energetic secretary, appeared at the door which communicated with a narrow inner chamber between the district attorney's office and the main waiting room.

"Yes, Chief?" The secretary's eyes gleamed expectantly behind his enormous horn-rimmed glasses.

"Tell Ben to send me in a man at once." [11]

Swacker went out through the corridor door, and a minute or two later a suave, rotund man, dressed immaculately and wearing a pince-nez, entered, and stood before Markham with an ingratiating smile.

"Morning, Tracy." Markham's tone was pleasant but curt. "Here's a list of four witnesses in connection with the Odell case that I want brought down here at once—the two phone operators, the maid, and the janitor. You'll find them at 184 West 71st Street. Sergeant Heath is holding them there."

"Right, sir." Tracy took the memorandum, and with a priggish, but by no means inelegant, bow went out.

During the next hour Markham plunged into the general work that had accumulated during the forenoon, and I was amazed at the man's tremendous vitality and efficiency. He disposed of as many important matters as would have occupied the ordinary businessman for an entire day. Swacker bobbed in and out with electric energy, and various clerks appeared at the touch of a buzzer, took their orders, and were gone with breathless rapidity. Vance, who had sought diversion in a tome of famous arson trials, looked up admiringly from time to time and shook his head in mild reproach at such spirited activity.

It was just half past two when Swacker announced the return of Tracy with the four witnesses; and for two hours Markham questioned and cross-questioned them with a thoroughness and an insight that even I, as a lawyer, had rarely seen equaled. His interrogation of the two phone operators was quite different from his casual questioning of them earlier in the day; and if there had been a single relevant omission in their former testimony, it would certainly have been caught now by Markham's grueling catechism. But when, at last, they were told they could go, no new information had been brought to light. Their stories now stood firmly grounded: no one—with the exception of the girl herself and her escort, and the disappointed visitor at half past nine—had entered the front door and passed down the hall to the Odell apartment from seven o'clock on; and no one had passed out that way. The janitor reiterated stubbornly that he had bolted the side door a little after six, and no amount of wheedling or aggression could shake his dogged certainty on that point. Amy Gibson, the maid, could add nothing to her former testimony. Markham's intensive examination of her produced only repetitions of what she had already told him.

Not one new possibility—not one new suggestion—was brought out. In fact, the two hours' interlocutory proceedings resulted only in closing up every loophole in a seemingly incredible situation. When, at half past four, Markham sat back in his chair with a weary sigh, the chance of unearthing a promising means of approach to the astonishing problem seemed more remote than ever.

Vance closed his treatise on arson and threw away his cigarette.

"I tell you, Markham old chap"—he grinned—"this case requires umbilical contemplation, not routine. Why not call in an Egyptian seeress with a *flair* for crystal-gazing?"

"If this sort of thing goes on much longer," returned Markham dispiritedly, "I'll be tempted to take your advice."

Just then Swacker looked in through the door to say that Inspector Brenner was on the wire. Markham picked up the telephone receiver, and as he listened he jotted down some notes on a pad. When the call had ended, he turned to Vance.

"You seemed disturbed over the condition of the steel jewel case we found in the bedroom. Well, the expert on burglar tools just called up; and he verifies his opinion of this morning. The case was pried open with a specially-made cold chisel such as only a professional burglar would carry or would know how to use. It had an inch-and-three-eighths beveled bit and a one-inch flat handle. It was an old instrument—there was a peculiar nick in the blade—and is the same one that was used in a successful housebreak on upper Park Avenue early last summer. . . . Does that highly exciting information ameliorate your anxiety?"

"Can't say that it does." Vance had again become serious and perplexed. "In fact, it makes the situation still more fantastic. . . . I could see a glimmer of light—eerie and unearthly, perhaps, but still a perceptible illumination—in all this murkiness if it wasn't for that jewel case and the steel chisel."

Markham was about to answer when Swacker again looked in and informed him that Sergeant Heath had arrived and wanted to see him.

Heath's manner was far less depressed than when we had taken leave of him that morning. He accepted the cigar Markham offered him, and seating himself at the conference table in front of the district attorney's desk, drew out a battered notebook.

"We've had a little good luck," he began. "Burke and Emery—two of the men I put on the case—got a line on Odell at the first place they made inquiries. From what they learned, she didn't run around with many men—limited herself to a few live wires, and played the game with what you'd call *finesse*. . . . The principal one—the man who's been seen most with her—is Charles Cleaver."

Markham sat up. "I know Cleaver—if it's the same one."

"It's him, all right," declared Heath. "Former Brooklyn Tax Commissioner; been interested in a poolroom for pony-betting over in Jersey City ever since. Hangs out at the Stuyvesant Club, where he can hobnob with his old Tammany Hall cronies."

"That's the one," nodded Markham. "He's a kind of professional gay dog—known as Pop, I believe."

Vance gazed into space.

"Well, well," he murmured. "So old Pop Cleaver was also entangled with our subtle and sanguine Dolores. She certainly couldn't have loved him for his *beaux yeux*."

"I thought, sir," went on Heath, "that, seeing as how Cleaver is always in and out of the Stuyvesant Club, you might ask him some questions about Odell. He ought to know something."

"Glad to, Sergeant." Markham made a note on his pad. "I'll try to get in touch with him tonight. . . . Anyone else on your list?"

"There's a fellow named Mannix—Louis Mannix—who met Odell when she was in the 'Follies'; but she chucked him over a year ago, and they haven't been seen together since. He's got another girl now. He's the head of the firm of Mannix and Levine, fur importers, and is one of your nightclub rounders—a heavy spender. But I don't see much use of barking up that tree—his affair with Odell went cold too long ago."

"Yes," agreed Markham; "I think we can eliminate him."

"I say, if you keep up this elimination much longer," observed Vance, "you won't have anything left but the lady's corpse."

"And then, there's the man who took her out last night," pursued Heath. "Nobody seems to know his name—he must've been one of those discreet, careful old boys. I thought at first he might have been Cleaver, but the descriptions don't tally. . . . And by the way, sir, here's a funny thing: when he left Odell last night he took the taxi down to the Stuyvesant Club and got out there."

Markham nodded. "I know all about that, Sergeant. And I know who the man was; and it wasn't Cleaver."

Vance was chuckling. "The Stuyvesant Club seems to be well in the forefront of this case," he said. "I do hope it doesn't suffer the sad fate of the Knickerbocker Athletic."[\[12\]](#)

Heath was intent on the main issue.

"Who was the man, Mr. Markham?"

Markham hesitated, as if pondering the advisability of taking the other into his confidence. Then he said: "I'll tell you his name, but in strict confidence. The man was Kenneth Spotswoode."

He then recounted the story of his being called away from lunch, and of his failure to elicit any helpful suggestions from Spotswoode. He also informed Heath of his verification of the man's statements regarding his movements after meeting Judge Redfern at the club.

"And," added Markham, "since he obviously left the girl before she was murdered, there's no necessity to bother him. In fact, I gave him my word I'd keep him out of it for his family's sake."

"If you're satisfied, sir, I am." Heath closed his notebook and put it away. "There's just one other little thing. Odell used to live on 110th Street, and Emery dug up her former landlady and learned that this fancy guy the maid told us about used to call on her regularly."

"That reminds me, Sergeant." Markham picked up the memorandum he had made during Inspector Brenner's phone call. "Here's some data the Professor gave me about the forcing of the jewel case."

Heath studied the paper with considerable eagerness. "Just as I thought!" He nodded his head with satisfaction. "Clear-cut professional job, by somebody who's been in the line of work before."

Vance roused himself. "Still, if such is the case," he said, "why did this experienced burglar first use the insufficient poker? And why did he overlook the living room clothes press?"

"I'll find all that out, Mr. Vance, when I get my hands on him," asserted Heath, with a hard look in his eyes. "And the guy I want to have a nice quiet little chat with is the one with the pleated silk shirt and the chamois gloves."

"Chacun à son goût," sighed Vance. "For myself, I have no yearning whatever to hold converse with him. Somehow, I can't just picture a professional looter trying to rend a steel box with a cast iron poker."

"Forget the poker," Heath advised gruffly. "He jimmied the box with a steel chisel; and that same chisel was used last summer in another burglary on Park Avenue. What about *that*?"

"Ah! That's what torments me, Sergeant. If it wasn't for that disturbin' fact, d' ye see, I'd be lightsome and *sans souci* this afternoon, inviting my soul over a dish of tea at Claremont."

Detective Bellamy was announced, and Heath sprang to his feet. "That'll mean news about those fingerprints," he prophesied hopefully.

Bellamy entered unemotionally and walked up to the district attorney's desk.

"Cap'n Dubois sent me over," he said. "He thought you'd want the report on those Odell prints." He reached into his pocket and drew out a small flat folder which, at a sign from Markham, he handed to Heath. "We identified 'em. Both made by the same hand, like Cap'n Dubois said: and that hand belonged to Tony Skeel."

"'Dude' Skeel, eh?" The sergeant's tone was vibrant with suppressed excitement. "Say, Mr. Markham, that gets us somewhere. Skeel's an ex-convict and an artist in his line."

He opened the folder and took out an oblong card and a sheet of blue paper containing eight or ten lines of typewriting. He studied the card, gave a satisfied grunt, and handed it to Markham. Vance and I stepped up and looked at it. At the top was the familiar rogues' gallery photograph showing the full face and profile of a regular-featured youth with thick hair and a square chin. His eyes were wide-set and pale, and he wore a small, evenly trimmed moustache with waxed, needlepoint ends. Below the double photograph was a brief tabulated description of its sitter, giving his name, aliases, residence, and Bertillon measurements, and designating the character of his illegal profession. Underneath were ten little squares arranged in two rows, each containing a fingerprint impress made in black ink—the upper row being the impressions of the right hand, the lower row those of the left.

"So that's the *arbiter elegantiarum* who introduced the silk shirt for full-dress wear! My word!" Vance regarded the identification card satirically. "I wish he'd start a craze for gaiters with dinner jackets—these New York theaters are frightfully drafty in winter."

Heath put the card back in the folder and glanced over the typewritten paper that had accompanied it.

"He's our man, and no mistake, Mr. Markham. Listen to this: 'Tony (Dude) Skeel. Two years Elmira Reformatory, 1902 to 1904. One year in the Baltimore County jail for petit larceny, 1906. Three years in San Quentin for assault and robbery, 1908 to 1911. Arrested Chicago for housebreaking, 1912; case dismissed. Arrested and tried for burglary in Albany, 1913; no conviction. Served two years and eight months in Sing-Sing for housebreaking and burglary, 1914 to 1916.'" He folded the paper and put it, with the card, into his breast pocket. "Sweet little record."

"That dope what you wanted?" asked the imperturbable Bellamy.

"I'll say!" Heath was almost jovial.

Bellamy lingered expectantly with one eye on the district attorney; and Markham, as if suddenly remembering something, took out a box of cigars and held it out.

"Much obliged, sir," said Bellamy, helping himself to two Mi Favoritas; and putting them into his waistcoat pocket with great care, he went out.

"I'll use your phone now, if you don't mind, Mr. Markham," said Heath.

He called the Homicide Bureau.

"Look up Tony Skeel—Dude Skeel—pronto, and bring him in as soon as you find him," were his orders to Snitkin. "Get his address from the files and take Burke and Emery with you. If he's hopped it, send out a general alarm and have him picked up—some of the boys'll have a line on him. Lock him up without booking him, see? . . . And, listen. Search his room for burglar tools: he probably won't have any laying around, but I specially want a one-and-three-eighths-inch chisel with a nick in the blade. . . . I'll be at headquarters in half an hour."

He hung up the receiver and rubbed his hands together.

"Now we're sailing," he rejoiced.

Vance had gone to the window and stood staring down on the "Bridge of Sighs," his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Slowly he turned, and fixed Heath with a contemplative eye.

"It simply won't do, don't y' know," he asserted. "Your friend, the Dude may have ripped open that bally box, but his head isn't the right shape for the rest of last evening's performance."

Heath was contemptuous. "Not being a phrenologist, I'm going by the shape of his fingerprints."

"A woeful error in the technic of criminal approach, *sergente mio*," replied Vance dulcetly. "The question of culpability in this case isn't so simple as you imagine. It's deuced complicated. And this glass of fashion and mold of form whose portrait you're carryin' next to your heart has merely added to its intricacy."

## 10. A FORCED INTERVIEW

(Tuesday, September 11; 8 P.M.)

Markham dined at the Stuyvesant Club, as was his custom, and at his invitation Vance and I remained with him. He no doubt figured that our presence at the dinner table would act as a bulwark against the intrusion of casual acquaintances; for he was in no mood for the pleasantries of the curious. Rain had begun to fall late in the afternoon, and when dinner was over, it had turned into a steady downpour which threatened to last well into the night. Dinner over, the three of us sought a secluded corner of the lounge room, and settled ourselves for a protracted smoke.

We had been there less than a quarter of an hour when a slightly rotund man, with a heavy, florid face and thin gray hair, strolled up to us with a stealthy, self-assured gait, and wished Markham a jovial good evening. Though I had not met the newcomer I knew him to be Charles Cleaver.

"Got your note at the desk saying you wanted to see me." He spoke with a voice curiously gentle for a man of his size; but, for all its gentleness, there was in it a timbre of calculation and coldness.

Markham rose and, after shaking hands, introduced him to Vance and me—though, it seemed, Vance had known him slightly for some time. He took the chair Markham indicated, and, producing a Corona Corona, he carefully cut the end with a gold clipper attached to his heavy watch chain, rolled the cigar between his lips to dampen it and lighted it in closely cupped hands.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr. Cleaver," began Markham, "but, as you probably have read, a young woman by the name of Margaret Odell was murdered last night in her apartment in 71st Street. . . ."

He paused. He seemed to be considering just how he could best broach a subject so obviously delicate; and perhaps he hoped that Cleaver would volunteer the fact of his acquaintance with the girl. But not a muscle of the man's face moved; and, after a moment, Markham continued.

"In making inquiries into the young woman's life I learned that you, among others, were fairly well acquainted with her."

Again he paused. Cleaver lifted his eyebrows almost imperceptibly but said nothing.

"The fact is," went on Markham, a trifle annoyed by the other's deliberately circumspect attitude, "my report states that you were seen with her on many occasions during a period of nearly two years. Indeed, the only inference to be drawn from what I've learned is that you were more than casually interested in Miss Odell."

"Yes?" The query was as noncommittal as it was gentle.

"Yes," repeated Markham. "And I may add, Mr. Cleaver, that this is not the time for pretenses or suppressions. I am talking to you tonight, in large measure *ex officio*, because it occurred to me that you could give me some assistance in clearing the matter up. I think it only fair to say that a certain man is now under grave suspicion, and we hope to arrest him very soon. But, in any event, we will need help, and that is why I requested this little chat with you at the club."

"And how can I assist you?" Cleaver's face remained blank; only his lips moved as he put the question.

"Knowing this young woman as well as you did," explained Markham patiently, "you are no doubt in possession of some information—certain facts or confidences, let us say—which would throw light on her brutal, and apparently unexpected, murder."

Cleaver was silent for some time. His eyes had shifted to the wall before him, but otherwise his features remained set.

"I'm afraid I can't accommodate you," he said at length.

"Your attitude is not quite what might be expected in one whose conscience is entirely clear," returned Markham, with a show of resentment.

The man turned a mildly inquisitive gaze upon the district attorney.

"What has my knowing the girl to do with her being murdered? She didn't confide in me who her murderer was to be. She didn't even tell me that she knew anyone who intended to strangle her. If she'd known, she most likely could have avoided being murdered."

Vance was sitting close to me, a little removed from the others, and, leaning over, murmured in my ear *sotto voce*: "Markham's up against another lawyer—poor dear! . . . A crumplin' situation."

But however inauspiciously this interlocutory skirmish may have begun, it soon developed into a grim combat which ended in Cleaver's complete surrender. Markham, despite his suavity and graciousness, was an unrelenting and resourceful antagonist; and it was not long before he had forced from Cleaver some highly significant information.

In response to the man's ironically evasive rejoinder, he turned quickly and leaned forward.

"You're not on the witness stand in your own defense, Mr. Cleaver," he said sharply, "however much you appear to regard yourself as eligible for that position."

Cleaver glared back fixedly without replying; and Markham, his eyelids level, studied the man opposite, determined to decipher all he could from the other's phlegmatic countenance. But Cleaver was apparently just as determined that his *vis-à-vis* should decipher absolutely nothing; and the features that met Markham's scrutiny were as arid as a desert. At length Markham sank back in his chair.

"It doesn't matter particularly," he remarked indifferently, "whether you discuss the matter or not here in the club tonight. If you prefer to be brought to my office in the morning by a sheriff with a subpoena, I'll be only too glad to accommodate you."

"That's up to you," Cleaver told him hostilely.

"And what's printed in the newspapers about it will be up to the reporters," rejoined Markham. "I'll explain the situation to them and give them a verbatim report of the interview."

"But I've nothing to tell you." The other's tone was suddenly conciliatory; the idea of publicity was evidently highly distasteful to him.

"So you informed me before," said Markham coldly. "Therefore I wish you good evening."

He turned to Vance and me with the air of a man who had terminated an unpleasant episode.

Cleaver, however, made no move to go. He smoked thoughtfully for a minute or two; then he gave a short, hard laugh which did not even disturb the contours of his face.

"Oh, hell!" he grumbled, with forced good nature. "As you said, I'm not on the witness stand. . . . What do you want to know?"

"I've told you the situation." Markham's voice betrayed a curious irritation. "You know the sort of thing I want. How did this Odell girl live? Who were her intimates? Who would have been likely to want her out of the way? What enemies had she?—Anything that might lead us to an explanation of her death. . . . And incidentally," he added with tartness, "anything that'll eliminate yourself from any suspected participation, direct or indirect, in the affair."

Cleaver stiffened at these last words and started to protest indignantly. But immediately he changed his tactics. Smiling contemptuously, he took out a leather pocket case and, extracting a small folded paper, handed it to Markham.

"I can eliminate myself easily enough," he proclaimed, with easy confidence. "There's a speeding summons from Boonton, New Jersey. Note the date and the time: September the tenth—last night—at half past eleven. Was driving down to Hopatcong, and was ticketed by a motorcycle cop just as I had passed Boonton and was heading for Mountain Lakes. Got to appear in court there tomorrow morning. Damn nuisance, these country constables." He gave Markham a long, calculating look. "You couldn't square it for me, could you? It's a rotten ride to Jersey, and I've got a lot to do tomorrow."

Markham, who had inspected the summons casually, put it in his pocket.

"I'll attend to it for you," he promised, smiling amiably. "Now tell me what you know."

Cleaver puffed meditatively on his cigar. Then, leaning back and crossing his knees, he spoke with apparent candor.

"I doubt if I know much that'll help you. . . . I liked the Canary, as she was called—in fact, was pretty much attached to her at one time. Did a number of foolish things; wrote her a lot of damn-fool letters when I went to Cuba last year. Even had my picture taken with her down at Atlantic City." He made a self-condemnatory grimace. "Then she began to get cool and distant; broke several appointments with me. I raised the devil with her, but the only answer I got was a demand for money. . . ."

He stopped and looked down at his cigar ash. A venomous hatred gleamed from his narrowed eyes, and the muscles of his jowls hardened.

"No use lying about it. She had those letters and things, and she touched me for a neat little sum before I got 'em back. . . ."

"When was this?"

There was a momentary hesitation. "Last June," Cleaver replied. Then he hurried on: "Mr. Markham"—his voice was bitter—"I don't want to throw mud on a dead person; but that woman was the shrewdest, coldest-blooded blackmailer it's ever been my misfortune to meet. And I'll say this, too: I wasn't the only easy mark she squeezed. She had others on her string. . . . I happen to know she once dug into old Louey Mannix for a plenty—he told me about it."

"Could you give me the names of any of these other men?" asked Markham, attempting to dissemble his eagerness. "I've already heard of the Mannix episode."

"No, I couldn't." Cleaver spoke regretfully. "I've seen the Canary here and there with different men; and there's one in particular I've noticed lately. But they were all strangers to me."

"I suppose the Mannix affair is dead and buried by this time?"

"Yes—ancient history. You won't get any line on the situation from that angle. But there are others—more recent than Mannix—who might bear looking into, if you could find them. I'm easygoing myself; take things as they come. But there's a lot of men who'd go red-headed if she did the things to them that she did to me."

Cleaver, despite his confession, did not strike me as easygoing, but rather as a cold, self-contained, nerveless person whose immobility was at all times dictated by policy and expediency.

Markham studied him closely.

"You think, then, her death may have been due to vengeance on the part of some disillusioned admirer?"

Cleaver carefully considered his answer. "Seems reasonable," he said finally. "She was riding for a fall."

There was a short silence; then Markham asked: "Do you happen to know of a young man she was interested in—good-looking, small, blond moustache, light blue eyes—named Skeel?"

Cleaver snorted derisively. "That wasn't the Canary's specialty—she let the young ones alone, as far as I know."

At this moment a pageboy approached Cleaver and bowed. "Sorry to disturb you, sir, but there's a phone call for your brother. Party said it was important and, as your brother isn't in the club now, the operator thought you might know where he'd gone."

"How would I know?" fumed Cleaver. "Don't ever bother me with his calls."

"Your brother in the city?" asked Markham casually. "I met him years ago. He's a San Franciscan, isn't he?"

"Yes—rabid Californian. He's visiting New York for a couple of weeks so he'll appreciate Frisco more when he gets back."

It seemed to me that this information was given reluctantly; and I got the impression that Cleaver, for some reason, was annoyed. But Markham, apparently, was too absorbed in the problem before him to take notice of the other's disgruntled air, for he reverted at once to the subject of the murder. "I happen to know one man who has been interested in the Odell woman recently; he may be the same one you've seen her with—tall, about forty-five, and wears a gray, closed-cropped moustache." (He was, I knew, describing Spotswoode.)

"That's the man," averred Cleaver. "Saw them together only last week at Mouquin's."

Markham was disappointed. "Unfortunately, he's checked off the list. . . . But there must be somebody who was in the girl's confidence. You're sure you couldn't cudgel your brains to my advantage?"

Cleaver appeared to think.

"If it's merely a question of someone who had her confidence," he said, "I might suggest Doctor Lindquist—first name's Ambrose, I think; and he lives somewhere in the Forties near Lexington Avenue. But I don't know that he'd be of any value to you. Still, he was pretty close to her at one time."

"You mean that this Doctor Lindquist might have been interested in her otherwise than professionally?"

"I wouldn't like to say." Cleaver smoked for a while as if inwardly debating the situation. "Anyway, here are the facts: Lindquist is

one of these exclusive society specialists—a neurologist he calls himself—and I believe he's the head of a private sanitarium of some kind for nervous women. He must have money, and, of course, his social standing is a vital asset to him—just the sort of man the Canary might have selected as a source of income. And I know this: he came to see her a good deal oftener than a doctor of his type would be apt to. I ran into him one night at her apartment, and when she introduced us, he wasn't even civil."

"It will at least bear looking into," replied Markham unenthusiastically. "You've no one else in mind who might know something helpful?"

Cleaver shook his head.

"No—no one."

"And she never mentioned anything to you that indicated she was in fear of anyone, or anticipated trouble?"

"Not a word. Fact is, I was bowled over by the news. I never read any paper but the morning *Herald*—except, of course, *The Daily Racing Form* at night. And as there was no account of the murder in this morning's paper, I didn't hear about it until just before dinner. The boys in the billiard room were talking about it, and I went out and looked at an afternoon paper. If it hadn't been for that, I might not have known of it till tomorrow morning."

Markham discussed the case with him until half past eight but could elicit no further suggestions. Finally Cleaver rose to go.

"Sorry I couldn't give you more help," he said. His rubicund face was beaming now, and he shook hands with Markham in the friendliest fashion.

"You wangled that viscid old sport rather cleverly, don't y' know," remarked Vance, when Cleaver had gone. "But there's something deuced queer about him. The transition from his gambler's glassy stare to his garrulous confidences was too sudden—suspiciously sudden, in fact. I may be evil-minded, but he didn't impress me as a luminous pillar of truth. Maybe it's because I don't like those cold, boiled eyes of his—somehow they didn't harmonize with his gushing imitation of openhearted frankness."

"We can allow him something for his embarrassing position," suggested Markham charitably. "It isn't exactly pleasant to admit having been taken in and blackmailed by a charmer."

"Still, if he got his letters back in June, why did he continue paying court to the lady? Heath reported he was active in that sector right up to the end."

"He may be the complete amorist," smiled Markham.

"Some like Abra, what?—

'Abra was ready ere I call'd her name;

And, though I call'd another, Abra came.'

Maybe—yes. He might qualify as a modern Cayley Drummle."

"At any rate, he gave us, in Doctor Lindquist, a possible source of information."

"Quite so," agreed Vance. "And that's about the only point of his whole passionate unfoldment that I particularly put any stock in, because it was the only point he indicated with any decent reticence. . . . My advice is that you interview this Aesculapius of the fair sex without further delay."

"I'm dog-tired," objected Markham. "Let it wait till tomorrow."

Vance glanced at the great clock over the stone mantel.

"It's latish, I'll admit, but why not, as Pittacus advised, seize time by the forelock?"

'Who lets slip fortune, her shall never find:

Occasion once past by, is a bald behind.'

But the elder Cato anticipated Cowley. In his 'Disticha de Moribus' he wrote: *Fronte capillata—*"

"Come!" pleaded Markham, rising. "Anything to dam this flow of erudition."

## 11. SEEKING INFORMATION

(Tuesday September 11; 9 P.M.)

Ten minutes later we were ringing the bell of a stately old brownstone house in East 44th Street.

A resplendently caparisoned butler opened the door, and Markham presented his card.

"Take this to the doctor at once and say that it's urgent."

"The doctor is just finishing dinner," the stately seneschal informed him, and conducted us into a richly furnished reception room, with deep, comfortable chairs, silken draperies, and subdued lights.

"A typical gynecologist's seraglio," observed Vance, looking around. "I'm sure the pasha himself is a majestic and elegant personage."

The prediction proved true. Doctor Lindquist entered the room a moment later inspecting the district attorney's card as if it had been a cuneiform inscription whose import he could not quite decipher. He was a tall man in his late forties, with bushy hair and eyebrows, and a complexion abnormally pale. His face was long, and, despite the asymmetry of his features, he might easily have been called handsome. He was in dinner clothes, and he carried himself with the self-conscious precision of a man unduly impressed with his own importance. He seated himself at a kidney-shaped desk of carved mahogany and lifted his eyes with polite inquiry to Markham.

"To what am I indebted for the honor of this call?" he asked in a studiously melodious voice, lingering over each word caressingly. "You are most fortunate to have found me in," he added, before Markham could speak. "I confer with patients only by appointment." One felt that he experienced a certain humiliation at having received us without elaborate ceremonial preliminaries.

Markham, whose nature was opposed to all circumlocution and pretense, came direct to the point.

"This isn't a professional consultation, Doctor; but it happens that I want to speak to you about one of your former patients—a Miss Margaret Odell."

Doctor Lindquist regarded the gold paperweight before him with vacantly reminiscent eyes.

"Ah, yes. Miss Odell. I was just reading of her violent end. A most unfortunate and tragic affair. . . . In just what way can I be of service to you?—You understand, of course, that the relationship between a physician and his patient is one of sacred confidence—"

"I understand that thoroughly," Markham assured him abruptly. "On the other hand, it is the sacred duty of every citizen to assist the authorities in bringing a murderer to justice. And if there is anything you can tell me which will help toward that end, I shall certainly expect you to tell me."

The doctor raised his hand slightly in polite protestation. "I shall, of course, do all I can to assist you, if you will but indicate your desires."

"There's no need to beat about the bush, Doctor," said Markham. "I know that Miss Odell was a patient of yours for a long time; and I realize that it is highly possible, not to say probable, that she told you certain personal things which may have direct bearing on her death."

"But, my dear Mr.—," Doctor Lindquist glanced ostentatiously at the card, "ah—Markham, my relations with Miss Odell were of a purely professional character."

"I had understood, however," ventured Markham, "that, while what you say may be technically true, nevertheless there was an informality, let me say, in that relationship. Perhaps I may state it better by saying that your professional attitude transcended a merely scientific interest in her case."

I heard Vance chuckle softly; and I myself could hardly suppress a smile at Markham's verbose and orbicular accusation. But Doctor Lindquist, it seemed, was in no wise disconcerted. Assuming an air of beguiling pensiveness, he said: "I will confess, in the interests of strict accuracy, that during my somewhat protracted treatment of her case, I came to regard the young woman with a certain—shall I say, fatherly liking? But I doubt if she was even aware of this mild sentiment on my part."

The corners of Vance's mouth twitched slightly. He was sitting with drowsy eyes, watching the doctor with a look of studious amusement.

"And she never at any time told you of any private or personal affairs that were causing her anxiety?" persisted Markham.

Doctor Lindquist pyramided his fingers, and appeared to give the question his undivided thought.

"No, I can't recall a single statement of that nature." His words were measured and urbane. "I know, naturally, in a general way, her manner of living; but the details, you will readily perceive, were wholly outside my province as a medical consultant. The disorganization of her nerves was due—so my diagnosis led me to conclude—to late hours, excitement, irregular and rich eating—what, I believe, is referred to vulgarly as going the pace. The modern woman, in this febrile age, sir—"

"When did you see her last, may I ask?" Markham interrupted impatiently.

The doctor made a pantomime of eloquent surprise.

"When did I see her last? . . . Let me see." He could, apparently, recall the occasion only with considerable difficulty. "A fortnight ago, perhaps—though it may have been longer. I really can't recall. . . . Shall I refer to my files?"

"That won't be necessary," said Markham. He paused and regarded the doctor with a look of disarming affability. "And was this last visit a paternal or merely a professional one?"

"Professional, of course." Doctor Lindquist's eyes were impassive and only mildly interested; but his face, I felt, was by no means the unedited reflection of his thoughts.

"Did the meeting take place here or at her apartment?"

"I believe I called on her at her home."

"You called on her a great deal, Doctor—so I am informed—and at rather unconventional hours. . . . Is this entirely in accord with your practice of seeing patients only by appointment?"



Markham's tone was pleasant; but from the nature of his question I knew that he was decidedly irritated by the man's bland hypocrisy, and felt that he was deliberately withholding relevant information.

Before Doctor Lindquist could reply, however, the butler appeared at the door and silently indicated an extension telephone on a taboret beside the desk. With an unctuously murmured apology, the doctor turned and lifted the receiver.

Vance took advantage of this opportunity to scribble something on a piece of paper and pass it surreptitiously to Markham.

His call completed, Doctor Lindquist drew himself up haughtily and faced Markham with chilling scorn.

"Is it the function of the district attorney," he asked distantly, "to harass respectable physicians with insulting questions? I did not know that it was illegal—or even original, for that matter—for a doctor to visit his patients."

"I am not discussing *now*"—Markham emphasized the adverb—"your infractions of the law; but since you suggest a possibility which, I assure you, was not in my mind, would you be good enough to tell me—merely as a matter of form—where you were last night between eleven and twelve?"

The question produced a startling effect. Doctor Lindquist became suddenly like a tautly drawn rope, and rising slowly and stiffly, he glared, with cold intense venom, at the district attorney. His velvety mask had fallen off; and I detected another emotion beneath his repressed anger: his expression cloaked a fear, and his wrath but partly veiled a passionate uncertainty.

"My whereabouts last night is no concern of yours." He spoke with great effort, his breath coming and going noisily.

Markham waited, apparently unmoved, his eyes riveted on the trembling man before him. This calm scrutiny completely broke down the other's self-control.

"What do you mean by forcing yourself in here with your contemptible insinuations?" he shouted. His face, now livid and mottled, was hideously contorted; his hands made spasmodic movements; and his whole body shook as with a tremor. "Get out of here—you and your two myrmidons! Get out, before I have you thrown out!"

Markham, himself enraged now, was about to reply, when Vance took him by the arm.

"The doctor is gently hinting that we go," he said. And with amazing swiftness he spun Markham round and led him firmly out of the room.

When we were again in the taxicab on our way back to the club, Vance sniggered gaily. "A sweet specimen, that! Paranoia. Or, more likely, manic-depressive insanity—the *folie circulaire* type: recurring periods of maniacal excitement alternating with periods of the clearest sanity, don't y' know. Anyway, the doctor's disorder belongs in the category of psychoses—associated with the maturation or waning of the sexual instinct. He's just the right age, too. Neurotic degenerate—that's what this oily Hippocrates is. In another minute he would have attacked you. . . . My word! It's a good thing I came to the rescue. Such chaps are about as safe as rattlesnakes."

He shook his head in a mock discouragement.

"Really, y' know, Markham, old thing," he added, "you should study the cranial indications of your fellow man more carefully—*vultus est index animi*. Did you, by any chance, note the gentleman's wide rectangular forehead, his irregular eyebrows, and pale luminous eyes, and his outstanding ears with their thin upper rims, their pointed tragi and split lobes? . . . A clever devil, this Ambrose—but a moral imbecile. Beware of those pseudopyriform faces, Markham; leave their Apollonian Greek suggestiveness to misunderstood women."

"I wonder what he really knows?" grumbled Markham irritably.

"Oh, he knows something—rest assured of that! And if only we knew it, too, we'd be considerably further along in the investigation. Furthermore, the information he is hiding is somewhat unpleasantly connected with himself. His euphoria is a bit shaken. He frightfully overdid the grand manner; his valedict'ry fulmination was the true expression of his feeling toward us."

"Yes," agreed Markham. "That question about last night acted like a petard. What prompted you to suggest my asking it?"

"A number of things—his gratuitous and obviously mendacious statement that he had just read of the murder; his wholly insincere homily on the sacredness of professional confidences; the cautious and Pecksniffian confession of his fatherly regard for the girl; his elaborate struggle to remember when he had last seen her—this particularly, I think, made me suspicious; and then, the psychopathic indicants of his physiognomy."

"Well," admitted Markham, "the question had its effect. . . . I feel that I shall see this fashionable M.D. again."

"You will," iterated Vance. "We took him unawares. But when he has had time to ponder the matter and concoct an appealin' tale, he'll become downright garrulous. . . . Anyhow, the evening is over, and you can meditate on buttercups till the morrow."

But the evening was not quite over as far as the Odell case was concerned. We had been back in the lounge room of the club but a short time when a man walked by the corner in which we sat, and bowed with formal courtesy to Markham. Markham, to my surprise, rose and greeted him, at the same time indicating a chair.

"There's something further I wanted to ask you, Mr. Spotswoode," he said, "if you can spare a moment."

At the mention of the name I regarded the man closely, for, I confess, I was not a little curious about the anonymous escort who had taken the girl to dinner and the theater the night before. Spotswoode was a typical New England aristocrat, inflexible, slow in his movements, reserved, and quietly but modishly dressed. His hair and moustache were slightly gray—which, no doubt, enhanced the pinkness of his complexion. He was just under six feet tall and well proportioned, but a trifle angular.

Markham introduced him to Vance and me, and briefly explained that we were working with him on the case and that he had thought it best to take us fully into his confidence.

Spotswoode gave him a dubious look but immediately bowed his acceptance of the decision.

"I'm in your hands, Mr. Markham," he replied, in a well-bred but somewhat high-pitched voice, "and I concur, of course, with whatever you think advisable." He turned to Vance with an apologetic smile. "I'm in a rather unpleasant position and naturally feel a little sensitive about it."

"I'm something of an antinomian," Vance pleasantly informed him. "At any rate, I'm not a moralist; so my attitude in the matter is quite academic."

Spotswoode laughed softly. "I wish my family held a similar point of view; but I'm afraid they would not be so tolerant of my foibles."



"It's only fair to tell you, Mr. Spotswoode," interposed Markham, "that there is a bare possibility I may have to call you as a witness."

The man looked up quickly, his face clouding over, but he made no comment.

"The fact is," continued Markham, "we are about to make an arrest, and your testimony may be needed to establish the time of Miss Odell's return to her apartment, and also to substantiate the fact that there was presumably someone in her room after you had left. Her screams and calls for help, which you heard, may prove vital evidence in obtaining a conviction."

Spotswoode seemed rather appalled at the thought of his relations with the girl becoming public, and for several minutes he sat with averted eyes.

"I see your point," he acknowledged at length. "But it would be a terrible thing for me if the fact of my delinquencies became known."

"That contingency may be entirely avoided," Markham encouraged him. "I promise you that you will not be called upon unless it is absolutely necessary. . . . And now, what I especially wanted to ask you is this: do you happen to know a Doctor Lindquist, who, I understand, was Miss Odell's personal physician?"

Spotswoode was frankly puzzled. "I never heard the name," he answered. "In fact, Miss Odell never mentioned any doctor to me."

"And did you ever hear her mention the name of Skeel . . . or refer to any one as Tony?"

"Never." His answer was emphatic.

Markham lapsed into a disappointed silence. Spotswoode, too, was silent; he sat as if in a reverie.

"You know, Mr. Markham," he said, after several minutes, "I ought to be ashamed to admit it, but the truth is I cared a good deal for the girl. I suppose you've kept her apartment intact. . . ." He hesitated, and a look almost of appeal came into his eyes. "I'd like to see it again if I could."

Markham regarded him sympathetically but finally shook his head.

"It wouldn't do. You'd be sure to be recognized by the operator—or there might be a reporter about—and then I'd be unable to keep you out of the case."

The man appeared disappointed but did not protest; and for several minutes no one spoke. Then Vance raised himself slightly in his chair.

"I say, Mr. Spotswoode, do you happen to remember anything unusual occurring last night during the half hour you remained with Miss Odell after the theater?"

"Unusual?" the man's manner was eloquent of his astonishment. "To the contrary. We chatted awhile, and then, as she seemed tired, I said good night and came away, making a luncheon appointment with her for today."

"And yet, it now seems fairly certain that some other man was hiding in the apartment when you were there."

"There's little doubt on that point," agreed Spotswoode, with the suggestion of a shudder. "And her screams would seem to indicate that he came forth from hiding a few minutes after I went."

"And you had no suspicion of the fact when you heard her call for help?"

"I did at first—naturally. But when she assured me that nothing was the matter, and told me to go home, I attributed her screams to a nightmare. I knew she had been tired, and I had left her in the wicker chair near the door, from where her screams seemed to come; so I naturally concluded she had dozed off and called out in her sleep. . . . If only I hadn't taken so much for granted!"

"It's a harrowin' situation." Vance was silent for a while; then he asked: "Did you, by any chance, notice the door of the living room closet? Was it open or closed?"

Spotswoode frowned, as if attempting to visualize the picture; but the result was a failure.

"I suppose it was closed. I probably would have noticed it if it had been open."

"Then, you couldn't say if the key was in the lock or not?"

"Good Lord, no! I don't even know if it ever had a key."

The case was discussed for another half hour; then Spotswoode excused himself and left us.

"Funny thing," ruminated Markham, "how a man of his upbringing could be so attracted by the empty-headed, butterfly type."

"I'd say it was quite natural," returned Vance. . . . "You're such an incorrigible moralist, Markham."

## 12. CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

(Wednesday, September 12; 9 A.M.)

The following day, which was Wednesday, not only brought forth an important and, as it appeared, conclusive development in the Odell case but marked the beginning of Vance's active cooperation in the proceedings. The psychological elements in the case had appealed to him irresistibly, and he felt, even at this stage of the investigation, that a final answer could never be obtained along the usual police lines. At his request Markham had called for him at a little before nine o'clock, and we had driven direct to the district attorney's office.

Heath was waiting impatiently when we arrived. His eager and covertly triumphant expression plainly indicated good news.

"Things are breaking fine and dandy," he announced, when we had sat down. He himself was too elated to relax, and stood between Markham's desk rolling a large black cigar between his fingers. "We got the Dude—six o'clock yesterday evening—and we got him right. One of the C. O. boys, named Riley, who was patrolling Sixth Avenue in the Thirties, saw him swing off a surface car and head for McAnerny's Pawn Shop. Right away Riley wigwags the traffic officer on the corner and follows the Dude into McAnerny's. Pretty soon the traffic officer comes in with a patrolman, who he's picked up; and the three of 'em nab our stylish friend in the act of pawning this ring."

He tossed a square solitaire diamond in a filigreed platinum setting on the district attorney's desk.

"I was at the office when they brought him in, and I sent Snitkin with the ring up to Harlem to see what the maid had to say about it, and she identified it as belonging to Odell."

"But, I say, it wasn't a part of the *bijouterie* the lady was wearing that night, was it, Sergeant?" Vance put the question casually.

Heath jerked about and eyed him with sullen calculation.

"What if it wasn't? It came out of that jimmied jewel case—or I'm Ben Hur."

"Of course it did," murmured Vance, lapsing into lethargy.

"And that's where we're in luck," declared Heath, turning back to Markham. "It connects Skeel directly with the murder and the robbery."

"What has Skeel to say about it?" Markham was leaning forward intently. "I suppose you questioned him."

"I'll say we did," replied the sergeant; but his tone was troubled. "We had him up all night giving him the works. And the story he tells is this: he says the girl gave him the ring a week ago, and that he didn't see her again until the afternoon of the day before yesterday. He came to her apartment between four and five—you remember the maid said she was out then—and entered and left the house by the side door, which was unlocked at that time. He admits he called again at half past nine that night, but he says that when he found she was out, he went straight home and stayed there. His alibi is that he sat up with his landlady till after midnight playing Khun Khan and drinking beer. I hopped up to his place this morning, and the old girl verified it. But that don't mean anything. The house he lives in is a pretty tough hangout, and this landlady, besides being a heavy boozier, has been up the river a coupla times for shoplifting."

"What does Skeel say about the fingerprints?"

"He says, of course, he made 'em when he was there in the afternoon."

"And the one on the closet doorknob?"

Heath gave a derisive grunt.

"He's got an answer for that, too—says he thought he heard someone coming in, and locked himself in the clothes closet. Didn't want to be seen and spoil any game Odell mighta been playing."

"Most considerate of him to keep out of the way of the *belles poires*," drawled Vance. "Touchin' loyalty, what?"

"You don't believe the rat, do you, Mr. Vance?" asked Heath, with indignant surprise.

"Can't say that I do. But our Antonio at least spins a consistent yarn."

"Too damn consistent to suit me," growled the sergeant.

"That's all you could get out of him?" It was plain that Markham was not pleased with the results of Heath's third degree of Skeel.

"That's about all, sir. He stuck to his story like a leech."

"You found no chisel in his room?"

Heath admitted that he hadn't. "But you couldn't expect him to keep it around," he added.

Markham pondered the facts for several minutes. "I can't see that we've got a very good case, however much we may be convinced of Skeel's guilt. His alibi may be thin, but taken in connection with the phone operator's testimony, I'm inclined to think it would hold tight in court."

"What about the ring, sir?" Heath was desperately disappointed. "And what about his threats, and his fingerprints, and his record of similar burglaries?"

"Contributory factors only," Markham explained. "What we need for a murder is more than a *prima facie* case. A good criminal lawyer could have him discharged in twenty minutes, even if I could secure an indictment. It's not impossible, you know, that the woman gave him the ring a week ago—you recall that the maid said he was demanding money from her about that time. And there's nothing to show that the fingerprints were not actually made late Monday afternoon. Moreover, we can't connect him in any way with the chisel, for we don't know who did the Park Avenue job last summer. His whole story fits the facts perfectly; and we haven't anything contradictory to offer."

Heath shrugged helplessly; all the wind had been taken out of his sails.

"What do you want done with him?" he asked desolately.

Markham considered—he, too, was discomfited.

"Before I answer, I think I'll have a go at him myself."

He pressed a buzzer and ordered a clerk to fill out the necessary requisition. When it had been signed in duplicate, he sent Swacker with it to Ben Hanlon.

"Do ask him about those silk shirts," suggested Vance. "And find out, if you can, if he considers a white waistcoat *de rigueur* with a dinner jacket."

"This office isn't a male millinery shop," snapped Markham.

"But, Markham dear, you won't learn anything else from this Petronius."

Ten minutes later a deputy sheriff from the Tombs entered with his handcuffed prisoner.

Skeel's appearance that morning belied his sobriquet of "Dude." He was haggard and pale; his ordeal of the previous night had left its imprint upon him. He was unshaven; his hair was uncombed; the ends of his moustache drooped; and his cravat was awry. But despite his bedraggled condition, his manner was jaunty and contemptuous. He gave Heath a defiant leer and faced the district attorney with swaggering indifference.

To Markham's questions he doggedly repeated the same story he had told Heath. He clung tenaciously to every detail of it with the ready accuracy of a man who had painstakingly memorized a lesson and was thoroughly familiar with it. Markham coaxed, threatened, bullied. All hint of his usual affability was gone; he was like an inexorable dynamic machine. But Skeel, whose nerves seemed to be made of iron, withstood the vicious fire of his cross-questioning without wincing; and, I confess, his resistance somewhat aroused my admiration despite my revulsion toward him and all he stood for.

After half an hour Markham gave up, completely baffled in his efforts to elicit any damaging admissions from the man. He was about to dismiss him when Vance rose languidly and strolled to the district attorney's desk. Seating himself on the edge of it, he regarded Skeel with impersonal curiosity.

"So you're a devotee of Khun Khan, eh?" he remarked indifferently. "Silly game, what? More interestin' than Conquain or Rum, though. Used to be played in the London clubs. Of East Indian origin, I believe. . . . You still play it with two decks, I suppose, and permit round-the-corner mating?"

An involuntary frown gathered on Skeel's forehead. He was used to violent district attorneys and familiar with the bludgeoning methods of the police, but here was a type of inquisitor entirely new to him; and it was plain that he was both puzzled and apprehensive. He decided to meet this novel antagonist with a smirk of arrogant amusement.

"By the bye," continued Vance, with no change in tone, "can anyone hidden in the clothes press of the Odell living room see the davenport through the keyhole?"

Suddenly all trace of a smile was erased from the man's features.

"And I say," Vance hurried on, his eyes fixed steadily on the other, "why didn't you give the alarm?"

I was watching Skeel closely, and though his set expression did not alter, I saw the pupils of his eyes dilate. Markham, also, I think, noted this phenomenon.

"Don't bother to answer," pursued Vance, as the man opened his lips to speak. "But tell me: didn't the sight shake you up a bit?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Skeel retorted with sullen impertinence. But, for all his sangfroid, one sensed an uneasiness in his manner. There was an overtone of effort in his desire to appear indifferent, which robbed his words of complete conviction.

"Not a pleasant situation, that," Vance ignored his retort. "How did you feel, crouching there in the dark, when the closet doorknob was turned and someone tried to get in?" His eyes were boring into the man, though his voice retained its casual intonation.

The muscles of Skeel's face tightened, but he did not speak.

"Lucky thing you took the precaution of locking yourself in—eh, what?" Vance went on. "Suppose he'd got the door open—my word! Then what? . . ."

He paused and smiled with a kind of silky sweetness which was more impressive than any glowering aggression.

"I say, did you have your steel chisel ready for him? Maybe he'd have been too quick and strong for you—maybe there would have been thumbs pressing against your larynx, too, before you could have struck him—eh? . . . Did you think of that, there in the dark? . . . No, not precisely a pleasant situation. A bit gruesome, in fact."

"What are you raving about?" Skeel spat out insolently. "You're balmy." But his swagger had been forgotten, and a look akin to horror had passed across his face. This slackening of pose was momentary, however; almost at once his smirk returned, and his head swayed in contempt.

Vance sauntered back to his chair and stretched himself in it listlessly, as if all his interest in the case had again evaporated.

Markham had watched the little drama attentively, but Heath had sat smoking with ill-concealed annoyance. The silence that followed was broken by Skeel.

"Well, I suppose I'm to be railroaded. Got it all planned, have you? . . . Try and railroad me!" He laughed harshly. "My lawyer's Abe Rubin, and you might phone him that I'd like to see him."<sup>[13]</sup>

Markham, with a gesture of annoyance, waved to the deputy sheriff to take Skeel back to the Tombs.

"What were you trying to get at?" he asked Vance when the man was gone.

"Just an elusive notion in the depths of my being struggling for the light." Vance smoked placidly a moment. "I thought Mr. Skeel might be persuaded to pour out his heart to us. So I wooed him with words."

"That's just bully," gibed Heath. "I was expecting you any minute to ask him if he played mumbly-peg or if his grandmother was a hootowl."

"Sergeant, dear Sergeant," pleaded Vance, "don't be unkind. I simply couldn't endure it. . . . And really, now, didn't my chat with Mr. Skeel suggest a possibility to you?"

"Sure," said Heath, "that he was hiding in the closet when Odell was killed. But where does that get us? It lets Skeel out, although the job was a professional one, and he was caught red-handed with some of the swag."

He turned disgustedly to the district attorney.

"And now what, sir?"

"I don't like the look of things," Markham complained. "If Skeel has Abe Rubin to defend him, we won't stand a chance with the case we've got. I feel convinced he was mixed up in it; but no judge will accept my personal feelings as evidence."

"We could turn the Dude loose and have him tailed," suggested Heath grudgingly. "We might catch him doing something that'll give the game away."

Markham considered.

"That might be a good plan," he acceded. "We'll certainly get no more evidence on him as long as he's locked up."

"It looks like our only chance, sir."

"Very well," agreed Markham. "Let him think we're through with him; he may get careless. I'll leave the whole thing to you, Sergeant. Keep a couple of good men on him day and night. Something may happen."

Heath rose, an unhappy man. "Right, sir. I'll attend to it."

"And I'd like to have more data on Charles Cleaver," added Markham. "Find out what you can of his relations with the Odell girl. Also, get me a line on Doctor Ambrose Lindquist. What's his history? What are his habits? You know the kind of thing. He treated the girl for some mysterious or imaginary ailment; and I think he has something up his sleeve. But don't go near him personally—yet."

Heath jotted the name down in his notebook, without enthusiasm.

"And before you set your stylish captive free," put in Vance, yawning, "you might, don't y' know, see if he carries a key that fits the Odell apartment."

Heath jerked up short and grinned. "Now, that idea's got some sense to it. . . . Funny I didn't think of it myself." And, shaking hands with all of us, he went out.

### 13. AN ERSTWHILE GALLANT

(Wednesday, September 12; 10:30 A.M.)

Swacker was evidently waiting for an opportunity to interrupt, for, when Sergeant Heath had passed through the door, he at once stepped into the room.

"The reporters are here, sir," he announced, with a wry face. "You said you'd see them at ten thirty."

In response to a nod from his chief, he held open the door, and a dozen or more newspaper men came trooping in.

"No questions, please, this morning," Markham begged pleasantly. "It's too early in the game. But I'll tell you all I know. . . . I agree with Sergeant Heath that the Odell murder was the work of a professional criminal—the same who broke into Arnheim's house on Park Avenue last summer."

Briefly he told of Inspector Brenner's findings in connection with the chisel. "We've made no arrest, but one may be expected in the very near future. In fact, the police have the case well in hand but are going carefully in order to avoid any chance of an acquittal. We've already recovered some of the missing jewelry. . . ."

He talked to the reporters for five minutes or so, but he made no mention of the testimony of the maid or the phone operators, and carefully avoided the mention of any names.

When we were again alone, Vance chuckled admiringly.

"A masterly evasion, my dear Markham! Legal training has its advantages—decidedly it has its advantages. . . . 'We've recovered some of the missing jewelry!' Sweet winged words! Not an untruth—oh, no!—but how deceivin'! Really, y' know, I must devote more time to the caressin' art of *suggestio falsi* and *suppressio veri*. You should be crowned with an anadem of myrtle."

"Leaving all that to one side," Markham rejoined impatiently, "suppose you tell me, now that Heath's gone, what was in your mind when you applied your verbal voodooism to Skeel. What was all the conjurer-talk about dark closets, and alarums, and pressing thumbs, and peering through keyholes?"

"Well, now, I didn't think my little chit-chat was so cryptic," answered Vance. "The *recherché* Tony was undoubtedly ambuscaded à la *sourdine* in the clothes press at some time during the fatal evening; and I was merely striving, in my amateurish way, to ascertain the exact hour of his concealment."

"And did you?"

"Not conclusively," Vance shook his head sadly. "Y' know, Markham, I'm the proud possessor of a theory—it's vague and obscure and unsubstantial; and it's downright unintelligible. And even if it were verified, I can't see how it would help us any, for it would leave the situation even more incomprehensible than it already is. . . . I almost wish I hadn't questioned Heath's Beau Nash. He upset my ideas frightfully."

"From what I could gather, you seem to think it possible that Skeel witnessed the murder. That couldn't, by any stretch of the imagination, be your precious theory?"

"That's part of it, anyway."

"My dear Vance, you do astonish me!" Markham laughed outright. "Skeel, then, according to you, is innocent; but he keeps his knowledge to himself, invents an alibi, and doesn't even tattle when he's arrested. . . . It won't hold water."

"I know," sighed Vance. "It's a veritable sieve. And yet, the notion haunts me—it rides me like a hag—it eats into my vitals."

"Do you realize that this mad theory of yours presupposes that, when Spotswoode and Miss Odell returned from the theater, there were *two* men hidden in the apartment—two men *unknown to each other*—namely Skeel and your hypothetical murderer?"

"Of course I realize it; and the thought of it is breaking down my reason."

"Furthermore, they must have entered the apartment separately and hidden separately. . . . How, may I ask, did they get in? And how did they get out? And which one caused the girl to scream after Spotswoode had left? And what was the other one doing in the meantime? And if Skeel was a passive spectator, horrified and mute, how do you account for his breaking open the jewel case and securing the ring—?"

"Stop! Stop! Don't torture me so," Vance pleaded. "I know I'm insane. Been given to hallucinations since birth; but—Merciful Heaven!—I've never before had one as crazy as this."

"On that point at least, my dear Vance, we are in complete and harmonious agreement," smiled Markham.

Just then Swacker came in and handed Markham a letter.

"Brought by messenger, and marked 'immediate,'" he explained.

The letter, written on heavy engraved stationery, was from Doctor Lindquist, and explained that between the hours of 11 P.M. and 1 A.M. on Monday night he had been in attendance on a patient at his sanitarium. It also apologized for his actions when asked regarding his whereabouts, and offered a wordy, but not particularly convincing, explanation of his conduct. He had had an unusually trying day, it seemed—neurotic cases were trying, at best—and the suddenness of our visit, together with the apparently hostile nature of Markham's questions, had completely upset him. He was more than sorry for his outburst, he said, and stood ready to assist in any way he could. It was unfortunate for all concerned, he added, that he had lost his temper, for it would have been a simple matter for him to explain about Monday night.

"He has thought the situation over calmly," said Vance, "and hereby offers you a neat little alibi which, I think, you will have difficulty in shaking. . . . An artful beggar—like all these unbalanced pseudopsychiatrists. Observe: he was with a patient. To be sure! What patient? Why, one too ill to be questioned. . . . There you are. A cul-de-sac masquerading as an alibi. Not bad, what?"

"It doesn't interest me overmuch," Markham put the letter away. "That pompous professional ass could never have got into the Odell apartment without having been seen; and I can't picture him sneaking in by devious means." He reached for some papers. . . . "And now, if you don't object, I'll make an effort to earn my \$15,000 salary."

But Vance, instead of making a move to go, sauntered to the table and opened a telephone directory.

"Permit me a suggestion, Markham," he said, after a moment's search. "Put off your daily grind for a bit, and let's hold polite converse with Mr. Louis Mannix. Y' know, he's the only presumptive swain of the inconstant Margaret, so far mentioned, who hasn't been given an audience. I hanker to gaze upon him and hearken to his rune. He'd make the family circle complete, so to speak. . . . He still holds forth in Maiden Lane, I see; and it wouldn't take long to fetch him here."

Markham had swung half round in his chair at the mention of Mannix's name. He started to protest, but he knew from experience that Vance's suggestions were not the results of idle whims; and he was silent for several moments weighing the matter. With practically every other avenue of inquiry closed for the moment, I think the idea of questioning Mannix rather appealed to him.

"All right," he consented, ringing for Swacker; "though I don't see how he can help. According to Heath, the Odell girl gave him his *cong  * a year ago."

"He may still have hay on his horns, or, like Hotspur, be drunk with choler. You can't tell." Vance resumed his chair. "With such a name, he'd bear investigation *ipso facto*."

Markham sent Swacker for Tracy; and when the latter arrived, suave and beaming, he was given instructions to take the district attorney's car and bring Mannix to the office.

"Get a subpoena," said Markham; "and use it if necessary."

Half an hour or so later Tracy returned.

"Mr. Mannix made no difficulty about coming," he reported. "Was quite agreeable, in fact. He's in the waiting room now."

Tracy was dismissed, and Mannix was ushered in.

He was a large man, and he walked with the forced elasticity of gait which epitomizes the silent struggle of incipiently corpulent middle age to deny the onrush of the years and cling to the semblance of youth. He carried a slender wanghee cane; and his checkered suit, brocaded waistcoat, pearl-gray gaiters, and gaily beribboned Homburg hat gave him an almost foppish appearance. But these various indications of sportiveness were at once forgotten when one inspected his features. His small eyes were bright and crafty; his nose was bibative, and appeared disproportionately small above his thick, sensual lips and prognathous jaw. There was an oiliness and shrewdness in the man's manner which were at once repulsive and arresting.

At a gesture from Markham he sat down on the edge of a chair, placing a podgy hand on each knee. His attitude was one of alert suspicion.

"Mr. Mannix," said Markham, an engaging note of apology in his voice, "I am sorry to have discommoded you; but the matter in hand is both serious and urgent. . . . A Miss Margaret Odell was murdered night before last, and in the course of inquiries we learned that you had at one time known her quite well. It occurred to me that you might be in possession of some facts about her that would assist us in our investigation."

A saponaceous smile, meant to be genial, parted the man's heavy lips.

"Sure, I knew the Canary—a long time ago, y' understand." He permitted himself a sigh. "A fine, high-class girl, if I do say so. A good looker and a good dresser. Too damn bad she didn't go on with the show business. But"—he made a repudiative motion with his hand—"I haven't seen the lady, y' understand, for over a year—not to speak to, if you know what I mean."

Mannix clearly was on his guard, and his beady little eyes did not once leave the district attorney's face.

"You had a quarrel with her perhaps?" Markham asked the question incuriously.

"Well, now, I wouldn't go so far as to say we quarreled. No." Mannix paused, seeking the correct word. "You might say we disagreed—got tired of the arrangement and decided to separate; kind of drifted apart. Last thing I told her was, if she ever needed a friend, she'd know where to find me."

"Very generous of you," murmured Markham. "And you never renewed your little affair?"

"Never—never. Don't remember ever speaking to her from that day to this."

"In view of certain things I've learned, Mr. Mannix"—Markham's tone was regretful—"I must ask you a somewhat personal question. Did she ever make an attempt to blackmail you?"

Mannix hesitated, and his eyes seemed to grow even smaller, like those of a man thinking rapidly.

"Certainly not!" he replied, with belated emphasis. "Not at all. Nothing of the kind." He raised both hands in protest against the thought. Then he asked furtively: "What gave you such an idea?"

"I have been told," explained Markham, "that she had extorted money from one or two of her admirers."

Mannix made a wholly unconvincing grimace of astonishment. "Well well! You don't tell me! Can it be possible?" He peered shrewdly at the district attorney. "Maybe it was Charlie Cleaver she blackmailed—yes?"

Markham picked him up quickly.

"Why do you say Cleaver?"

Again Mannix waved his thick hand, this time deprecatingly.

"No special reason, y' understand. Just thought it might be him. . . . No special reason."

"Did Cleaver ever tell you he'd been blackmailed?"

"Cleaver tell me? . . . Now, I ask you, Mr. Markham: why should Cleaver tell me such a story—why should he?"

"And you never told Cleaver that the Odell girl had blackmailed you?"

"Positively not!" Mannix gave a scornful laugh which was far too theatrical to have been genuine. "Me tell Cleaver I'd been blackmailed? Now, that's funny, that is."

"Then, why did you mention Cleaver a moment ago?"

"No reason at all—like I told you. . . . He knew the Canary; but that ain't no secret."

Markham dropped the subject. "What do you know about Miss Odell's relations with a Doctor Ambrose Lindquist?"

Mannix was now obviously perplexed. "Never heard of him—no, never. She didn't know him when I was taking her around."

"Whom else besides Cleaver did she know well?"

Mannix shook his head ponderously.

"Now, that I couldn't say—positively I couldn't say. Seen her with this man and that, same as everybody saw her; but who they were I don't know—absolutely."

"Ever hear of Tony Skeel?" Markham quickly leaned over and met the other's gaze inquiringly.

Once more Mannix hesitated, and his eyes glittered calculatingly. "Well, now that you ask me, I believe I did hear of the fellow. But I couldn't swear to it, y' understand. . . . What makes you think I heard of this Skeel fellow?"

Markham ignored the question.

"Can you think of no one who might have borne Miss Odell a grudge, or had cause to fear her?"

Mannix was volubly emphatic on the subject of his complete ignorance of any such person; and after a few more questions, which elicited only denials, Markham let him go.

"Not bad at all, Markham old thing—eh, what?" Vance seemed pleased with the conference. "Wonder why he's so coy? Not a nice person, this Mannix. And he's so fearful lest he be informative. Again, I wonder why. He was so careful—oh, so careful."

"He was sufficiently careful, at any rate, not to tell us anything," declared Markham gloomily.

"I shouldn't say that, don't y' know." Vance lay back and smoked placidly. "A ray of light filtered through here and there. Our fur-importing philogynist denied he'd been blackmailed—which was obviously untrue—and tried to make us believe that he and the lovely Margaret cooed like turtledoves at parting—Tosh! . . . And then, that mention of Cleaver. That wasn't spontaneous—dear me, no. Brother Mannix and spontaneity are as the poles apart. He had a reason for bringing Cleaver in; and I fancy that if you knew what that reason was, you'd feel like flinging roses riotously, and that sort of thing. Why Cleaver? That *secret-de-Polichinelle* explanation was a bit weak. The orbits of these two paramours cross somewhere. On that point, at least, Mannix inadvertently enlightened us. . . . Moreover, it's plain that he doesn't know our fashionable healer with the satyr ears. But, on the other hand, he's aware of the existence of Mr. Skeel, and would rather like to deny the acquaintance. . . . So—*voilà l'affaire*. Plenty of information; but—my word!—what to do with it?"

"I give it up," acknowledged Markham hopelessly.

"I know; it's a sad sad world," Vance commiserated him. "But you must face the olla podrida with a bright eye. It's time for lunch, and a fillet of sole *Marguéry* will cheer you no end."

Markham glanced at the clock and permitted himself to be led to the Lawyers Club.

## 14. VANCE OUTLINES A THEORY

(Wednesday, September 12; evening)

Vance and I did not return to the district attorney's office after lunch, for Markham had a busy afternoon before him, and nothing further was likely to transpire in connection with the Odell case until Sergeant Heath had completed his investigations of Cleaver and Doctor Lindquist. Vance had seats for Giordano's *Madame Sans-Gêne*, and two o'clock found us at the Metropolitan. Though the performance was excellent, Vance was too *distracted* to enjoy it; and it was significant that, after the opera, he directed the chauffeur to the Stuyvesant Club. I knew he had a tea appointment, and that he had planned to motor to Longue Vue for dinner; and the fact that he should have dismissed these social engagements from his mind in order to be with Markham showed how intensely the problem of the murder had absorbed his interest.

It was after six o'clock when Markham came in, looking harassed and tired. No mention of the case was made during dinner, with the exception of Markham's casual remark that Heath had turned in his reports on Cleaver and doctor Lindquist and Mannix. (It seemed that, immediately after lunch, he had telephoned to the sergeant to add Mannix's name to the two others as a subject for inquiry.) It was not until we had retired to our favorite corner of the lounge room that the topic of the murder was brought up for discussion.

And that discussion, brief and one-sided, was the beginning of an entirely new line of investigation—a line which, in the end, led to the guilty person.

Markham sank wearily into his chair. He had begun to show the strain of the last two days of fruitless worry. His eyes were a trifle heavy, and there was a grim tenacity in the lines of his mouth. Slowly and deliberately he lighted a cigar, and took several deep inhalations.

"Damn the newspapers!" he grumbled. "Why can't they let the district attorney's office handle its business in its own way? . . . Have you seen the afternoon papers? They're all clamoring for the murderer. You'd think I had him up my sleeve."

"You forget, my dear chap," grinned Vance, "that we are living under the benign and upliftin' reign of Democritus, which confers upon every ignoramus the privilege of promiscuously criticising his betters."

Markham snorted. "I don't complain about criticism; it's the lurid imagination of these bright young reporters that galls me. They're trying to turn this sordid crime into a spectacular Borgia melodrama, with passion running rampant, and mysterious influences at work, and all the pomp and trappings of a medieval romance. . . . You'd think even a schoolboy could see that it was only an ordinary robbery and murder of the kind that's taking place regularly throughout the country."

Vance paused in the act of lighting a cigarette, and his eyebrows lifted. Turning, he regarded Markham with a look of mild incredulity. "I say! Do you really mean to tell me that your statement for the press was given out in good faith?"

Markham looked up in surprise. "Certainly it was. . . . What do you mean by 'good faith'?"

Vance smiled indolently. "I rather thought, don't y' know, that your oration to the reporters was a bit of strategy to lull the real culprit into a state of false security, and to give you a clear field for investigation."

Markham contemplated him a moment.

"See here, Vance," he demanded irritably, "what are you driving at?"

"Nothing at all—really, old fellow," the other assured him affably. "I knew that Heath was deadly sincere about his belief in Skeel's guilt, but it never occurred to me, d' ye see, that you yourself actually regarded the crime as one committed by a professional burglar. I foolishly thought that you let Skeel go this morning in the hope that he would lead you somehow to the guilty person. I rather imagined you were spoofing the trusting sergeant by pretending to fall in with his silly notion."

"Ah, I see! Still clinging to your weird theory that a brace of villains were present, hiding in separate clothes closets, or something of the kind." Markham made no attempt to temper his sarcasm. "A sapient idea—so much more intelligent than Heath's!"

"I know it's weird. But it happens not to be any weirder than your theory of a lone yeggman."

"And for what reason, pray," persisted Markham, with considerable warmth, "do you consider the yeggman theory weird?"

"For the simple reason that it was not the crime of a professional thief at all, but the willfully deceptive act of a particularly clever man who doubtless spent weeks in its preparation."

Markham sank back in his chair and laughed heartily. "Vance, you have contributed the one ray of sunshine to an otherwise gloomy and depressing case."

Vance bowed with mock humility.

"It gives me great pleasure," was his dulcet rejoinder, "to be able to bring even a wisp of light into so clouded a mental atmosphere."

A brief silence followed. Then Markham asked, "Is this fascinating and picturesque conclusion of yours regarding the highly intellectual character of the Odell woman's murderer based on your new and original psychological methods of deduction?" There was no mistaking the ridicule in his voice.

"I arrived at it," explained Vance sweetly, "by the same process of logic I used in determining the guilt of Alvin Benson's murderer."

Markham smiled. "*Touché!* . . . Don't think I'm so ungrateful as to belittle the work you did in that case. But this time, I fear, you've permitted your theories to lead you hopelessly astray. The present case is what the police call an open-and-shut affair."

"Particularly shut," amended Vance dryly. "And both you and the police are in the distressin' situation of waiting inactively for your suspected victim to give the game away."

"I'll admit the situation is not all one could desire," Markham spoke morosely. "But even so, I can't see that there's any opportunity in this affair for your recondite psychological methods. The thing's too obvious—that's the trouble. What we need now is evidence, not theories. If it wasn't for the spacious and romantic imaginings of the newspaper men, public interest in the case would already have died out."



"Markham," said Vance quietly, but with unwonted seriousness, "if that's what you really believe, then you may as well drop the case now; for you're foredoomed to failure. You think it's an obvious crime. But let me tell you, it's a subtle crime, if ever there was one. And it's as clever as it is subtle. No common criminal committed it—believe me. It was done by a man of very superior intellect and astoundin' ingenuity."

Vance's assured, matter-of-fact tone had a curiously convincing quality; and Markham, restraining his impulse to scoff, assumed an air of indulgent irony.

"Tell me," he said, "by what cryptic mental process you arrived at so fantastic a conclusion."

"With pleasure." Vance took a few puffs on his cigarette and lazily watched the smoke curl upward.<sup>[14]</sup>

"Y' know, Markham," he began, in his emotionless drawl, "every genuine work of art has a quality which the critics call *élan*—namely, enthusiasm and spontaneity. A copy, or imitation, lacks that distinguishing characteristic; it's too perfect, too carefully done, too exact. Even enlightened scions of the law, I fancy, are aware that there is bad drawing in Botticelli and disproportions in Rubens, what? In an original, d' ye see, such flaws don't matter. But an imitator never puts 'em in: he doesn't dare—he's too intent on getting all the details correct. The imitator works with a self-consciousness and a meticulous care which the artist, in the throes of creative labor, never exhibits. And here's the point: there's no way of imitating that enthusiasm and spontaneity—that *élan*—which an original painting possesses. However closely a copy may resemble an original, there's a vast psychological difference between them. The copy breathes an air of insincerity, of ultra-perfection, of conscious effort. . . . You follow me, eh?"

"Most instructive, my dear Ruskin."

Vance meekly bowed his appreciation, and proceeded pleasantly. "Now, let us consider the Odell murder. You and Heath are agreed that it is a commonplace, brutal, sordid, unimaginative crime. But, unlike you two bloodhounds on the trail, I have ignored its mere appearances and have analyzed its various factors—I have looked at it psychologically, so to speak. And I have discovered that it is not a genuine and sincere crime—that is to say, an original—but only a sophisticated, self-conscious and clever imitation, done by a skilled copyist. I grant you it is correct and typical in every detail. But just there is where it fails, don't y' know. Its technic is too good, its craftsmanship too perfect. The ensemble, as it were, is not convincing—it lacks *élan*. Aesthetically speaking, it has all the earmarks of a *tour de force*. Vulgarly speaking, it's a fake." He paused and gave Markham an engaging smile. "I trust this somewhat oracular peroration has not bored you."

"Pray continue," urged Markham, with exaggerated politeness. His manner was jocular, but something in his tone led me to believe that he was seriously interested.

"What is true of art is true of life," Vance resumed placidly. "Every human action, d' ye see, conveys unconsciously an impression either of genuineness or of spuriousness—of sincerity or calculation. For example, two men at table eat in a similar way, handle their knives and forks in the same fashion, and apparently do the identical things. Although the sensitive spectator cannot put his finger on the points of difference, he nonetheless senses at once which man's breeding is genuine and instinctive and which man's is imitative and self-conscious."

He blew a wreath of smoke toward the ceiling and settled more deeply into his chair.

"Now, Markham, just what are the universally recognized features of a sordid crime of robbery and murder? . . . Brutality, disorder, haste, ransacked drawers, cluttered desks, broken jewel cases, rings stripped from the victim's fingers, severed pendant chains, torn clothing, tipped-over chairs, upset lamps, broken vases, twisted draperies, strewn floors, and so forth. Such are the accepted immemorial indications—eh, what? But—consider a moment, old chap. Outside of fiction and the drama, in how many crimes do they *all* appear—all in perfect ordination, and without a single element to contradict the general effect? That is to say, how many actual crimes are technically perfect in their settings? . . . None! And why? Simply because nothing actual in this life—nothing that is spontaneous and genuine—runs to accepted form in every detail. The law of chance and fallibility invariably steps in."

He made a slight indicative gesture.

"But regard this particular crime: look at it closely. What do you find? You will perceive that its *mise en scène* has been staged, and its drama enacted, down to every minute detail—like a Zola novel. It is almost mathematically perfect. And therein, d' ye see, lies the irresistible inference of its having been carefully premeditated and planned. To use an art term, it is a tickled-up crime. Therefore, its conception was not spontaneous. . . . And yet, don't y' know, I can't point out any specific flaw; for its great flaw lies in its being flawless. And nothing flawless, my dear fellow, is natural or genuine."

Markham was silent for a while.

"You deny even the remote possibility of a common thief having murdered the girl?" he asked at length; and now there was no hint of sarcasm in his voice.

"If a common thief did it," contended Vance, "then there's no science of psychology, there are no philosophic truths, and there are no laws of art. If it was a genuine crime of robbery, then, by the same token, there is no difference whatever between an old master and a clever technician's copy."

"You'd entirely eliminate robbery as the motive, I take it."

"The robbery," Vance affirmed, "was only a manufactured detail. The fact that the crime was committed by a highly astute person indicates unquestionably that there was a far more potent motive behind it. Any man capable of so ingenious and clever a piece of deception is obviously a person of education and imagination; and he most certainly would not have run the stupendous risk of killing a woman unless he had feared some overwhelming disaster—unless, indeed, her continuing to live would have caused him greater mental anguish, and would have put him in greater jeopardy, even than the crime itself. Between two colossal dangers, he chose the murder as the lesser."

Markham did not speak at once; he seemed lost in reflection. But presently he turned and, fixing Vance with a dubious stare, said, "What about that chiselled jewel box? A professional burglar's jimmy wielded by an experienced hand doesn't fit into your aesthetic hypothesis—it is, in fact, diametrically opposed to such a theory."

"I know it only too well." Vance nodded slowly. "And I've been harried and hectored by that steel chisel ever since I beheld the evidence of its work that first morning. . . . Markham, that chisel is the one genuine note in an otherwise spurious performance. It's as

if the real artist had come along at the moment the copyist had finished his faked picture, and painted in a single small object with the hand of a master."

"But doesn't that bring us back inevitably to Skeel?"

"Skeel—ah, yes. That's the explanation, no doubt; but not the way you conceive it. Skeel ripped the box open—I don't question that; but—deuce take it!—it's the only thing he did do; it's the only thing that was left for him to do. That's why he got only a ring which La Belle Marguerite was not wearing that night. All her other baubles—to wit, those that adorned her—had been stripped from her and were gone."

"Why are you so positive on this point?"

"The poker, man—the poker! . . . Don't you see? That amateurish assault upon the jewel case with a cast iron coal prodder couldn't have been made *after* the case had been prized open—it would have had to be made *before*. And that seemingly insane attempt to break steel with cast iron was part of the stage setting. The real culprit didn't care if he got the case open or not. He merely wanted it to look as if he had *tried* to get it open; so he used the poker and then left it lying beside the dented box."

"I see what you mean." This point, I think, impressed Markham more strongly than any other Vance had raised; for the presence of the poker on the dressing table had not been explained away either by Heath or Inspector Brenner. . . . "Is that the reason you questioned Skeel as if he might have been present when your other visitor was there?"

"Exactly. By the evidence of the jewel case I knew he either was in the apartment when the bogus crime of robbery was being staged, or else had come upon the scene when it was over and the stage director had cleared out. . . . From his reactions to my questions I rather fancy he was present."

"Hiding in the closet?"

"Yes. That would account for the closet not having been disturbed. As I see it, it wasn't ransacked, for the simple and rather grotesque reason that the elegant Skeel was locked within. How else could that one clothes press have escaped the rifling activities of the pseudoburglar? He wouldn't have omitted it deliberately, and he was far too thoroughgoing to have overlooked it accidentally. Then there are the fingerprints on the knob. . . ."

Vance lightly tapped on the arm of his chair.

"I tell you, Markham old dear, you simply must build your conception of the crime on this hypothesis and proceed accordingly. If you don't, each edifice you rear will come toppling about your ears."

## 15. FOUR POSSIBILITIES

(Wednesday, September 12; evening)

When Vance finished speaking, there was a long silence. Markham, impressed by the other's earnestness, sat in a brown study. His ideas had been shaken. The theory of Skeel's guilt, to which he had clung from the moment of the identification of the fingerprints, had, it must be admitted, not entirely satisfied him, although he had been able to suggest no alternative. Now Vance had categorically repudiated this theory and at the same time had advanced another which, despite its indefiniteness, had nevertheless taken into account all the physical points of the case; and Markham, at first antagonistic, had found himself, almost against his will, becoming more and more sympathetic to this new point of view.

"Damn it, Vance!" he said. "I'm not in the least convinced by your theatrical theory. And yet, I feel a curious undercurrent of plausibility in your analyses. . . . I wonder—"

He turned sharply, and scrutinized the other steadfastly for a moment.

"Look here! Have you anyone in mind as the protagonist of the drama you've outlined?"

"Pon my word, I haven't the slightest notion as to who killed the lady," Vance assured him. "But if you are ever to find the murderer, you must look for a shrewd, superior man with nerves of iron, who was in imminent danger of being irremediably ruined by the girl—a man of inherent cruelty and vindictiveness; a supreme egoist; a fatalist more or less; and, I'm inclined to believe, something of a madman."

"Mad!"

"Oh, not a lunatic, just a madman, a perfectly normal, logical, calculating madman—same as you and I and Van here. Only, our hobbies are harmless, d' ye see. This chap's mania is outside your preposterously revered law. That's why you're after him. If his aberration were stamp collecting or golf, you wouldn't give him a second thought. But his perfectly rational *penchant* for eliminating *déclassées* ladies who bothered him fills you with horror; it's not *your* hobby. Consequently, you have a hot yearning to flay him alive."

"I'll admit," said Markham coolly, "that a homicidal mania is my idea of madness."

"But he didn't have a homicidal mania, Markham old thing. You miss all the fine distinctions in psychology. This man was annoyed by a certain person, and set to work, masterfully and reasonably, to do away with the source of his annoyance. And he did it with surpassin' cleverness. To be sure, his act was a bit grisly. But when, if ever, you get your hands on him, you'll be amazed to find how normal he is. And able, too—oh, able no end."

Again Markham lapsed into a long, thoughtful silence. At last he spoke.

"The only trouble with your ingenious deductions is that they don't accord with the known circumstances of the case. And facts, my dear Vance, are still regarded by a few of us old-fashioned lawyers as more or less conclusive."

"Why this needless confession of your shortcomings?" inquired Vance whimsically. Then, after a moment: "Let me have the facts which appear to you antagonistic to my deductions."

"Well, there are only four men of the type you describe who could have had any remote reason for murdering the Odell woman. Heath's scouts went into her history pretty thoroughly, and for over two years—that is, since her appearance in the 'Follies'—the only *personae gratae* at her apartment have been Mannix, Doctor Lindquist, Pop Cleaver, and, of course, Spotswoode. The Canary was a bit exclusive, it seems; and no other man got near enough to her even to be considered as a possible murderer."

"It appears, then, that you have a complete quartet to draw on." Vance's tone was apathetic. "What do you crave—a regiment?"

"No," answered Markham patiently. "I crave only one logical possibility. But Mannix was through with the girl over a year ago; Cleaver and Spotswoode both have watertight alibis; and that leaves only Doctor Lindquist, whom I can't exactly picture as a strangler and meretricious burglar, despite his irascibility. Moreover, he, too, has an alibi; and it may be a genuine one."

Vance wagged his head. "There's something positively pathetic about the childlike faith of the legal mind."

"It does cling to rationality at times, doesn't it?" observed Markham.

"My dear fellow!" Vance rebuked him. "The presumption implied in that remark is most immodest. If you could distinguish between rationality and irrationality you wouldn't be a lawyer—you'd be a god. . . . No; you're going at this thing the wrong way. The real factors in the case are not what you call the known circumstances, but the unknown quantities—the human *x's*, so to speak—the personalities, or natures, of your quartet."

He lit a fresh cigarette, and lay back, closing his eyes.

"Tell me what you know of these four *cavalieri serventi*—you say Heath has turned in his report. Who were their mamas? What do they eat for breakfast? Are they susceptible to poison ivy? . . . Let's have Spotswoode's dossier first. Do you know anything about him?"

"In a general way," returned Markham. "Old Puritan stock, I believe—governors, burgomasters, a few successful traders. All Yankee forebears—no intermixture. As a matter of fact, Spotswoode represents the oldest and hardiest of the New England aristocracy—although I imagine the so-called wine of the Puritans has become pretty well diluted by now. His affair with the Odell girl is hardly consonant with the older Puritans' mortification of the flesh."

"It's wholly consonant, though, with the psychological reactions which are apt to follow the inhibitions produced by such mortification," submitted Vance. "But what does he do? Whence cometh his lucre?"

"His father manufactured automobile accessories, made a fortune at it, and left the business to him. He tinkers at it, but not seriously, though I believe he has designed a few appurtenances."

"I do hope the hideous cut-glass olla for holding paper bouquets is not one of them. The man who invented that tonneau decoration is capable of any fiendish crime."

"It couldn't have been Spotswoode, then," said Markham tolerantly, "for he certainly can't qualify as your potential strangler. We

know the girl was alive after he left her, and that, during the time she was murdered, he was with Judge Redfern. . . . Even you, friend Vance, couldn't manipulate those facts to the gentleman's disadvantage."

"On that, at least, we agree," conceded Vance. "And that's all you know of the gentleman?"

"I think that's all, except that he married a well-to-do woman—a daughter of a Southern senator, I believe."

"Doesn't help any. . . . And now, let's have Mannix's history."

Markham referred to a typewritten sheet of paper.

"Both parents immigrants—came over in the steerage. Original name Mannikiewicz, or something like that. Born on the East Side; learned the fur business in his father's retail shop in Hester Street; worked for the Sanfrasco Cloak Company and got to be factory foreman. Saved his money and sweetened the pot by manipulating real estate; then went into the fur business for himself and steadily worked up to his present opulent state. Public school and night commercial college. Married in 1900 and divorced a year later. Lives a gay life—helps support the nightclubs, but never gets drunk. I suppose he comes under the head of a spender and wine opener. Has invested some money in musical comedies and always has a stage beauty in tow. Runs to blondes."

"Not very revealin'," sighed Vance. "The city is full of Mannixes. . . . What did you garner in connection with our bon-ton medico?"

"The city has its quota of Doctor Lindquists, too, I fear. He was brought up in a small Middle-West bailiwick—French and Magyar extraction; took his M.D. from the Ohio State Medical, practiced in Chicago—some shady business there, but never convicted; came to Albany and got in on the X-ray-machine craze; invented a breast pump and formed a stock company—made a small fortune out of it; went to Vienna for two years—"

"Ah, the Freudian motif!"

"—returned to New York and opened a private sanitarium; charged outrageous prices and thereby endeared himself to the *nouveau riche*. Has been at the endearing process ever since. Was defendant in a breach-of-promise suite some years ago, but the case was settled out of court. He's not married."

"He wouldn't be," commented Vance. "Such gentry never are. . . . Interestin' summary, though—yes, decidedly interestin'. I'm tempted to develop a psychoneurosis and let Ambroise treat me. I do so want to know him better. And where—oh, where—was this egregious healer at the moment of our erring sister's demise? Ah, who can tell, my Markham; who knows—who knows?"

"In any event, I don't think he was murdering anyone."

"You're so prejudicial!" said Vance. "But let us move reluctantly on. What's your *portrait parlé* of Cleaver? The fact that he's familiarly called Pop is helpful as a starter. You simply couldn't imagine Beethoven being called Shorty, or Bismarck being referred to as Snookums."

"Cleaver has been a politician all of his life—a Tammany Hall 'regular.' Was a ward boss at twenty-five; ran a Democratic club of some kind in Brooklyn for a time; was an alderman for two terms and practiced general law. Was appointed Tax Commissioner; left politics and raised a small racing stable. Later secured an illegal gambling concession at Saratoga; and now operates a poolroom in Jersey City. He's what you might call a professional sport. Loves his liquor."

"No marriages?"

"None on the records. But see here: Cleaver's out of it. He was ticketed in Boonton that night at half past eleven."

"Is that, by any chance, the watertight alibi you mentioned a moment ago?"

"In any primitive legal way I considered it as such." Markham resented Vance's question. "The summons was handed him at half past eleven; it's so marked and dated. And Boonton is fifty miles from here—a good two hours' motor ride. Therefore, Cleaver unquestionably left New York about half past nine; and even if he'd driven directly back, he couldn't have reached here until long after the time the medical examiner declared the girl was dead. As a matter of routine, I investigated the summons and even spoke by phone to the officer who issued it. It was genuine enough—I ought to know: I had it quashed."

"Did this Boonton Dogberry know Cleaver by sight?"

"No, but he gave me an accurate description of him. And naturally he took the car's number."

Vance looked at Markham with open-eyed sorrow.

"My dear Markham—my very dear Markham—can't you see that all you've actually proved is that a bucolic traffic Nemesis handed a speed-violation summons to a smooth-faced, middle-aged, stout man who was driving Cleaver's car near Boonton at half past eleven on the night of the murder? . . . And, my word! Isn't that exactly the sort of alibi the old boy would arrange if he intended taking the lady's life at midnight or thereabouts?"

"Come, come!" laughed Markham. "That's a bit too far-fetched. You'd give every lawbreaker credit for concocting schemes of the most diabolical cunning."

"So I would," admitted Vance apathetically. "And—d' ye know?—rather fancy that's just the kind of schemes a lawbreaker would concoct, if he was planning a murder, and his own life was at stake. What really amazes me is the naïve assumption of you investigators that a murderer gives no intelligent thought whatever to his future safety. It's rather touchin', y' know."

Markham grunted. "Well, you can take it from me, it was Cleaver himself who got the summons."

"I dare say you're right," Vance conceded. "I merely suggested the possibility of deception, don't y' know. The only point I really insist on is that the fascinatin' Miss Odell was killed by a man of subtle and superior mentality."

"And I, in turn," irritably rejoined Markham, "insist that the only men of that type who touched her life intimately enough to have had any reason to do it are Mannix, Cleaver, Lindquist, and Spotswoode. And I further insist that not one of them can be regarded as a promising possibility."

"I fear I must contradict you, old dear," said Vance serenely. "They're all possibilities—and one of them is guilty."

Markham glared at him derisively.

"Well, well! So the case is settled! Now, if you'll but indicate which is the guilty one, I'll arrest him at once and return to my other duties."

"You're always in such haste," Vance lamented. "Why leap and run? The wisdom of the world's philosophers is against it. *Festina lente*, says Caesar; or, as Rufus has it, *Festinatatio tarda est*. And the Koran says quite frankly that haste is of the Devil. Shakespeare was

constantly belittling speed: 'He tires betimes that spurs too fast betimes'; and, 'Wisely, and slow; they stumble that run fast.' Then there was Molière—remember *Sganarelle*?—: '*Le trop de promptitude à l'erreur nous expose.*' Chaucer also held similar views. 'He hasteth wel,' said he, 'that wysely can abyde.' Even God's common people have embalmed the idea in numberless proverbs: 'Good and quickly seldom meet'; and 'Hasty men never want woe—'"

Markham rose with a gesture of impatience.

"Hell! I'm going home before you start a bedtime story," he growled.

The ironical aftermath of this remark was that Vance did tell a "bedtime story" that night; but he told it to me in the seclusion of his own library; and the gist of it was this:

"Heath is committed, body and soul, to a belief in Skeel's guilt; and Markham is as effectively strangled with legal red tape as the poor Canary was strangled with powerful hands. *Eheu*, Van! There's nothing left for me but to set forth tomorrow *a cappella*, like Gaboriau's Monsieur Lecoq, and see what can be done in the noble cause of justice. I shall ignore both Heath and Markham, and become as a pelican of the wilderness, an owl of the desert, a sparrow alone upon the housetop. . . . Really, y' know, I'm no avenger of society, but I do detest an unsolved problem."

## 16. SIGNIFICANT DISCLOSURES

(Thursday, September 13; forenoon)

Greatly to Currie's astonishment Vance gave instructions to be called at nine o'clock the following morning; and at ten o'clock we were sitting on his little roof garden having breakfast in the mellow mid-September sunshine.

"Van," he said to me, when Currie had brought us our second cup of coffee, "however secretive a woman may be, there's always someone to whom she unburdens her soul. A confidant is an essential to the feminine temperament. It may be a mother, or a lover, or a priest, or a doctor, or, more generally, a girl chum. In the Canary's case we haven't a mother or a priest. Her lover, the elegant Skeel, was a potential enemy; and we're pretty safe in ruling out her doctor—she was too shrewd to confide in such a creature as Lindquist. The girl chum, then, remains. And today we seek her." He lit a cigarette and rose. "But, first, we must visit Mr. Benjamin Browne of Seventh Avenue."

Benjamin Browne was a well-known photographer of stage celebrities, with galleries in the heart of the city's theatrical district; and as we entered the reception room of his luxurious studio later that morning my curiosity as to the object of our visit was at the breaking point. Vance went straight to the desk, behind which sat a young woman with flaming red hair and mascaro-shaded eyes, and bowed in his most dignified manner. Then, taking a small unmounted photograph from his pocket, he laid it before her.

"I am producing a musical comedy, mademoiselle," he said, "and I wish to communicate with the young lady who left this picture of herself with me. Unfortunately I've misplaced her card; but as her photograph bore the imprint of Browne's, I thought you might be good enough to look in your files and tell me who she is and where I may find her."

He slipped a five-dollar bill under the edge of the blotter, and waited with an air of innocent expectancy.

The young woman looked at him quizzically, and I thought I detected the hint of a smile at the corners of her artfully rouged lips. But after a moment she took the photograph without a word and disappeared through a rear door. Ten minutes later she returned and handed Vance the picture. On the back of it she had written a name and address.

"The young lady is Miss Alys La Fosse, and she lives at the Belafield Hotel." There was now no doubt as to her smile. "You really shouldn't be so careless with the addresses of your applicants—some poor girl might lose an engagement." And her smile suddenly turned into soft laughter.

"Mademoiselle," replied Vance, with mock seriousness, "in the future I shall be guided by your warning." And with another dignified bow, he went out.

"Good Lord!" he said, as we emerged into Seventh Avenue. "Really, y' know, I should have disguised myself as an impresario, with a gold-headed cane, a derby, and a purple shirt. That young woman is thoroughly convinced that I'm contemplating an intrigue. . . . A jolly smart *tête-rouge*, that."

He turned into a florist's shop at the corner, and selecting a dozen American Beauties, addressed them to "Benjamin Browne's Receptionist."

"And now," he said, "let us stroll to the Belafield, and seek an audience with Alys."

As we walked across town Vance explained.

"That first morning, when we were inspecting the Canary's rooms, I was convinced that the murder would never be solved by the usual elephantine police methods. It was a subtle and well-planned crime, despite its obvious appearances. No routine investigation would suffice. Intimate information was needed. Therefore, when I saw this photograph of the xanthous Alys half hidden under the litter of papers on the *escritoire*, I reflected: 'Ah! A girl friend of the departed Margaret's. She may know just the things that are needed.' So, when the Sergeant's broad back was turned, I put the picture in my pocket. There was no other photograph about the place, and this one bore the usual sentimental inscription. 'Ever thine,' and was signed 'Alys.' I concluded, therefore, that Alys had played Anactoria to the Canary's Sappho. Of course I erased the inscription before presenting the picture to the penetrating sibyl at Browne's. . . . And here we are at the Belafield, hopin' for a bit of enlightenment."

The Belafield was a small, expensive apartment-hotel in the East Thirties, which, to judge from the guests to be seen in the Americanized Queen Anne lobby, catered to the well-off sporting set. Vance sent his card up to Miss La Fosse, and received the message that she would see him in a few minutes. The few minutes, however, developed into three-quarters of an hour, and it was nearly noon when a resplendent bellboy came to escort us to the lady's apartment.

Nature had endowed Miss La Fosse with many of its arts, and those that Nature had omitted, Miss La Fosse herself had supplied. She was slender and blond. Her large blue eyes were heavily lashed, but though she looked at one with a wide-eyed stare, she was unable to disguise their sophistication. Her toilet had been made with elaborate care; and as I looked at her, I could not help thinking what an excellent model she would have been for Chéret's pastel posters.

"So you are Mr. Vance," she cooed. "I've often seen your name in *Town Topics*."

Vance gave a shudder.

"And this is Mr. Van Dine," he said sweetly, "—a mere attorney, who, thus far, has been denied the pages of that fashionable weekly."

"Won't you sit down?" (I am sure Miss La Fosse had spoken the line in a play; she made of the invitation an impressive ceremonial.) "I really don't know why I should have received you. But I suppose you called on business. Perhaps you wish me to appear at a society bazaar, or something of the kind. But I'm so busy, Mr. Vance. You simply can't imagine how occupied I am with my work. . . . I just love my work," she added, with an ecstatic sigh.

"And I'm sure there are many thousands of others who love it, too," returned Vance, in his best drawing-room manner. "But unfortunately I have no bazaar to be graced by your charming presence. I have come on a much more serious matter. . . . You were a very close friend of Miss Margaret Odell's—"

The mention of the Canary's name brought Miss La Fosse suddenly to her feet. Her ingratiating air of affected elegance had quickly disappeared. Her eyes flashed, and their lids drooped harshly. A sneer distorted the lines of her cupid's-bow mouth, and she tossed her head angrily.

"Say, listen! Who do you think you are? I don't know nothing, and I got nothing to say. So run along—you and your lawyer."

But Vance made no move to obey. He took out his cigarette case and carefully selected a Régie.

"Do you mind if I smoke? And won't you have one? I import them direct from my agent in Constantinople. They're exquisitely blended."

The girl snorted, and gave him a look of cold disdain. The doll-baby had become a virago.

"Get yourself outa my apartment, or I'll call the house detective." She turned to the telephone on the wall at her side.

Vance waited until she had lifted the receiver.

"If you do that, Miss La Fosse, I'll order you taken to the district attorney's office for questioning," he told her indifferently, lighting his cigarette and leaning back in his chair.

Slowly she replaced the receiver and turned. "What's your game, anyway? . . . Suppose I did know Margy—then what? And where do you fit into the picture?"

"Alas! I don't fit in at all." Vance smiled pleasantly. "But, for that matter, nobody seems to fit in. The truth is, they're about to arrest a poor blighter for killing your friend, who wasn't in the tableau, either. I happen to be a friend of the district attorney's; and I know exactly what's being done. The police are scouting round in a perfect frenzy of activity, and it's hard to say what trail they'll strike next. I thought, don't y' know, I might save you a lot of unpleasantness by a friendly little chat. . . . Of course," he added, "if you prefer to have me give your name to the police, I'll do so, and let them hold the audience in their own inimitable but crude fashion. I might say, however, that, as yet, they are blissfully unaware of your relationship with Miss Odell, and that, if you are reasonable, I see no reason why they should be informed of it."

The girl had stood, one hand on the telephone, studying Vance intently. He had spoken carelessly and with a genial inflection; and she at length resumed her seat.

"Now, won't you have one of my cigarettes?" he asked, in a tone of gracious reconciliation.

Mechanically she accepted his offer, keeping her eyes on him all the time, as if attempting to determine how far he was to be trusted.

"Who are they thinking of arresting?" She asked the question with scarcely a movement of her features.

"A johnny named Skeel. Silly idea, isn't it?"

"Him!" Her tone was one of mingled contempt and disgust. "That cheap crook? He hasn't got nerve enough to strangle a cat."

"Precisely. But that's no reason for sending him to the electric chair, what?" Vance leaned forward and smiled engagingly. "Miss La Fosse, if you will talk to me for five minutes, and forget I'm a stranger, I'll give you my word of honor not to let the police or the district attorney know anything about you. I'm not connected with the authorities, but somehow I dislike the idea of seeing the wrong man punished. And I'll promise to forget the source of any information you will be kind enough to give me. If you will trust me, it will be infinitely easier for you in the end."

The girl made no answer for several minutes. She was, I could see, trying to estimate Vance; and evidently she decided that, in any case, she had nothing to lose—now that her friendship with the Canary had been discovered—by talking to this man who had promised her immunity from further annoyance.

"I guess you're all right," she said, with a reservation of dubiety; "but I don't know why I should think so." She paused. "But, look here: I was told to keep out of this. And if I don't keep out of it, I'm apt to be back hoofing it in the chorus again. And that's no life for a sweet young thing like me with extravagant tastes—believe me, my friend!"

"That calamity will never befall you through any lack of discretion on my part," Vance assured her, with good-natured earnestness. . . . "Who told you to keep out of it?"

"My—fiancé" She spoke somewhat coquettishly. "He's very well known and he's afraid there might be scandal if I got mixed up in the case as a witness, or anything like that."

"I can readily understand his feelings." Vance nodded sympathetically. "And who, by the bye, is this luckiest of men?"

"Say! You're good." She complimented him with a coy *moue*. "But I'm not announcing my engagement yet."

"Don't be horrid," begged Vance. "You know perfectly well that I could find out his name by making a few inquiries. And if you drove me to learn the facts elsewhere, then my promise to keep your name a secret would no longer bind me."

Miss La Fosse considered this point.

"I guess you could find out all right . . . so I might as well tell you—only I'm trusting to your word to protect me." She opened her eyes wide and gave Vance a melting look. "I know you wouldn't let me down."

"My dear Miss La Fosse!" His tone was one of pained surprise.

"Well, my fiancé is Mr. Mannix, and he's the head of a big fur-importing house. . . . You see"—she became clingingly confidential—"Louey—that is, Mr. Mannix—used to go round with Margy. That's why he didn't want me to get mixed up in the affair. He said the police might bother him with questions, and his name might get into the papers. And that would hurt his commercial standing."

"I quite understand," murmured Vance. "And do you happen to know where Mr. Mannix was Monday night?"

The girl looked startled.

"Of course I know. He was right here with me from half past ten until two in the morning. We were discussing a new musical show he was interested in; and he wanted me to take the leading role."

"I'm sure it will be a success." Vance spoke with disarming friendliness. "Were you home alone all Monday evening?"

"Hardly." The idea seemed to amuse her. "I went to the *Scandals*—but I came home early. I knew Louey—Mr. Mannix—was coming."

"I trust he appreciated your sacrifice." Vance, I believe, was disappointed by this unexpected alibi of Mannix's. It was, indeed, so final that further interrogation concerning it seemed futile. After a momentary pause; he changed the subject.

"Tell me; what do you know about a Mr. Charles Cleaver? He was a friend of Miss Odell's."

"Oh, Pop's all right." The girl was plainly relieved by this turn in the conversation. "A good scout. He was certainly gone on Margy. Even after she threw him over for Mr. Spotswoode, he was faithful, as you might say—always running after her, sending her flowers and presents. Some men are like that. Poor old Pop! He even phoned me Monday night to call up Margy for him and try to arrange a party. Maybe if I'd done it, she wouldn't be dead now. . . . It's a funny world, isn't it?"

"Oh, no end funny." Vance smoked calmly for a minute; I could not help admiring his self-control. "What time did Mr. Cleaver phone you Monday night—do you recall?" From his voice one would have thought the question of no importance.

"Let me see. . . ." She pursed her lips prettily. "It was just ten minutes to twelve. I remember that the little chime clock on the mantel over there was striking midnight, and at first I couldn't hear Pop very well. You see, I always keep my clock ten minutes fast so I'll never be late for an appointment."

Vance compared the clock with his watch.

"Yes, it's ten minutes fast. And what about the party?"

"Oh, I was too busy talking about the new show, and I had to refuse. Anyway, Mr. Mannix didn't want to have a party that night. . . . It wasn't my fault was it?"

"Not a bit of it," Vance assured her. "Work comes before pleasure—especially work as important as yours. . . . And now, there is one other man I want to ask you about, and then I won't bother you any more.—What was the situation between Miss Odell and Doctor Lindquist?"

Miss La Fosse became genuinely perturbed.

"I was afraid you were going to ask me about him." There was apprehension in her eyes. "I don't know just what to say. He was wildly in love with Margy; and she led him on, too. But she was sorry for it afterward, because he got jealous—like a crazy person. He used to pester the life out of her. And once—do you know!—he threatened to shoot her and then shoot himself. I told Margy to look out for him. But she didn't seem to be afraid. Anyway, I think she was taking awful chances. . . . Oh! Do you think it could have been—do you really think—?"

"And wasn't there anyone else," Vance interrupted, "who might have felt the same way? Anyone Miss Odell had reason to fear?"

"No." Miss La Fosse shook her head. "Margy didn't know many men intimately. She didn't change often, if you know what I mean. There wasn't anybody else outside of those you've mentioned, except, of course, Mr. Spotswoode. He cut Pop out several months ago. She went to dinner with him Monday night, too. I wanted her to go to the *Scandals* with me—that's how I know."

Vance rose and held out his hand.

"You've been very kind. And you have nothing whatever to fear. No one shall ever know of our little visit this morning."

"Who do you think killed Margy?" There was genuine emotion in the girl's voice. "Louey says it was probably some burglar who wanted her jewels."

"I'm too wise to sow discord in this happy ménage by even questioning Mr. Mannix's opinion," said Vance half banteringly. "No one *knows* who's guilty; but the police agree with Mr. Mannix."

For a moment the girl's doubts returned, and she gave Vance a searching look. "Why are you so interested? You didn't know Margy, did you? She never mentioned you."

Vance laughed. "My dear child! I only wish I knew why I am so deuced concerned in this affair. 'Pon my word, I can't give you even the sketchiest explanation. . . . No, I never met Miss Odell. But it would offend my sense of proportion if Mr. Skeel were punished and the real culprit went free. Maybe I'm getting sentimental. A sad fate, what?"

"I guess I'm getting soft, too." She nodded her head, still looking Vance square in the eyes. "I risked my happy home to tell you what I did, because somehow I believed you. . . . Say, you weren't stringing me, by any chance?"

Vance put his hand to his heart, and became serious.

"My dear Miss La Fosse, when I leave here it will be as though I had never entered. Dismiss me and Mr. Van Dine here from your mind."

Something in his manner banished her misgivings, and she bade us a kittenish farewell.



## 17. CHECKING AN ALIBI

(Thursday, September 13; afternoon)

"My sleuthing goes better," exulted Vance, when we were again in the street. "Fair Alys was a veritable mine of information—eh, what? Only, you should have controlled yourself better when she mentioned her beloved's name—really, you should, Van old thing. I saw you jump and heard you heave. Such emotion is unbecoming in a lawyer."

From a booth in a drugstore near the hotel he telephoned Markham: "I am taking you to lunch. I have numerous confidences I would pour into your ear." A debate ensued, but in the end Vance emerged triumphant; and a moment later a taxicab was driving us downtown.

"Alys is clever—there are brains in that fluffy head," he ruminated. "She's much smarter than Heath; she knew at once that Skeel wasn't guilty. Her characterization of the immaculate Tony was inelegant but how accurate—oh, how accurate! And you noticed, of course, how she trusted me. Touchin', wasn't it? . . . It's a knotty problem, Van. Something's amiss somewhere."

He was silent, smoking, for several blocks.

"Mannix. . . . Curious he should crop up again. And he issued orders to Alys to keep mum. Now, why? Maybe the reason he gave her was the real one. Who knows? On the other hand, was he with his *chère amie* from half past ten till early morning? Well, well. Again, who knows? Something queer about that business discussion. . . . Then Cleaver. He called up just ten minutes before midnight—oh, yes, he called up. That wasn't a fairytale. But how could he telephone from a speeding car? He couldn't. Maybe he really wanted to have a party with his recalcitrant Canary, don't y' know. But, then, why the brummagem alibi? Funk? Maybe. But why the circuitousness? Why didn't he call his lost love direct? Ah, perhaps he did! Someone certainly called her by phone at twenty minutes to twelve. We must look into that, Van. . . . Yes, he may have called her, and then when a man answered—who the deuce was that man, anyway?—he may have appealed to Alys. Quite natural, y' know. Anyway, he wasn't in Boonton. Poor Markham! How upset he'll be when he finds out! . . . But what really worries me is that story of the doctor. Jealous mania: it squares with Ambrose's character perfectly. He's the kind that does go off his head. I knew his confession of paternalism was a red herring. My word! So the doctor was making threats and flourishing pistols, eh? Bad, bad. I don't like it. With those ears of his, he wouldn't hesitate to pull the trigger. Paranoia—that's it. Delusions of persecution. Probably thought the girl and Pop—or maybe the girl and Spotswoode—were plotting his misery and laughing at him. You can't tell about those chaps. They're deep and they're dangerous. The canny Alys had him sized up—warned the Canary against him. . . . Taken by and large, it's a devilish tangle. Anyway, I feel rather bucked. We're moving—oh, undoubtedly we're moving—though in what direction I can't even guess. It's beastly annoyin'."

Markham was waiting for us at the Bankers' Club. He greeted Vance irritably. "What have you got to tell me that's so damned important?"

"Now, don't get ratty." Vance was beaming. "How's your lodestar, Skeel, behaving?"

"So far he's done everything that's pure and refined except join the Christian Endeavor Society."

"Sunday's coming. Give him time. . . . So you're not happy, Markham dear?"

"Was I dragged away from another engagement to report on my state of mind?"

"No need. Your state of mind's execrable. . . . Cheerio! I've brought you something to think about."

"Damn it! I've got too much to think about now."

"Here, have some brioche." Vance gave the order for lunch without consulting either of us. "And now for my revelations. *Imprimis*: Pop Cleaver wasn't in Boonton last Monday night. He was very much in the midst of our modern Gomorrah, trying to arrange a midnight party."

"Wonderful!" snorted Markham. "I lave in the font of your wisdom. His alter ego, I take it, was on the road to Hopatcong. The supernatural leaves me cold."

"You may be as pancosmic as you choose. Cleaver was in New York at midnight Monday, craving excitement."

"What about the summons for speeding?"

"That's for you to explain. But if you'll take my advice, you'll send for this Boonton catchpole and let him have a look at Pop. If he says Cleaver is the man he ticketed, I'll humbly do away with myself."

"Well! That makes it worth trying. I'll have the officer at the Stuyvesant Club this afternoon and I'll point out Cleaver to him. . . . What other staggering revelations have you in store?"

"Mannix will bear looking into."

Markham put down his knife and fork and leaned back. "I'm overcome! Such Himalayan sagacity! With that evidence against him, he should be arrested at once. . . . Vance, my dear old friend, are you feeling quite normal? No dizzy spells lately? No shooting pains in the head? Knee jerks all right?"

"Furthermore, Doctor Lindquist was wildly infatuated with the Canary, and insanely jealous. Recently threatened to take a pistol and hold a little pogrom of his own."

"That's better." Markham sat up. "Where did you get this information?"

"Ah! That's my secret."

Markham was annoyed.

"Why so mysterious?"

"Needs must, old chap. Gave my word and all that sort of thing. And I'm a bit quixotic, don't y' know—too much Cervantes in my youth." He spoke lightly, but Markham knew him too well to push the question.

In less than five minutes after we had returned to the district attorney's office, Heath came in.

"I got something else on Mannix, sir; thought you might want to add it to the report I turned in yesterday. Burke secured a picture of

him and showed it to the phone operators at Odell's house. Both of 'em recognized it. He's been there several times, but it wasn't the Canary he called on. It was the woman in Apartment 2. She's named Frisbee and used to be one of Mannix's fur models. He's been to see her several times during the past six months and has taken her out once or twice; but he hasn't called on her for a month or more. . . Any good?"

"Can't tell." Markham shot Vance an inquisitive look. "But thanks for the information, Sergeant."

"By the bye," said Vance dulcetly, when Heath had left us, "I'm feeling tophole. No pains in the head; no dizzy spells. Knee jerks perfect."

"Delighted. Still, I can't charge a man with murder because he calls on his fur model."

"You're so hasty! Why should you charge him with murder?" Vance rose and yawned. "Come, Van. I'd rather like to gaze on Perneb's tomb at the Metropolitan this afternoon. Could you bear it?" At the door he paused. "I say, Markham, what about the Boonton bailiff?" Markham rang for Swacker. "I'll see to it at once. Drop in at the club around five, if you feel like it. I'll have the officer there then, as Cleaver is sure to come in before dinner."

When Vance and I returned to the club late that afternoon, Markham was stationed in the lounge room facing the main door of the rotunda; and beside him sat a tall, heavysset, bronzed man of about forty, alert but ill at ease.

"Traffic Officer Phipps arrived from Boonton a little while ago," said Markham, by way of introduction. "Cleaver is expected at any moment now. He has an appointment here at half past five."

Vance drew up a chair.

"I do hope he's a punctual beggar."

"So do I," returned Markham viciously. "I'm looking forward to your *felo-de-se*."

"Our hap is loss, our hope but sad despair," murmured Vance.

Less than ten minutes later Cleaver entered the rotunda from the street, paused at the desk, and sauntered into the lounge room. There was no escaping the observation point Markham had chosen; and as he walked by us he paused and exchanged greetings. Markham detained him a moment with a few casual questions; and then Cleaver passed on.

"That the man you ticketed, Officer?" asked Markham, turning to Phipps.

Phipps was scowling perplexedly. "It looks something like him, sir; there's a kind of resemblance. But it ain't him." He shook his head. "No, sir; it ain't him. The fellow I hung a summons on was stouter than this gent and wasn't as tall."

"You're positive?"

"Yes, sir—no mistake. The guy I tagged tried to argue with me and then he tried to slip me a flyer to forget it. I had my headlight on him full."

Phipps was dismissed with a substantial *pourboire*.

"Vae misero mihi!" sighed Vance. "My worthless existence is to be prolonged. Sad. But you must try to bear it. . . . I say, Markham, what does Pop Cleaver's brother look like?"

"That's it," nodded Markham. "I've met his brother; he's shorter and stouter. . . . This thing is getting beyond me. I think I'll have it out with Cleaver now."

He started to rise, but Vance forced him back into his seat.

"Don't be impetuous. Cultivate patience. Cleaver's not going to do a bunk; and there are one or two prelimin'ry steps strongly indicated. Mannix and Lindquist still seduce my curiosity."

Markham clung to his point. "Neither Mannix nor Lindquist is here now, and Cleaver is. And I want to know why he lied to me about that summons."

"I can tell you that," said Vance. "He wanted you to think he was in the wilds of New Jersey at midnight Monday. Simple, what?"

"The inference is a credit to your intelligence! But I hope you don't seriously think that Cleaver is guilty. It's possible he knows something; but I certainly cannot picture him as a strangler."

"And why?"

"He's not the type. It's inconceivable—even if there were evidence against him."

"Ah! The psychological judgment! You eliminate Cleaver because you don't think his nature harmonizes with the situation. I say, doesn't that come perilously near being an esoteric hypothesis?—or a metaphysical deduction? . . . However, I don't entirely agree with you in your application of the theory to Cleaver. That fish-eyed gambler has unsuspected potentialities for evil. But with the theory itself I am wholly in accord. And behold, my dear Markham: you yourself apply psychology in its abecedarian implications, yet ridicule my application of it in its higher developments. Consistency may be the hobgoblin of little minds, y' know, but it's nonetheless a priceless jewel. . . . How about a cup of tea?"

We sought the Palm Room and sat down at a table near the entrance. Vance ordered oolong tea, but Markham and I took black coffee. A very capable four-piece orchestra was playing Tchaikovsky's *Casse-Noisette Suite*, and we sat restfully in the comfortable chairs without speaking. Markham was tired and dispirited, and Vance was busy with the problem that had absorbed him continuously since Tuesday morning. Never before had I seen him so preoccupied.

We had been there perhaps half an hour when Spotswoode strolled in. He stopped and spoke, and Markham asked him to join us. He, too, appeared depressed, and his eyes showed signs of worry.

"I hardly dare ask you, Mr. Markham," he said diffidently, after he had ordered a ginger ale, "but how do my chances stand now of being called as a witness?"

"That fate is certainly no nearer than when I last saw you," Markham replied. "In fact, nothing has happened to change the situation materially."

"And the man you had under suspicion?"

"He's still under suspicion, but no arrest has been made. We're hoping, however, that something will break before long."

"And I suppose you still want me to remain in the city?"

"If you can arrange it—yes."

Spotswoode was silent for a time; then he said, "I don't want to appear to shirk any responsibility—and perhaps it may seem wholly selfish for me even to suggest it—but, in any event, wouldn't the testimony of the telephone operator as to the hour of Miss Odell's return and her calls for help be sufficient to establish the facts, without my corroboration?"

"I have thought of that, of course; and if it is at all possible to prepare the case for the prosecution without summoning you to appear, I assure you it will be done. At the moment, I can see no necessity of your being called as a witness. But one never knows what may turn up. If the defense hinges on a question of exact time, and the operator's testimony is questioned or disqualified for any reason, you may be required to come forward. Otherwise not."

Spotswoode sipped his ginger ale. A little of his depression seemed to have departed.

"You're very generous, Mr. Markham. I wish there was some adequate way of thanking you." He looked up hesitantly. "I presume you are still opposed to my visiting the apartment. . . . I know you think me unreasonable and perhaps sentimental; but the girl represented something in my life that I find very difficult to tear out. I don't expect you to understand it—I hardly understand it myself."

"I think it's easily understandable, don't y' know," remarked Vance, with a sympathy I had rarely seen him manifest. "Your attitude needs no apology. History and fable are filled with the same situation, and the protagonists have always exhibited sentiments similar to yours. Your most famous prototype, of course, was Odysseus on the citron-scented isle of Ogygia with the fascinatin' Calypso. The soft arms of sirens have gone snaking round men's necks ever since the red-haired Lilith worked her devastatin' wiles on the impressionable Adam. We're all sons of that racy old boy."

Spotswoode smiled. "You at least give me an historic background," he said. Then he turned to Markham. "What will become of Miss Odell's possessions—her furniture and so forth?"

"Sergeant Heath heard from an aunt of hers in Seattle," Markham told him. "She's on her way to New York, I believe, to take over what there is of the estate."

"And everything will be kept intact until then?"

"Probably longer, unless something unexpected happens. Anyway, until then."

"There are one or two little trinkets I'd like to keep," Spotswoode confessed, a bit shamefacedly, I thought.

After a few more minutes of desultory talk he rose and, pleading an engagement, bade us good afternoon.

"I hope I can keep his name clear of the case," said Markham, when he had gone.

"Yes; his situation is not an enviable one," concurred Vance. "It's always sad to be found out. The moralist would set it down to retribution."

"In this instance chance was certainly on the side of righteousness. If he hadn't chosen Monday night for the Winter Garden, he might now be in the bosom of his family, with nothing more troublesome to bother him than a guilty conscience."

"It certainly looks that way." Vance glanced at his watch. "And your mention of the Winter Garden reminds me. Do you mind if we dine early? Frivolity beckons me tonight. I'm going to the *Scandals*."

We both looked at him as though he had taken leave of his senses.

"Don't be so horrified, my Markham. Why should I not indulge an impulse? . . . And, incidentally, I hope to have glad tidings for you by lunchtime tomorrow."

## 18. THE TRAP

(Friday, September 14; noon)

Vance slept late the following day. I had accompanied him to the *Scandals* the night before, utterly at a loss to understand his strange desire to attend a type of entertainment which I knew he detested. At noon he ordered his car, and instructed the chauffeur to drive to the Belafield Hotel.

"We are about to call again on the allurin' Alys," he said. "I'd bring posies to lay at her shrine, but I fear dear Mannix might question her unduly about them."

Miss La Fosse received us with an air of crestfallen resentment.

"I might've known it!" She nodded her head with sneering perception. "I suppose you've come to tell me the cops found out about me without the slightest assistance from you." Her disdain was almost magnificent. "Did you bring 'em with you? . . . A swell guy *you* are!—But it's my own fault for being a damn fool."

Vance waited unmoved until she had finished her contemptuous tirade. Then he bowed pleasantly.

"Really, y' know, I merely dropped in to pay my respects, and to tell you that the police have turned in their report of Miss Odell's acquaintances, and that your name was not mentioned on it. You seemed a little worried yesterday on that score, and it occurred to me I could set your mind wholly at ease."

The vigilance of her attitude relaxed. "Is that straight? . . . My God! I don't know what would happen if Louey'd find out I'd been blabbing."

"I'm sure he won't find out, unless you choose to tell him. . . . Won't you be generous and ask me to sit down a moment?"

"Of course—I'm so sorry. I'm just having my coffee. Please join me." She rang for two extra services.

Vance had drunk two cups of coffee less than half an hour before, and I marveled at his enthusiasm for this atrocious hotel beverage.

"I was a belated spectator of the *Scandals* last night," he remarked in a negligent, conversational tone. "I missed the revue earlier in the season. How is it you yourself were so late in seeing it?"

"I've been so busy," she confided. "I was rehearsing for 'A Pair of Queens'; but the production's been postponed. Louey couldn't get the theater he wanted."

"Do you like revues?" asked Vance. "I should think they'd be more difficult for the principals than the ordin'ry musical comedy."

"They are." Miss La Fosse adopted a professional air. "And they're unsatisfactory. The individual is lost in them. There's no real scope for one's talent. They're breathless if you know what I mean."

"I should imagine so." Vance bravely sipped his coffee. "And yet, there were several numbers in the *Scandals* that you could have done charmingly; they seemed particularly designed for you. I thought of you doing them, and—d' ye know?—the thought rather spoiled my enjoyment of the young lady who appeared in them."

"You flatter me, Mr. Vance. But, really, I have a good voice. I've studied very hard. And I learned dancing with Professor Markoff."

"Indeed!" (I'm sure Vance had never heard the name before, but his exclamation seemed to imply that he regarded Professor Markoff as one of the world's most renowned ballet masters.) "Then, you certainly should have been starred in the *Scandals*. The young lady I have in mind sang rather indifferently, and her dancing was most inadequate. Moreover, she was many degrees your inferior in personality and attractiveness. . . . Confess: didn't you have just a little desire Monday night to be singing the 'Chinese Lullaby' song?"

"Oh, I don't know." Miss La Fosse carefully considered the suggestion. "They kept the lights awfully low; and I don't look so well in cerise. But the costumes were adorable, weren't they?"

"On you they certainly would have been adorable. . . . What color are you partial to?"

"I love the orchid shades," she told him enthusiastically; "though I don't look at all bad in turquoise blue. But an artist once told me I should always wear white. He wanted to paint my portrait, but the gentleman I was engaged to then didn't like him."

Vance regarded her appraisingly.

"I think your artist friend was right. And, y' know, the St. Moritz scene in the *Scandals* would have suited you perfectly. The little brunette who sang the snow song, all in white, was delightful; but really, now, she should have had golden hair. Dusky beauties belong to the southern climes. And she impressed me as lacking the sparkle and vitality of a Swiss resort in midwinter. You could have supplied those qualities admirably."

"Yes; I'd have liked that better than the Chinese number, I think. White fox is my favorite fur, too. But, even so, in a revue you're on in one number and off in another. When it's all over, you're forgotten." She sighed unhappily.

Vance set down his cup and looked at her with whimsically reproachful eyes. After a moment he said, "My dear, why did you fib to me about the time Mr. Mannix returned to you last Monday night? It wasn't a bit nice of you."

"What do you mean?" Miss La Fosse exclaimed in frightened indignation, drawing herself up into an attitude of withering hauteur.

"You see," explained Vance, "the St. Moritz scene of the *Scandals* doesn't go on until nearly eleven, and it closes the bill. So you couldn't possibly have seen it and also received Mr. Mannix here at half past ten. Come. What time did he arrive here Monday night?"

The girl flushed angrily. "You're pretty slick, aren't you? You shoulda been a cop. . . . Well, what if I didn't get home till after the show? Any crime in that?"

"None whatever," answered Vance mildly. "Only a little breach of good faith in telling me you came home early." He bent forward earnestly. "I'm not here to make you trouble. On the contr'y, I'd like to protect you from any distress or bother. You see, if the police go nosing round, they may run on to you. But if I'm able to give the district attorney accurate information about certain things connected with Monday night, there'll be no danger of the police being sent to look for you."

Miss La Fosse's eyes grew suddenly hard, and her brow crinkled with determination. "Listen! I haven't got anything to hide, and neither has Louey. But if Louey asks me to say he's somewhere at half past ten, I'm going to say it—see? That's my idea of friendship."

Louey had some good reason to ask it, too, or he wouldn't have done it. However, since you're so smart, and have accused me of playing unfair, I'm going to tell you that he didn't get in till after midnight. But if anybody else asks me about it, I'll see 'em in hell before I tell 'em anything but the half-past-ten story. Get that?"

Vance bowed. "I get it; and I like you for it."

"But don't go away with the wrong idea," she hurried on, her eyes sparkling with fervor. "Louey may not have got here till after midnight, but if you think he knows anything about Margy's death, you're crazy. He was through with Margy a year ago. Why, he hardly knew she was on earth. And if any fool cop gets the notion in his head that Louey was mixed up in the affair, I'll alibi him—so help me God!—if it's the last thing I do in this world."

"I like you more and more," said Vance; and when she gave him her hand at parting he lifted it to his lips.

As we rode downtown Vance was thoughtful. We were nearly to the Criminal Courts Building before he spoke.

"The primitive Alys rather appeals to me," he said. "She's much too good for the oleaginous Mannix. . . . Women are so shrewd—and so gullible. A woman can read a man with almost magical insight; but, on the other hand, she is inexpressibly blind when it comes to *her* man. Witness sweet Alys's faith in Mannix. He probably told her he was slaving at the office Monday night. Naturally, she doesn't believe it; but she knows—*knows*, mind you—that her Louey just couldn't have been concerned in the Canary's death. Ah, well, let us hope she's right and that Mannix is not apprehended—at least not until her new show is financed. . . . My word! If this being a detective involves many more revues, I shall have to resign. Thank Heaven, though, the lady didn't attend the cinema Monday night!"

When we arrived at the District Attorney's office we found Heath and Markham in consultation. Markham had a pad before him, several pages of which were covered with tabulated and annotated entries. A cloud of cigar smoke enveloped him. Heath sat facing him, his elbows on the table, his chin resting in his hands. He looked pugnacious but disconsolate.

"I'm going over the case with the sergeant," Markham explained, with a brief glance in our direction. "We're trying to get all the salient points down in some kind of order, to see if there are any connecting links we've overlooked. I've told the sergeant about the doctor's infatuation and his threats, and of the failure of Traffic Officer Phipps to identify Cleaver. But the more we learn, the worse, apparently, the jumble grows."

He picked up the sheets of paper and fastened them together with a clip. "The truth is, we haven't any real evidence against anybody. There are suspicious circumstances connected with Skeel and Doctor Lindquist and Cleaver; and our interview with Mannix didn't precisely allay suspicions in his direction, either. But when we come right down to it, what's the situation! We've got some fingerprints of Skeel, which might have been made late Monday afternoon. Doctor Lindquist goes berserk when we ask him where he was Monday night, and then offers us a weak alibi. He admits a fatherly interest in the girl, whereas he's really in love with her—a perfectly natural bit of mendacity. Cleaver lent his car to his brother and lied about it, so that I'd think he was in Boonton Monday at midnight. And Mannix gives us a number of shifty answers to our questions concerning his relations with the girl. . . . Not an embarrassment of riches."

"I wouldn't say your information was exactly negligent," observed Vance, taking a chair beside the sergeant. "It may all prove devilish valuable if only it could be put together properly. The difficulty, it appears to me, is that certain parts of the puzzle are missing. Find 'em, and I'll warrant everything will fit beautifully—like a mosaic."

"Easy enough to say 'find 'em,'" grumbled Markham. "The trouble is to know where to look."

Heath relighted his dead cigar and made an impatient gesture.

"You can't get away from Skeel. He's the boy that did it, and, if it wasn't for Abe Rubin, I'd sweat the truth outa him. And by the way, Mr. Vance, he had his own private key to the Odell apartment, all right." He glanced at Markham hesitantly. "I don't want to look as if I was criticising, sir, but I got a feeling we're wasting time chasing after these gentlemen friends of Odell—Cleaver and Mannix and this here doctor."

"You may be right," Markham seemed inclined to agree with him. "However, I'd like to know why Lindquist acted the way he did."

"Well, that might help some," Heath compromised. "If the doc was so far gone on Odell as to threaten to shoot her, and if he went off his head when you asked him to alibi himself, maybe he could tell us something. Why not throw a little scare into him? His record ain't any too good, anyway."

"An excellent idea," chimed in Vance.

Markham looked up sharply. Then he consulted his appointment book. "I'm fairly free this afternoon, so suppose you bring him down here, Sergeant. Get a subpoena if you have to—only see that he comes. And make it as soon after lunch as you can." He tapped on the desk irritably. "If I don't do anything else, I'm going to eliminate some of this human flotsam that's cluttering up the case. And Lindquist is as good as any to start with. I'll either develop these various suspicious circumstances into something workable or I'll root them up. Then we'll see where we stand."

Heath shook hands pessimistically and went out.

"Poor hapless man!" sighed Vance, looking after him. "He giveth way to all the pangs and fury of despair."

"And so would you," snapped Markham, "if the newspapers were butchering you for a political holiday. By the way, weren't you to be a harbinger of glad tidings this noon, or something of the sort?"

"I believe I did hold out some such hope." Vance sat looking meditatively out of the window for several minutes. "Markham, this fellow Mannix lures me like a magnet. He irks and whirrets me. He infests my slumbers. He's the raven on my bust of Pallas. He plagues me like a banshee."

"Does this jeremiad come under the head of tidings?"

"I sha'n't rest peacefully," pursued Vance, "until I know where Louey the furrier was between eleven o'clock and midnight Monday. He was somewhere he shouldn't have been. And you, Markham, must find out. Please make Mannix the second offensive in your assault upon the flotsam. He'll parley, with the right amount of pressure. Be brutal, old dear; let him think you suspect him of the throttling. Ask him about the fur model—what's her name?—Frisbee—" He stopped short and knit his brows. "My eye—oh, my eye! I wonder. . . . Yes, yes, Markham; you must question him about the fur model. Ask him when he saw her last, and try to look wise and mysterious when you're doing it."

"See here, Vance"—Markham was exasperated—"you've been harping on Mannix for three days. What's keeping your nose to that scent?"

"Intuition—sheer intuition. My psychic temperament, don't y' know."

"I'd believe that if I hadn't known you for fifteen years." Markham inspected him shrewdly, then shrugged his shoulders. "I'll have Mannix on the tapis when I'm through with Lindquist."

## 19. THE DOCTOR EXPLAINS

(Friday, September 14; 2 P.M.)

We lunched in the district attorney's private sanctum; and at two o'clock Doctor Lindquist was announced. Heath accompanied him, and, from the expression on the sergeant's face, it was plain he did not at all like his companion.

The doctor, at Markham's request, seated himself facing the district attorney's desk.

"What is the meaning of this new outrage?" he demanded coldly. "Is it your prerogative to force a citizen to leave his private affairs in order to be bullied?"

"It's my duty to bring murderers to justice," replied Markham, with equal coldness. "And if any citizen considers that giving aid to the authorities is an outrage, that's *his* prerogative. If you have anything to fear by answering my questions, Doctor, you are entitled to have your attorney present. Would you care to phone him to come here now and give you legal protection?"

Doctor Lindquist hesitated. "I need no legal protection, sir. Will you be good enough to tell me at once why I was brought here?"

"Certainly; to explain a few points which have been discovered regarding your relationship with Miss Odell, and to elucidate—if you care to—your reasons for deceiving me, at our last conference, in regard to that relationship."

"You have, I infer, been prying unwarrantably into my private affairs. I had heard that such practices were once common in Russia. . . ."

"If the prying was unwarranted, you can, Doctor Lindquist, easily convince me on that point; and whatever we may have learned concerning you will be instantly forgotten. It is true, is it not, that your interest in Miss Odell went somewhat beyond mere paternal affection?"

"Are not even a man's sacred sentiments respected by the police of this country?" There was insolent scorn in the doctor's tone.

"Under some conditions, yes; under others, no." Markham controlled his fury admirably. "You need not answer me, of course; but, if you choose to be frank, you may possibly save yourself the humiliation of being questioned publicly by the people's attorney in a court of law."

Doctor Lindquist winced and considered the matter at some length. "And if I admit that my affection for Miss Odell was other than paternal—what then?"

Markham accepted the question as an affirmation.

"You were intensely jealous of her, were you not, Doctor?"

"Jealousy," Doctor Lindquist remarked, with an air of ironic professionalism, "is not an unusual accompaniment to an infatuation. Authorities such as Kraft-Ebing, Moll, Freud, Ferenczi, and Adler, I believe, regard it as an intimate psychological corollary of amatory attraction."

"Most instructive." Markham nodded his head appreciatively. "I am to assume, then, that you were infatuated with—or, let us say, amorously attracted by—Miss Odell, and that on occasions you exhibited the intimate psychological corollary of jealousy?"

"You may assume what you please. But I fail to understand why my emotions are any of your affair."

"Had your emotions not led you to highly questionable and suspicious acts, I would not be interested in them. But I have it on unimpeachable authority that your emotions so reacted on your better judgment that you threatened to take Miss Odell's life and also your own. And, in view of the fact that the young woman has since been murdered, the law naturally—and reasonably—is curious."

The doctor's normally pale face seemed to turn yellow, and his long splay fingers tightened over the arms of his chair; but otherwise he sat immobile and rigidly dignified, his eyes fixed intently on the district attorney.

"I trust," added Markham, "you will not augment my suspicions by any attempt at denial."

Vance was watching the man closely. Presently he leaned forward.

"I say, Doctor, what method of extermination did you threaten Miss Odell with?"

Doctor Lindquist jerked round, thrusting his head toward Vance. He drew in a long rasping breath, and his whole frame became tense. Blood suffused his cheeks; and there was a twitching of the muscles about his mouth and throat. For a moment I was afraid he was going to lose his self-control. But after a moment's effort he steadied himself.

"You think perhaps I threatened to strangle her?" His words were vibrant with the intensity of his passionate anger. "And you would like to turn my threat into a noose to hang me?—Paugh!" He paused, and when he spoke again, his voice had become calmer. "It is quite true I once inadvisedly attempted to frighten Miss Odell with a threat to kill her and to commit suicide. But if your information is as accurate as you would have me believe, you are aware that I threatened her with a revolver. It is the weapon, I believe, that is conventionally mentioned when making empty threats. I certainly would not have threatened her with thuggee, even had I contemplated so abominable an act."

"True," nodded Vance. "And it's a rather good point, don't y' know."

The doctor was evidently encouraged by Vance's attitude. He again faced Markham and elaborated his confession. "A threat, I presume you know, is rarely the forerunner of a violent deed. Even a brief study of the human mind would teach you that a threat is *prima facie* evidence of one's innocence. A threat, generally, is made in anger, and acts as its own safety valve." He shifted his eyes. "I am not a married man; my emotional life has not been stabilized, as it were; and I am constantly coming in close contact with hypersensitive and overwrought people. During a period of abnormal susceptibility I conceived an infatuation for the young woman, an infatuation which she did not reciprocate—certainly not with an ardor commensurate with my own. I suffered deeply; and she made no effort to mitigate my sufferings. Indeed, I suspected her, more than once, of deliberately and perversely torturing me with other men. At any rate, she took no pains to hide her infidelities from me. I confess that once or twice I was almost distracted. And it was in the hope of frightening her into a more amenable and considerate attitude that I threatened her. I trust that you are a sufficiently discerning judge of human nature to believe me."

"Leaving that point for a moment," answered Markham noncommittally, "will you give me more specific information as to your whereabouts Monday night?"

Again I noted a yellow tinge creep over the man's features, and his body stiffened perceptibly. But when he spoke, it was with his habitual suavity.

"I considered that my note to you covered that question satisfactorily. What did I omit?"

"What was the name of the patient on whom you were calling that night?"

"Mrs. Anna Breedon. She is the widow of the late Amos H. Breedon of the Breedon National Bank of Long Branch."

"And you were with her, I believe you stated, from eleven until one?"

"That is correct."

"And was Mrs. Breedon the only witness to your presence at the sanitarium between those hours?"

"I am afraid that is so. You see, after ten o'clock at night I never ring the bell. I let myself in with my own key."

"And I suppose that I may be permitted to question Mrs. Breedon?"

Doctor Lindquist was profoundly regretful. "Mrs. Breedon is a very ill woman. She suffered a tremendous shock at the time of her husband's death last summer, and has been practically in a semiconscious condition ever since. There are times when I even fear for her reason. The slightest disturbance of excitement might produce very serious results."

He took a newspaper cutting from a gold-edged letter case and handed it to Markham.

"You will observe that this obituary notice mentions her prostration and confinement in a private sanitarium. I have been her physician for years."

Markham, after glancing at the cutting, handed it back. There was a short silence broken by a question from Vance.

"By the bye, Doctor, what is the name of the night nurse at your sanitarium?"

Doctor Lindquist looked up quickly.

"My night nurse? Why—what has she to do with it? She was very busy Monday night. I can't understand. . . . Well, if you want her name I have no objection. It's Finckle—Miss Amelia Finckle."

Vance wrote down the name and, rising, carried the slip of paper to Heath.

"Sergeant, bring Miss Finckle here tomorrow morning at eleven," he said, with a slight lowering of one eyelid.

"I sure will, sir. Good idea." His manner boded no good for Miss Finckle.

A cloud of apprehension spread over Doctor Lindquist's face.

"Forgive me if I say that I am insensible to the sanity of your cavalier methods." His tone betrayed only contempt. "May I hope that for the present your inquisition is ended?"

"I think that will be all, Doctor," returned Markham politely. "May I have a taxicab called for you?"

"Your consideration overwhelms me. But my car is below." And Doctor Lindquist haughtily withdrew.

Markham immediately summoned Swacker and sent him for Tracy. The detective came at once, polishing his pince-nez and bowing affably. One would have taken him for an actor rather than a detective, but his ability in matters requiring delicate handling was a byword in the department.

"I want you to fetch Mr. Louis Mannix again," Markham told him. "Bring him here at once; I'm waiting to see him."

Tracy bowed genially and, adjusting his glasses, departed on his errand.

"And now," said Markham, fixing Vance with a reproachful look, "I want to know what your idea was in putting Lindquist on his guard about the night nurse. Your brain isn't at par this afternoon. Do you think I didn't have the nurse in mind? And now you've warned him. He'll have until eleven tomorrow morning to coach her in her answers. Really, Vance, I can't conceive of anything better calculated to defeat us in our attempt to substantiate the man's alibi."

"I did put a little fright into him, didn't I?" Vance grinned complacently. "Whenever your antagonist begins talking exaggeratedly about the insanity of your notions, he's already deuced hot under the collar. But, Markham old thing, don't burst into tears over my mental shortcomings. If you and I both thought of the nurse, don't you suppose the wily doctor also thought of her? If this Miss Finckle were the type that could be suborned, he would have enlisted her perjurious service two days ago, and she would have been mentioned, along with the comatose Mrs. Breedon, as a witness to his presence at the sanitarium Monday night. The fact that he avoided all reference to the nurse shows that she's not to be wheedled into swearing falsely. . . . No, Markham. I deliberately put him on his guard. Now he'll have to do something before we question Miss Finckle. And I'm vain enough to think I know what it'll be."

"Let me get this right," put in Heath. "Am I, or am I not, to round up the Finckle woman tomorrow morning?"

"There'll be no need," said Vance. "We are doomed, I fear, not to gaze upon this Florence Nightingale. A meeting between us is about the last thing the doctor would desire."

"That may be true," admitted Markham. "But don't forget that he may have been up to something Monday night wholly unconnected with the murder, that he simply doesn't want known."

"Quite—quite. And yet, nearly everyone who knew the Canary seems to have selected Monday night for the indulgence of *sub rosa* peccadilloes. It's a bit thick, what? Skeel tries to make us believe he was immersed in Khun Khan. Cleaver was—if you take his word for it—touring the countryside in Jersey's lake district. Lindquist wants us to picture him as comforting the afflicted. And Mannix, I happen to know, has gone to some trouble to build up an alibi in case we get nosy. All of 'em, in fact, were doing something they don't want us to know about. Now, what was it? And why did they, of one accord, select the night of the murder for mysterious affairs which they don't dare mention, even to clear themselves of suspicion? Was there an invasion of efreets in the city that night? Was there a curse on the world, driving men to dark bawdy deeds? Was there Black Magic abroad? I think not."

"I'm laying my money on Skeel," declared Heath stubbornly. "I know a professional job when I see it. And you can't get away from those fingerprints and the Professor's report on the chisel."

Markham was sorely perplexed. His belief in Skeel's guilt had, I knew, been undermined in some measure by Vance's theory that the crime was the carefully premeditated act of a shrewd and educated man. But now he seemed to swing irresolutely back to Heath's point of view.



"I'll admit," he said, "that Lindquist and Cleaver and Mannix don't inspire one with a belief in their innocence. But since they're all tarred with the same stick, the force of suspicion against them is somewhat dispersed. After all, Skeel is the only logical aspirant for the role of strangler. He's the only one with a visible motive; and he's the only one against whom there's any evidence."

Vance sighed wearily. "Yes, yes. Fingerprints—chisel marks. You're such a trustin' soul, Markham. Skeel's fingerprints are found in the apartment; therefore, Skeel strangled the lady. So beastly simple. Why bother further? A *chose jugée*—an adjudicated case. Send Skeel to the chair, and that's that! . . . It's effective, y' know, but is it art?"

"In your critical enthusiasm you understate our case against Skeel," Markham reminded him testily.

"Oh, I'll grant that your case against him is ingenious. It's so deuced ingenious I just haven't the heart to reject it. But most popular truth is mere ingenuity—that's why it's so wrong-headed. Your theory would appeal strongly to the popular mind. And yet, y' know, Markham, it isn't true."

The practical Heath was unmoved. He sat stolidly, scowling at the table. I doubt if he had even heard the exchange of opinions between Markham and Vance.

"You know, Mr. Markham," he said, like one unconsciously voicing an obscure line of thought, "if we could show how Skeel got in and out of Odell's apartment, we'd have a better case against him. I can't figure it out—it's got me stopped. So, I've been thinking we oughta get an architect to go over those rooms. The house is an oldtimer—God knows when it was originally built—and there may be some way of getting into it that we haven't discovered yet."

"'Pon my soul!" Vance stared at him in satirical wonderment. "You're becoming downright romantic! Secret passageways, hidden doors, stairways between the walls. So that's it, is it? Oh, my word! . . . Sergeant, beware of the cinema. It has ruined many a good man. Try grand opera for a while—it's more borin' but less corruptin'."

"That's all right, Mr. Vance." Apparently Heath himself did not relish the architectural idea particularly. "But as long as we don't know how Skeel got in, it's just as well to make sure of a few ways he didn't get in."

"I agree with you, Sergeant," said Markham. "I'll get an architect on the job at once." He rang for Swacker and gave the necessary instructions.

Vance extended his legs and yawned.

"All we need now is a Favorite of the Harem, a few blackamoors with palm-leaf fans, and some *pizzicato* music."

"You will joke, Mr. Vance." Heath lit a fresh cigar. "But even if the architect don't find anything wrong with the apartment, Skeel's liable to give his hand away 'most any time."

"I'm pinnin' my childish faith on Mannix," said Vance. "I don't know why I should; but he's not a nice man, and he's suppressing something. Markham, don't you dare let him go until he tells you where he was Monday night. And don't forget to hint mysteriously about the fur model."

## 20. A MIDNIGHT WITNESS

(Friday, September 14; 3:30 P.M.)

In less than half an hour Mannix arrived. Heath relinquished his seat to the newcomer and moved to a large chair beneath the windows. Vance had taken a place at the small table on Markham's right where he was able to face Mannix obliquely.

It was patent that Mannix did not relish the idea of another interview. His little eyes shifted quickly about the office, lingered suspiciously for a moment on Heath, and at last came to rest on the district attorney. He was more vigilant even than during his first visit; and his greeting to Markham, while fulsome, had in it a note of trepidation. Nor was Markham's air calculated to put him at ease. It was an ominous, indomitable Public Prosecutor who motioned him to be seated. Mannix laid his hat and cane on the table and sat down on the edge of his chair, his back as perpendicular as a flagpole.

"I'm not at all satisfied with what you told me Wednesday, Mr. Mannix," Markham began, "and I trust you won't necessitate me to take drastic steps to find out what you know about Miss Odell's death."

"What I know!" Mannix forced a smile intended to be disarming. "Mr. Markham—Mr. Markham!" He seemed oilier than usual as he spread his hands in hopeless appeal. "If I knew anything, believe me, I would tell you—positively I would tell you."

"I'm delighted to hear it. Your willingness makes my task easier. First, then, please tell me where you were at midnight Monday."

Mannix's eyes slowly contracted until they looked like two tiny shining disks, but otherwise the man did not move. After what seemed an interminable pause, he spoke.

"I should tell you where I was Monday? Why should I have to do that? . . . Maybe I'm suspected of the murder—yes?"

"You're not suspected now. But your apparent unwillingness to answer my question is certainly suspicious. Why don't you care to have me know where you were?"

"I got no reason to keep it from you, y' understand." Mannix shrugged. "I got nothing to be ashamed of—absolutely! . . . I had a lot of accounts to go over at the office—winter-season stocks. I was down at the office until ten o'clock—maybe later. Then at half past ten—"

"That'll do!" Vance's voice cut in tartly. "No need to drag anyone else into this thing."

He spoke with a curious significance of emphasis, and Mannix studied him craftily, trying to read what knowledge, if any, lay behind his words. But he received no enlightenment from Vance's features. The warning, however, had been enough to halt him.

"You don't want to know where I was at half past ten?"

"Not particularly," said Vance. "We want to know where you were at midnight. And it won't be necessary to mention anyone who saw you at that time. When you tell us the truth, we'll know it." He himself had assumed the air of wisdom and mystery that he had deputed to Markham earlier in the afternoon. Without breaking faith with Alys La Fosse, he had sowed the seeds of doubt in Mannix's mind.

Before the man could frame an answer, Vance stood up and leaned impressively over the district attorney's desk.

"You know a Miss Frisbee. Lives in 71st Street; accurately speaking—at number 184; to be more exact—in the house where Miss Odell lived; to put it precisely—in Apartment Number 2. Miss Frisbee was a former model of yours. Sociable girl: still charitable to the advances of her erstwhile employer—meanin' yourself. When did you see her last, Mr. Mannix? . . . Take your time about answering. You may want to think it over."

Mannix took his time. It was a full minute before he spoke, and then it was to put another question.

"Haven't I got a right to call on a lady—haven't I?"

"Certainly. Therefore, why should a question about so obviously correct and irreproachable an episode make you uneasy?"

"Me uneasy?" Mannix, with considerable effort, produced a grin. "I'm just wondering what you got in your mind, asking me about my private affairs."

"I'll tell you. Miss Odell was murdered at about midnight Monday. No one came or went through the front door of the house, and the side door was locked. The only way any one could have entered her apartment was by way of Apartment 2; and nobody who knew Miss Odell ever visited Apartment 2 except yourself."

At these words Mannix leaned over the table, grasping the edge of it with both hands for support. His eyes were wide and his sensual lips hung open. But it was not fear that one read in his attitude; it was sheer amazement. He sat for a moment staring at Vance, stunned and incredulous.

"That's what you think, is it? No one could've got in or out except by Apartment 2, because the side door was locked?" He gave a short, vicious laugh. "If that side door didn't happen to be locked Monday night, where'd I stand then—huh? Where'd I stand?"

"I rather think you'd stand with us—with the district attorney." Vance was watching him like a cat.

"Sure I would!" spat Mannix. "And let me tell you something, my friend: that's just where I stand—absolutely!" He swung heavily about and faced Markham. "I'm a good fellow, y' understand, but I've kept my mouth shut long enough. . . . *That side door wasn't locked Monday night. And I know who sneaked out of it at five minutes to twelve!*"

"Ça marche!" murmured Vance, reseating himself and calmly lighting a cigarette.

Markham was too astonished to speak at once; and Heath sat stock-still, his cigar halfway to his mouth.

At length Markham leaned back and folded his arms.

"I think you'd better tell us the whole story, Mr. Mannix." His voice held a quality which made the request an imperative.

Mannix, too, settled back in his chair.

"Oh, I'm going to tell it—believe me, I'm going to tell it. You had the right idea. I spent the evening with Miss Frisbee. No harm in that, though."

"What time did you go there?"

"After office hours—half past five, quarter to six. Came up in the subway, got off at 72d, and walked over."

"And you entered the house through the front door?"

"No. I walked down the alleyway and went in the side door—like I generally do. It's nobody's business who I call on, and what the telephone operator in the front hall don't know don't hurt him."

"That's all right so far," observed Heath. "The janitor didn't bolt the side door until after six."

"And did you stay the entire evening, Mr. Mannix?" asked Markham.

"Sure—till just before midnight. Miss Frisbee cooked the dinner, and I'd brought along a bottle of wine. Social little party—just the two of us. And I didn't go outside the apartment, understand, until five minutes to twelve. You can get the lady down here and ask her. I'll call her up now and tell her to explain the exact situation about Monday night. I'm not asking you to take my word for it—positively not."

Markham made a gesture dismissing the suggestion.

"What took place at five minutes to twelve?"

Mannix hesitated, as if loath to come to the point.

"I'm a good fellow, y' understand. And a friend's a friend. But—I ask you—is that any reason why I should get in wrong for something I didn't have absolutely nothing to do with?"

He waited for an answer, but receiving none, continued.

"Sure, I'm right. Anyway, here's what happened. As I said, I was calling on the lady. But I had another date for later that night; so a few minutes before midnight I said good-bye and started to go. Just as I opened the door I saw someone sneaking away from the Canary's apartment down the little back hall to the side door. There was a light in the hall, and the door of Apartment 2 faces that side door. I saw the fellow as plain as I see you—positively as plain."

"Who was it?"

"Well, if you got to know, it was Pop Cleaver."

Markham's head jerked slightly.

"What did you do then?"

"Nothing, Mr. Markham—nothing at all. I didn't think much about it, y' understand. I knew Pop was chasing after the Canary, and I just supposed he'd been calling on her. But I didn't want Pop to see me—none of his business where I spend my time. So I waited quietly till he went out—"

"By the side door?"

"Sure. Then I went out the same way. I was going to leave by the front door, because I knew the side door was always locked at night. But when I saw Pop go out that way, I said to myself I'd do the same. No sense giving your business away to a telephone operator if you haven't got to—no sense at all. So I went out the same way I came in. Picked up a taxi on Broadway, and went—"

"That's enough!" Again Vance's command cut him short.

"Oh, all right—all right." Mannix seemed content to end his statement at this point. "Only, y' understand, I don't want you to think —"

"We don't."

Markham was puzzled at these interruptions, but made no comment.

"When you read of Miss Odell's death," he said, "why didn't you come to the police with this highly important information?"

"I should get mixed up in it!" exclaimed Mannix in surprise. "I got enough trouble without looking for it—plenty."

"An exigent course," commented Markham with open disgust. "But you nevertheless suggested to me, after you knew of the murder, that Cleaver was being blackmailed by Miss Odell."

"Sure I did. Don't that go to show I wanted to do the right thing by you—giving you a valuable tip?"

"Did you see anyone else that night in the halls or alleyway?"

"Nobody—absolutely nobody."

"Did you hear anyone in the Odell apartment—anyone speaking or moving about, perhaps?"

"Didn't hear a thing." Mannix shook his head emphatically.

"And you're certain of the time you saw Cleaver go out—five minutes to twelve?"

"Positively. I looked at my watch, and I said to the lady: 'I'm leaving the same day I came; it won't be tomorrow for five minutes yet.'"

Markham went over his story point by point, attempting by various means to make him admit more than he had already told. But Mannix neither added to his statement nor modified it in any detail; and after half an hour's cross-examination he was permitted to go.

"We've found one missing piece of the puzzle, at any rate," commented Vance. "I don't see now just how it fits into the complete pattern, but it's helpful and suggestive. And, I say, how beautifully my intuition about Mannix was verified, don't y' know!"

"Yes, of course—your precious intuition." Markham looked at him sceptically. "Why did you shut him up twice when he was trying to tell me something?"

"O, tu ne sauras jamais," recited Vance. "I simply can't tell you, old dear. Awfully sorry, and all that."

His manner was whimsical, but Markham knew that at such times Vance was at heart most serious, and he did not press the question. I could not help wondering if Miss La Fosse realized just how secure she had been in putting her faith in Vance's integrity.

Heath had been considerably shaken by Mannix's story.

"I don't savvy that side door being unlocked," he complained. "How the hell did it get bolted again on the inside after Mannix went out? And who unbolted it after six o'clock?"

"In God's good time, my sergeant, all things will be revealed," said Vance.

"Maybe—and maybe not. But if we do find out, you can take it from me that the answer'll be Skeel. He's the bird we gotta get the goods on. Cleaver is no expert jimmy artist; and neither is Mannix."

"Just the same, there was a very capable technician on hand that night, and it wasn't your friend the Dude, though he was probably

the Donatello who sculptured open the jewel case."

"A pair of 'em, was there? That's your theory, is it, Mr. Vance? You said that once before; and I'm not saying you're wrong. But if we can hang any part of it on Skeel, we'll make him come across as to who his pal was."

"It wasn't a pal, Sergeant. It was more likely a stranger."

Markham sat glowering into space.

"I don't at all like the Cleaver end of this affair," he said. "There's been something damned wrong about him ever since Monday."

"And I say," put in Vance, "doesn't the gentleman's false alibi take on a certain shady significance now, what? You apprehend, I trust, why I restrained you from questioning him about it at the club yesterday. I rather fancied that if you could get Mannix to pour out his heart to you, you'd be in a stronger position to draw a few admissions from Cleaver. And behold? Again the triumph of intuition! With what you now know about him, you can chivvy him most unconscionably—eh, what?"

"And that's precisely what I'm going to do." Markham rang for Swacker. "Get hold of Charles Cleaver," he ordered irritably. "Phone him at the Stuyvesant Club and also his home—he lives round the corner from the club in West 27th Street. And tell him I want him to be here in half an hour, or I'll send a couple of detectives to bring him in handcuffs."

For five minutes Markham stood before the window, smoking agitatedly, while Vance, with a smile of amusement, busied himself with *The Wall Street Journal*. Heath got himself a drink of water, and took a turn up and down the room. Presently Swacker reentered.

"Sorry, Chief, but there's nothing doing. Cleaver's gone into the country somewhere. Won't be back till late tonight."

"Hell! . . . All right—that'll do." Markham turned to Heath. "You have Cleaver rounded up tonight, Sergeant, and bring him in here tomorrow morning at nine."

"He'll be here, sir!" Heath paused in his pacing and faced Markham. "I've been thinking, sir; and there's one thing that keeps coming up in my mind, so to speak. You remember that black document box that was setting on the living room table? It was empty; and what a woman generally keeps in that kind of a box is letters and things like that. Well, now, here's what's been bothering me: that box wasn't jimmied open—it was unlocked with a key. And, anyway, a professional crook don't take letters and documents. . . . You see what I mean, sir?"

"Sergeant of mine!" exclaimed Vance. "I abase myself before you! I sit at your feet! . . . The document box—the tidily opened, empty document box! Of course. Skeel didn't open it—never in this world! That was the other chap's handiwork."

"What was in your mind about that box, Sergeant?" asked Markham.

"Just this, sir. As Mr. Vance has insisted right along, there mighta been someone besides Skeel in that apartment during the night. And you told me that Cleaver admitted to you he'd paid Odell a lot of money last June to get back his letters. But suppose he never paid that money; suppose he went there Monday night and took those letters. Wouldn't he have told you just the story he did about buying 'em back? Maybe that's how Mannix happened to see him there."

"That's not unreasonable," Markham acknowledged. "But where does it lead us?"

"Well, sir, if Cleaver did take 'em Monday night, he mighta held on to 'em. And if any of those letters were dated later than last June, when he says he bought 'em back, then we'd have the goods on him."

"Well?"

"As I say, sir, I've been thinking. . . . Now, Cleaver is outa town today; and if we could get hold of those letters. . . ."

"It might prove helpful, of course," said Markham coolly, looking the sergeant straight in the eye. "But such a thing is quite out of the question."

"Still and all," mumbled Heath. "Cleaver's been pulling a lot of raw stuff on you, sir."

## 21. A CONTRADICTION IN DATES

(Saturday, September 15; 9 A.M.)

The next morning Markham and Vance and I breakfasted together at the Prince George, and arrived at the district attorney's office a few minutes past nine. Heath, with Cleaver in tow, was waiting in the reception room.

To judge by Cleaver's manner as he entered, the sergeant had been none too considerate of him. He strode belligerently to the district attorney's desk and fixed a cold, resentful eye on Markham.

"Am I, by any chance, under arrest?" he demanded softly, but it was the rasping, suppressed softness of wrathful indignation.

"Not yet," said Markham curtly. "But if you were, you'd have only yourself to blame. Sit down."

Cleaver hesitated, and took the nearest chair.

"Why was I routed out of bed at seven thirty by this detective of yours"—he jerked his thumb toward Heath—"and threatened with patrol wagons and warrants because I objected to such high-handed and illegal methods?"

"You were merely threatened with legal procedure if you refused to accept my invitation voluntarily. This is my short day at the office; and there was some explaining I wanted from you without delay."

"I'm damned if I'll explain anything to you under these conditions!" For all his nerveless poise, Cleaver was finding it difficult to control himself. "I'm no pickpocket that you can drag in here when it suits your convenience and put through a third degree."

"That's eminently satisfactory to me," Markham spoke ominously. "But since you refuse to do your explaining as a free citizen, I have no other course than to alter your present status." He turned to Heath. "Sergeant, go across the hall and have Ben swear out a warrant for Charles Cleaver. Then lock this gentleman up."

Cleaver gave a start and caught his breath sibilantly. "On what charge?" he demanded.

"The murder of Margaret Odell."

The man sprang to his feet. The color had gone from his face, and the muscles of his jowls worked spasmodically. "Wait! You're giving me a raw deal. And you'll lose out, too. You couldn't make that charge stick in a thousand years."

"Maybe not. But if you don't want to talk here, I'll make you talk in court."

"I'll talk here," Cleaver sat down again. "What do you want to know?"

Markham took out a cigar and lit it with deliberation. "First: why did you tell me you were in Boonton Monday night?"

Cleaver apparently had expected the question. "When I read of the Canary's death, I wanted an alibi; and my brother had just given me the summons he'd been handed in Boonton. It was a ready-made alibi right in my hand. So I used it."

"Why did you need an alibi?"

"I didn't need it; but I thought it might save me trouble. People knew I'd been running round with the Odell girl; and some of them knew she'd been blackmailing me—I'd told 'em, like a damn fool. I told Mannix, for instance. We'd both been stung."

"Is that your only reason for concocting this alibi?" Markham was watching him sharply.

"Wasn't it reason enough? Blackmail would have constituted a motive, wouldn't it?"

"It takes more than a motive to arouse unpleasant suspicion."

"Maybe so. Only I didn't want to be drawn into it. You can't blame me for trying to keep clear of it."

Markham leaned over with a threatening smile. "The fact that Miss Odell had blackmailed you wasn't your only reason for lying about the summons. It wasn't even your main reason."

Cleaver's eyes narrowed, but otherwise he was like a graven image. "You evidently know more about it than I do." He managed to make his words sound casual.

"Not more, Mr. Cleaver," Markham corrected him, "but nearly as much. Where were you between eleven o'clock and midnight Monday?"

"Perhaps that's one of the things you know."

"You're right. You were in Miss Odell's apartment."

Cleaver sneered, but he did not succeed in disguising the shock that Markham's accusation caused him.

"If that's what you think, then it happens you don't know, after all. I haven't put foot in her apartment for two weeks."

"I have the testimony of reliable witnesses to the contrary."

"Witnesses!" The word seemed to force itself from Cleaver's compressed lips.

Markham nodded. "You were seen coming out of Miss Odell's apartment and leaving the house by the side door at five minutes to twelve on Monday night."

Cleaver's jaw sagged slightly, and his labored breathing was quite audible.

"And between half past eleven and twelve o'clock," pursued Markham's relentless voice, "Miss Odell was strangled and robbed. What do you say to that?"

For a long time there was tense silence. Then Cleaver spoke.

"I've got to think this thing out."

Markham waited patiently. After several minutes Cleaver drew himself together and squared his shoulders.

"I'm going to tell you what I did that night, and you can take it or leave it." Again he was the cold, self-contained gambler. "I don't care how many witnesses you've got; it's the only story you'll ever get out of me. I should have told you in the first place, but I didn't see any sense of stepping into hot water if I wasn't pushed in. You might have believed me last Tuesday, but now you've got something in your head, and you want to make an arrest to shut up the newspapers—"

"Tell your story," ordered Markham. "If it's straight, you needn't worry about the newspapers."

Cleaver knew in his heart that this was true. No one, not even his bitterest political enemies, had ever accused Markham of buying

kudos with any act of injustice, however small.

"There's not much to tell, as a matter of fact," the man began. "I went to Miss Odell's house a little before midnight, but I didn't enter her apartment; I didn't even ring her bell."

"Is that your customary way of paying visits?"

"Sounds fishy, doesn't it? But it's the truth, nevertheless. I intended to see her—that is, I wanted to—but when I reached her door, something made me change my mind—"

"Just a moment. How did you enter the house?"

"By the side door, the one off the alleyway. I always used it when it was open. Miss Odell requested me to, so that the telephone operator wouldn't see me coming in so often."

"And the door was unlocked at that time Monday night?"

"How else could I have got in by it? A key wouldn't have done me any good, even if I'd had one, for the door locks by a bolt on the inside. I'll say this, though: that's the first time I ever remember finding the door unlocked at night."

"All right. You went in the side entrance. Then what?"

"I walked down the rear hall and listened at the door of Miss Odell's apartment for a minute. I thought there might be someone else with her, and I didn't want to ring unless she was alone. . . ."

"Pardon my interrupting, Mr. Cleaver," interposed Vance. "But what made you think someone else was there?"

The man hesitated.

"Was it," prompted Vance, "because you had telephoned to Miss Odell a little while before, and had been answered by a man's voice?"

Cleaver nodded slowly. "I can't see any particular point in denying it. . . . Yes, that's the reason."

"What did this man say to you?"

"Damn little. He said 'Hello,' and when I asked to speak to Miss Odell, he informed me she wasn't in, and hung up."

Vance addressed himself to Markham. "That, I think, explains Jessup's report of the brief phone call to the Odell apartment at twenty minutes to twelve."

"Probably," Markham spoke without interest. He was intent on Cleaver's account of what happened later and he took up the interrogation at the point where Vance had interrupted.

"You say you listened at the apartment door. What caused you to refrain from ringing?"

"I heard a man's voice inside."

Markham straightened up.

"A man's voice? You're sure?"

"That's what I said." Cleaver was matter of fact about it. "A man's voice. Otherwise I'd have rung the bell."

"Could you identify the voice?"

"Hardly. It was very indistinct; and it sounded a little hoarse. It wasn't anyone's voice I was familiar with; but I'd be inclined to say it was the same one that answered me over the phone."

"Could you make out anything that was said?"

Cleaver frowned and looked past Markham through the open window. "I know what the words sounded like," he said slowly. "I didn't think anything of them at the time. But after reading the papers the next day, those words came back to me—"

"What were the words?" Markham cut in impatiently.

"Well, as near as I could make out, they were: 'Oh, my God! Oh, my God!'—repeated two or three times."

This statement seemed to bring a sense of horror into the dreary old office—a horror all the more potent because of the casual, phlegmatic way in which Cleaver repeated that cry of anguish. After a brief pause Markham asked, "When you heard this man's voice, what did you do?"

"I walked softly back down the rear hall and went out again through the side door. Then I went home."

A short silence ensued. Cleaver's testimony had been in the nature of a surprise; but it fitted perfectly with Mannix's statement.

Presently Vance lifted himself out of the depths of his chair. "I say, Mr. Cleaver, what were you doing between twenty minutes to twelve, when you phoned Miss Odell, and five minutes to twelve, when you entered the side door of her apartment house?"

"I was riding uptown in the subway from 23d Street," came the answer after a short pause.

"Strange—very strange." Vance inspected the tip of his cigarette. "Then you couldn't possibly have phoned to anyone during that fifteen minutes—eh, what?"

I suddenly remembered Alys La Fosse's statement that Cleaver had telephoned to her on Monday night at ten minutes to twelve. Vance, by his question, had, without revealing his own knowledge, created a state of uncertainty in the other's mind. Afraid to commit himself too emphatically, Cleaver resorted to an evasion.

"It's possible, is it not, that I could have phoned someone after leaving the subway at 72d Street and before I walked the block to Miss Odell's house?"

"Oh, quite," murmured Vance. "Still, looking at it mathematically, if you phoned Miss Odell at twenty minutes to twelve, and then entered the subway, rode to 72d Street, walked a block to 71st, went into the building, listened at her door, and departed at five minutes to twelve—making the total time consumed only fifteen minutes—you'd scarcely have sufficient leeway to stop en route and phone to anyone. However, I sha'n't press the point. But I'd really like to know what you did between eleven o'clock and twenty minutes to twelve, when you phoned to Miss Odell."

Cleaver studied Vance intently for a moment. "To tell you the truth, I was upset that night. I knew Miss Odell was out with another man—she'd broken an appointment with me—and I walked the streets for an hour or more, fuming and fretting."

"Walked the streets?" Vance frowned.

"That's what I said." Cleaver spoke with animus. Then, turning, he gave Markham a long, calculating look. "You remember I once suggested to you that you might learn something from a Doctor Lindquist. . . . Did you ever get after him?"

Before Markham could answer, Vance broke in. "Ah! That's it!—Doctor Lindquist! Well, well—of course! . . . So, Mr. Cleaver, you were walking the streets? The *streets*, mind you! Precisely! You state the fact, and I echo the word *streets*. And you—apparently out of a clear sky—ask about Doctor Lindquist. Why Doctor Lindquist? No one has mentioned him. But that word *streets*—that's the connection. The streets and Doctor Lindquist are one—same as Paris and springtime are one. Neat, very neat. . . . And now I've got another piece to the puzzle."

Markham and Heath looked at him as if he had suddenly gone mad. He calmly selected a Régie from his case and proceeded to light it. Then he smiled beguilingly at Cleaver.

"The time has come, my dear sir, for you to tell us when and where you met Doctor Lindquist while roaming the streets Monday night. If you don't, 'pon my word, I'll come pretty close to doing it for you."

A full minute passed before Cleaver spoke; and during that time his cold, staring eyes never moved from the district attorney's face.

"I've already told most of the story; so here's the rest." He gave a soft mirthless laugh. "I went to Miss Odell's house a little before half past eleven—thought she might be home by that time. There I ran into Doctor Lindquist standing in the entrance to the alleyway. He spoke to me and told me someone was with Miss Odell in her apartment. Then I walked round the corner to the Ansonia Hotel. After ten minutes or so I telephoned Miss Odell, and, as I said, a man answered. I waited another ten minutes and phoned a friend of Miss Odell's, hoping to arrange a party; but, failing, I walked back to the house. The doctor had disappeared, and I went down the alleyway and in the side door. After listening a minute, as I told you, and hearing a man's voice, I came away and went home. . . . That's everything."

At that moment Swacker came in and whispered something to Heath. The sergeant rose with alacrity and followed the secretary out of the room. Almost at once he returned, bearing a bulging manila folder. Handing it to Markham, he said something in a low voice inaudible to the rest of us. Markham appeared both astonished and displeased. Waving the sergeant back to his seat, he turned to Cleaver.

"I'll have to ask you to wait in the reception room for a few minutes. Another urgent matter has just arisen."

Cleaver went out without a word, and Markham opened the folder. "I don't like this sort of thing, Sergeant. I told you so yesterday when you suggested it."

"I understand, sir." Heath, I felt, was not as contrite as his tone indicated. "But if those letters and things are all right, and Cleaver hasn't been lying to us about 'em, I'll have my man put 'em back so's no one'll ever know they were taken. And if they do make Cleaver out a liar, then we've got a good excuse for grabbing 'em."

Markham did not argue the point. With a gesture of distaste he began running through the letters, looking particularly at the dates. Two photographs he put back after a cursory glance; and one piece of paper, which appeared to contain a pen-and-ink sketch of some kind, he tore up with disgust and threw into the wastebasket. Three letters, I noticed, he placed to one side. After five minutes' inspection of the others, he returned them to the folder. Then he nodded to Heath.

"Bring Cleaver back." He rose and, turning, gazed out of the window.

As soon as Cleaver was again seated before the desk, Markham said, without looking round, "You told me it was last June that you bought your letters back from Miss Odell. Do you recall the date?"

"Not exactly," said Cleaver easily. "It was early in the month, though—during the first week, I think."

Markham now spun about and pointed to the three letters he had segregated.

"How, then, do you happen to have in your possession compromising letters which you wrote to Miss Odell from the Adirondacks late in July?"

Cleaver's self-control was perfect. After a moment's stoical silence, he merely said in a mild, quiet voice, "You of course came by those letters legally."

Markham was stung, but he was also exasperated by the other's persistent deceptions.

"I regret to confess," he said, "that they were taken from your apartment—though, I assure you, it was against my instructions. But since they have come unexpectedly into my possession, the wisest thing you can do is to explain them. There was an empty document box in Miss Odell's apartment the morning her body was found, and, from all appearances, it had been opened Monday night."

"I see." Cleaver laughed harshly. "Very well. The fact is—though I frankly don't expect you to believe me—I didn't pay my blackmail to Miss Odell until the middle of August, about three weeks ago. That's when all my letters were returned. I told you it was June in order to set back the date as far as possible. The older the affair was, I figured, the less likelihood there'd be of your suspecting me."

Markham stood fingering the letters undecidedly. It was Vance who put an end to his irresolution.

"I rather think, don't y' know," he said, "that you'd be safe in accepting Mr. Cleaver's explanation and returning his billets-doux."

Markham, after a momentary hesitation, picked up the manila folder and, replacing the three letters, handed it to Cleaver.

"I wish you to understand that I did not sanction the appropriating of this correspondence. You'd better take it home and destroy it—I won't detain you any longer now. But please arrange to remain where I can reach you if necessary."

"I'm not going to run away," said Cleaver; and Heath directed him to the elevator.

## 22. A TELEPHONE CALL

(Saturday, September 15; 10 A.M.)

Heath returned to the office, shaking his head hopelessly. "There musta been a regular wake at Odell's Monday night."

"Quite," agreed Vance. "A midnight conclave of the lady's admirers. Mannix was there, unquestionably; and he saw Cleaver; and Cleaver saw Lindquist; and Lindquist saw Spotswoode—"

"Humph! But nobody saw Skeel."

"The trouble is," said Markham, "we don't know how much of Cleaver's story is true. And, by the way, Vance, do you believe he really bought his letters back in August?"

"If only we knew! Dashed confusin', ain't it?"

"Anyway," argued Heath, "Cleaver's statement about phoning Odell at twenty minutes to twelve, and a man answering, is verified by Jessup's testimony. And I guess Cleaver saw Lindquist all right that night, for it was him who first tipped us off about the doc. He took a chance doing it, because the doc was liable to tell us he saw Cleaver."

"But if Cleaver had an allurin' alibi," said Vance, "he could simply have said the doctor was lying. However, whether you accept Cleaver's absorbin' legend or not, you can take my word for it there was a visitor, other than Skeel, in the Odell apartment that night."

"That's all right, too," conceded Heath reluctantly. "But, even so, this other fellow is only valuable to us as a possible source of evidence against Skeel."

"That may be true, Sergeant." Markham frowned perplexedly. "Only, I'd like to know how that side door was unbolted and then rebolted on the inside. We know now that it was open around midnight, and that Mannix and Cleaver both used it."

"You worry so over trifles," said Vance negligently. "The door problem will solve itself once we discover who was keeping company with Skeel in the Canary's gilded cage."

"I should say it boils down to Mannix, Cleaver, and Lindquist. They were the only three at all likely to be present; and if we accept Cleaver's story in its essentials, each of them had an opportunity of getting into the apartment between half past eleven and midnight."

"True. But you have only Cleaver's word that Lindquist was in the neighborhood. And that evidence, uncorroborated, can't be accepted as the lily-white truth."

Heath stirred suddenly and looked at the clock. "Say, what about that nurse you wanted at eleven o'clock?"

"I've been worrying horribly about her for an hour." Vance appeared actually troubled. "Really, y' know, I haven't the slightest desire to meet the lady. I'm hoping for a revelation, don't y' know. Let's wait for the doctor until half past ten, Sergeant."

He had scarcely finished speaking when Swacker informed Markham that Doctor Lindquist had arrived on a mission of great urgency. It was an amusing situation. Markham laughed outright, while Heath stared at Vance with uncomprehending astonishment.

"It's not necromancy, Sergeant," smiled Vance. "The doctor realized yesterday that we were about to catch him in a falsehood; so he decided to forestall us by explaining personally. Simple, what?"

"Sure." Heath's look of wonderment disappeared.

As Doctor Lindquist entered the room I noted that his habitual urbanity had deserted him. His air was at once apologetic and apprehensive. That he was laboring under some great strain was evident.

"I've come, sir," he announced, taking the chair Markham indicated, "to tell you the truth about Monday night."

"The truth is always welcome, Doctor," said Markham encouragingly.

Doctor Lindquist bowed agreement.

"I deeply regret that I did not follow that course at our first interview. But at that time I had not weighed the matter sufficiently; and, having once committed myself to a false statement, I felt I had no option but to abide by it. However, after more mature consideration, I have come to the conclusion that frankness is the wiser course. The fact is, sir, I was not with Mrs. Breedon Monday night between the hours I mentioned. I remained at home until about half past ten. Then I went to Miss Odell's house, arriving a little before eleven. I stood outside in the street until half past eleven; then I returned home."

"Such a bare statement needs considerable amplification."

"I realize it, sir; and I am prepared to amplify it." Doctor Lindquist hesitated, and a strained look came into his white face. His hands were tightly clenched. "I had learned that Miss Odell was going to dinner and the theater with a man named Spotswoode; and the thought of it began to prey on my mind. It was Spotswoode to whom I owed the alienation of Miss Odell's affections; and it was his interference that had driven me to my threat against the young woman. As I sat at home that night, letting my mind dwell morbidly on the situation, I was seized by the impulse to carry out that threat. Why not, I asked myself, end the intolerable situation at once? And why not include Spotswoode in the debacle? . . ."

As he talked he became more and more agitated. The nerves about his eyes had begun to twitch, and his shoulders jerked like those of a man attempting vainly to control a chill.

"Remember, sir, I was suffering agonies, and my hatred of Spotswoode seemed to cloud my reason. Scarcely realizing what I was doing, and yet operating under an irresistible determination, I put my automatic in my pocket and hurried out of the house. I thought Miss Odell and Spotswoode would be returning from the theater soon, and I intended to force my way into the apartment and perform the act I had planned. . . . From across the street I saw them enter the house—it was about eleven then—but, when I came face to face with the actuality, I hesitated. I delayed my revenge; I—I played with the idea, getting a kind of insane satisfaction out of it—knowing they were now at my mercy. . . ."

His hands were shaking as with a coarse tremor; and the twitching about his eyes had increased.

"For half an hour I waited, gloating. Then, as I was about to go in and have it over with, a man named Cleaver came along and saw me. He stopped and spoke. I thought he might be going to call on Miss Odell, so I told him she already had a visitor. He then went on



toward Broadway, and while I was waiting for him to turn the corner, Spotswoode came out of the house and jumped into a taxicab that had just driven up. . . . My plan had been thwarted—I had waited too long. Suddenly I seemed to awake as from some terrible nightmare. I was almost in a state of collapse, but I managed to get home. . . . That's what happened—so help me God!"

He sank back weakly in his chair. The suppressed nervous excitement that had fired him while he spoke had died out, and he appeared listless and indifferent. He sat several minutes breathing stertorously, and twice he passed his hand vaguely across his forehead. He was in no condition to be questioned, and finally Markham sent for Tracy and gave orders that he was to be taken to his home.

"Temporary exhaustion from hysteria," commented Vance indifferently. "All these paranoia lads are hyperneurasthenic. He'll be in a psychopathic ward in another year."

"That's as may be, Mr. Vance," said Heath, with an impatience that repudiated all enthusiasm for the subject of abnormal psychology. "What interests me just now is the way all these fellows' stories hang together."

"Yes," nodded Markham. "There is undeniably a groundwork of truth in their statements."

"But please observe," Vance pointed out, "that their stories do not eliminate any one of them as a possible culprit. Their tales, as you say, synchronize perfectly; and yet, despite all that neat coordination, any one of the three could have got into the Odell apartment that night. For instance: Mannix could have entered from Apartment 2 before Cleaver came along and listened; and he could have seen Cleaver going away when he himself was leaving the Odell apartment. Cleaver could have spoken to the doctor at half past eleven, walked to the Ansonia, returned a little before twelve, gone into the lady's apartment, and come out just as Mannix opened Miss Frisbee's door. Again, the excitable doctor may have gone in after Spotswoode came out at half past eleven, stayed twenty minutes or so, and departed before Cleaver returned from the Ansonia. . . . No; the fact that their stories dovetail doesn't in the least tend to exculpate any one of them."

"And," supplemented Markham, "that cry of 'Oh, my God!' might have been made by either Mannix or Lindquist—provided Cleaver really heard it."

"He heard it unquestionably," said Vance. "Someone in the apartment was invoking the Deity around midnight. Cleaver hasn't sufficient sense of the dramatic to fabricate such a thrillin' *bonne-bouche*."

"But if Cleaver actually heard that voice," protested Markham, "then, he is automatically eliminated as a suspect."

"Not at all, old dear. He may have heard it after he had come out of the apartment, and realized then, for the first time, that someone had been hidden in the place during his visit."

"Your man in the clothes closet, I presume you mean."

"Yes—of course. . . . You know, Markham, it might have been the horrified Skeel, emerging from his hiding place upon a scene of tragic wreckage, who let out that evangelical invocation."

"Except," commented Markham, with sarcasm, "Skeel doesn't impress me as particularly religious."

"Oh, that?" Vance shrugged. "A point in substantiation. Irreligious persons call on God much more than Christians. The only true and consistent theologians, don't y' know, are the atheists."

Heath, who had been sitting in gloomy meditation, took his cigar from his mouth and heaved a heavy sigh.

"Yes," he rumbled, "I'm willing to admit somebody besides Skeel got into Odell's apartment, and that the Dude hid in the clothes closet. But, if that's so, then, this other fellow didn't see Skeel; and it's not going to do us a whole lot of good even if we identify him."

"Don't fret on that point, Sergeant," Vance counselled him cheerfully. "When you've identified this other mysterious visitor, you'll be positively amazed how black care will desert you. You'll rubricate the hour you find him. You'll leap gladsomely in the air. You'll sing a roundelay."

"The hell I will!" said Heath.

Swacker came in with a typewritten memorandum and put it on the district attorney's desk. "The architect just phoned in this report." Markham glanced it over; it was very brief. "No help here," he said. "Walls solid. No waste space. No hidden entrances."

"Too bad, Sergeant," sighed Vance. "You'll have to drop the cinema idea. . . . Sad."

Heath grunted and looked disconsolate. "Even without no other way of getting in or out except that side door," he said to Markham, "couldn't we get an indictment against Skeel, now that we know the door was unlocked Monday night?"

"We might, Sergeant. But our chief snag would be to show how it was originally unlocked and then rebolted after Skeel left. And Abe Rubin would concentrate on that point. No, we'd better wait awhile and see what develops."

Something "developed" at once. Swacker entered and informed the sergeant that Snitkin wanted to see him immediately.

Snitkin came in, visibly agitated, accompanied by a wizened, shabbily dressed little man of about sixty, who appeared awed and terrified. In the detective's hand was a small parcel wrapped in newspaper, which he laid on the district attorney's desk with an air of triumph.

"The Canary's jewelry," he announced. "I've checked it up from the list the maid gave me, and it's all there."

Heath sprang forward, but Markham was already untying the package with nervous fingers. When the paper had been opened, there lay before us a small heap of dazzling trinkets—several rings of exquisite workmanship, three magnificent bracelets, a sparkling sunburst, and a delicately wrought lorgnette. The stones were all large and of unconventional cut.

Markham looked up from them inquisitively, and Snitkin, not waiting for the inevitable question, explained.

"This man Potts found 'em. He's a street cleaner, and he says they were in one of the D. S. C. cans at 23d Street near the Flatiron Building. He found 'em yesterday afternoon, so he says, and took 'em home. Then he got scared and brought 'em to Police Headquarters this morning."

Mr. Potts, the "white-wing," was trembling visibly.

"Thass right, sir—thass right," he assured Markham, with frightened eagerness. "I allus look into any bundles I find. I didn't mean no harm takin' 'em home, sir. I wasn't gonna keep 'em. I laid awake worryin' all night, an' this mornin', as soon as I got a chance, I took 'em to the p'lice." He shook so violently I was afraid he was going to break down completely.

"That's all right, Potts," Markham told him in a kindly voice. Then to Snitkin: "Let the man go—only get his full name and address."

Vance had been studying the newspaper in which the jewels had been wrapped.

"I say, my man," he asked, "is this the original paper you found them in?"

"Yes, sir—the same. I ain't touched nothin'."

"Right-o."

Mr. Potts, greatly relieved, shambled out, followed by Snitkin.

"The Flatiron Building is directly across Madison Square from the Stuyvesant Club," observed Markham, frowning.

"So it is." Vance then pointed to the left-hand margin of the newspaper that held the jewels. "And you'll notice that this *Herald* of yesterday has three punctures evidently made by the pins of a wooden holder such as is generally used in a club's reading room."

"You got a good eye, Mr. Vance." Heath nodded, inspecting the newspaper.

"I'll see about this." Markham viciously pressed a button. "They keep their papers on file for a week at the Stuyvesant Club."

When Swacker appeared, he asked that the club's steward be got immediately on the telephone. After a short delay, the connection was made. At the end of five minutes' conversation Markham hung up the receiver and gave Heath a baffled look.

"The club takes two *Heralds*. Both of yesterday's copies are there, on the rack."

"Didn't Cleaver once tell us he read nothing but *The Herald*—that and some racing sheet at night?" Vance put the question offhandedly.

"I believe he did." Markham considered the suggestion. "Still, both the club *Heralds* are accounted for." He turned to Heath. "When you were checking up on Mannix, did you find out what clubs he belonged to?"

"Sure." The sergeant took out his notebook and rifled the pages for a minute or two. "He's a member of the Furriers' and the Cosmopolis."

Markham pushed the telephone toward him.

"See what you can find out."

Heath was fifteen minutes at the task. "A blank," he announced finally. "The Furriers' don't use holders, and the Cosmopolis don't keep any back numbers."

"What about Mr. Skeel's clubs, Sergeant?" asked Vance, smiling.

"Oh, I know the finding of that jewelry gums up my theory about Skeel," said Heath, with surly ill nature. "But what's the good of rubbing it in? Still, if you think I'm going to give that bird a clean bill of health just because the Odell swag was found in a trashcan, you're mighty mistaken. Don't forget we're watching the Dude pretty close. He may have got leery, and tipped off some pal he'd cached the jewels with."

"I rather fancy the experienced Skeel would have turned his booty over to a professional receiver. But even had he passed it on to a friend, would this friend have been likely to throw it away because Skeel was worried?"

"Maybe not. But there's some explanation for those jewels being found, and when we get hold of it, it won't eliminate Skeel."

"No; the explanation won't eliminate Skeel," said Vance; "but—my word!—how it'll change his *locus standi*."

Heath contemplated him with shrewdly appraising eyes. Something in Vance's tone had apparently piqued his curiosity and set him to wondering. Vance had too often been right in his diagnoses of persons and things for the sergeant to ignore his opinions wholly.

But before he could answer, Swacker stepped alertly into the room, his eyes animated.

"Tony Skeel's on the wire, Chief, and wants to speak to you."

Markham, despite his habitual reserve, gave a start. "Here, Sergeant," he said quickly. "Take that extension phone on the table and listen in." He nodded curtly to Swacker, who disappeared to make the connection. Then he took up the receiver of his own telephone and spoke to Skeel.

For a minute or so he listened. Then, after a brief argument, he concurred with some suggestion that had evidently been made; and the conversation ended.

"Skeel craves an audience, I gather," said Vance. "I've rather been expecting it, y' know."

"Yes. He's coming here tomorrow at ten."

"And he hinted that he knew who slew the Canary—eh, what?"

"That's just what he did say. He promised to tell me the whole story tomorrow morning."

"He's the lad that's in a position to do it," murmured Vance.

"But, Mr. Markham," said Heath, who still sat with his hand on the telephone, gazing at the instrument with dazed incredulity, "I don't see why you don't have him brought here today."

"As you heard, Sergeant, Skeel insisted on tomorrow and threatened to say nothing if I forced the issue. It's just as well not to antagonize him. We might spoil a good chance of getting some light on this case if I ordered him brought here and used pressure. And tomorrow suits me. It'll be quiet around here then. Moreover, your man's watching Skeel, and he won't get away."

"I guess you're right, sir. The Dude's touchy and he can give a swell imitation of an oyster when he feels like it." The sergeant spoke with feeling.

"I'll have Swacker here tomorrow to take down his statement," Markham went on; "and you'd better put one of your men on the elevator. The regular operator is off Sundays. Also, plant a man in the hall outside and put another one in Swacker's office."

Vance stretched himself luxuriously and rose.

"Most considerate of the gentleman to call up at this time, don't y' know. I had a longing to see the Monets at Durand-Ruel's this afternoon, and I was afraid I wasn't going to be able to drag myself away from this fascinatin' case. Now that the apocalypse has been definitely scheduled for tomorrow, I'll indulge my taste for Impressionism. . . . *À demain*, Markham. Bye-bye, Sergeant."

### 23. THE TEN-O'CLOCK APPOINTMENT

(Sunday, September 16; 10 A.M.)

A fine drizzle was falling the next morning when we rose; and a chill—the first forerunner of winter—was in the air. We had breakfast in the library at half past eight, and at nine o'clock Vance's car, which had been ordered the night before, called for us. We rode down Fifth Avenue, now almost deserted in its thick blanket of yellow fog, and called for Markham at his apartment in West 12th Street. He was waiting for us in front of the house and stepped quickly into the car with scarcely a word of greeting. From his anxious, preoccupied look I knew that he was depending a good deal on what Skeel had to tell him.

We had turned into West Broadway beneath the Elevated tracks before any of us spoke. Then Markham voiced a doubt which was plainly an articulation of his troubled ruminations.

"I'm wondering if, after all, this fellow Skeel can have any important information to give us. His phone call was very strange. Yet he spoke confidently enough regarding his knowledge. No dramatics, no request for immunity—just a plain, assured statement that he knew who murdered the Odell girl, and had decided to come clean."

"It's certain he himself didn't strangle the lady," pronounced Vance. "My theory, as you know, is that he was hiding in the clothes press when the shady business was being enacted; and all along I've clung lovingly to the idea that he was *au secret* to the entire proceedings. The keyhole of that closet door is on a direct line with the end of the davenport where the lady was strangled; and if a rival was operating at the time of his concealment, it's not unreasonable to assume that he peered forth—eh, what? I questioned him on this point, you remember; and he didn't like it a bit."

"But, in that case—"

"Oh, I know. There are all kinds of erudite objections to my wild dream. Why didn't he give the alarm? Why didn't he tell us about it before? Why this? and why that? . . . I make no claim to omniscience, y' know; I don't even pretend to have a logical explanation for the various *traits d'union* of my vagary. My theory is only sketched in, as it were. But I'm convinced, nevertheless, that the modish Tony knows who killed his *bona roba* and looted her apartment."

"But of the three persons who possibly could have got into the Odell apartment that night—namely, Mannix, Cleaver, and Lindquist—Skeel evidently knows only one—Mannix."

"Yes, to be sure. And Mannix, it would seem, is the only one of the trio who knows Skeel. . . . An interestin' point."

Heath met us at the Franklin Street entrance to the Criminal Courts Building. He, too, was anxious and subdued and he shook hands with us in a detached manner devoid of his usual heartiness.

"I've got Snitkin running the elevator," he said, after the briefest of salutations. "Burke's in the hall upstairs, and Emery is with him, waiting to be let into Swacker's office."

We entered the deserted and almost silent building and rode up to the fourth floor. Markham unlocked his office door and we passed in.

"Guilfoyle, the man who's tailing Skeel," Heath explained, when we were seated, "is to report by phone to the Homicide Bureau as soon as the Dude leaves his rooms."

It was now twenty minutes to ten. Five minutes later Swacker arrived. Taking his stenographic notebook, he stationed himself just inside of the swinging door of Markham's private sanctum, where he could hear all that was said without being seen. Markham lit a cigar, and Heath followed suit. Vance was already smoking placidly. He was the calmest person in the room, and lay back languorously in one of the great leather chairs as though immune to all cares and vicissitudes. But I could tell by the overdeliberate way he flicked his ashes into the receiver that he, too, was uneasy.

Five or six minutes passed in complete silence. Then the sergeant gave a grunt of annoyance. "No, sir," he said, as if completing some unspoken thought, "I can't get a slant on this business. The finding of that jewelry, now, all nicely wrapped up . . . and then the Dude offering to squeal. . . . There's no sense to it."

"It's tryin', I know, Sergeant; but it's not altogether senseless." Vance was gazing lazily at the ceiling. "The chap who confiscated those baubles didn't have any use for them. He didn't want them, in fact—they worried him abominably."

The point was too complex for Heath. The previous day's developments had shaken the foundation of all his arguments; and he lapsed again into brooding silence.

At ten o'clock he rose impatiently and, going to the hall door, looked out. Returning, he compared his watch with the office clock and began pacing restlessly. Markham was attempting to sort some papers on his desk, but presently he pushed them aside with an impatient gesture.

"He ought to be coming along now," he remarked, with an effort at cheerfulness.

"He'll come," growled Heath, "or he'll get a free ride." And he continued his pacing.

A few minutes later he turned abruptly and went out into the hall. We could hear him calling to Snitkin down the elevator shaft, but when he came back into the office, his expression told us that as yet there was no news of Skeel.

"I'll call up the bureau," he decided, "and see what Guilfoyle had to report. At least we'll know then when the Dude left his house."

But when the sergeant had been connected with police headquarters, he was informed that Guilfoyle had as yet made no report.

"That's damn funny," he commented, hanging up the receiver.

It was now twenty minutes past ten. Markham was growing restive. The tenacity with which the Canary murder case had resisted all his efforts toward a solution had filled him with discouragement; and he had hoped, almost desperately, that this morning's interview with Skeel would clear up the mystery, or at least supply him with information on which definite action could be taken. Now, with Skeel late for this all-important appointment, the strain was becoming tense.

He pushed back his chair nervously and, going to the window, gazed out into the dark haze of fine rain. When he returned to his

desk his face was set.

"I'll give our friend until half past ten," he said grimly. "If he isn't here then, Sergeant, you'd better call up the local station house and have them send a patrol wagon for him."

There was another few minutes of silence. Vance lolled in his chair with half-closed eyes, but I noticed that, though he still held his cigarette, he was not smoking. His forehead was puckered by a frown, and he was very quiet. I knew that some unusual problem was occupying him. His lethargy had in it a quality of intentness and concentration.

As I watched him he suddenly sat up straight, his eyes open and alert. He tossed his dead cigarette into the receiver with a jerky movement that attested to some inner excitement.

"Oh, my word!" he exclaimed. "It really can't be, y' know! And yet"—his face darkened—"and yet, by Jove, that's it! . . . What an ass I've been—what an unutterable ass! . . . Oh!"

He sprang to his feet, then stood looking down at the floor like a man dazed, afraid of his own thoughts.

"Markham, I don't like it—I don't like it at all." He spoke almost as if he were frightened. "I tell you, there's something terrible going on—something uncanny. The thought of it makes my flesh creep. . . . I must be getting old and sentimental," he added, with an effort at lightness; but the look in his eyes belied his tone. "Why didn't I see this thing yesterday? . . . But I let it go on. . . ."

We were all staring at him in amazement. I had never seen him affected in this way before, and the fact that he was habitually so cynical and aloof, so adamant to emotion and impervious to outside influences, gave his words and actions an impelling and impressive quality.

After a moment he shook himself slightly, as if to throw off the pall of horror that had descended upon him, and, stepping to Markham's desk, he leaned over, resting on both hands.

"Don't you see?" he asked. "Skeel's not coming. No use to wait—no use of our having come here in the first place. We have to go to him. He's waiting for us. . . . Come! Get your hat."

Markham had risen, and Vance took him firmly by the arm.

"You needn't argue," he persisted. "You'll have to go to him sooner or later. You might as well go now, don't y' know. My word! What a situation!"

He had led Markham, astonished and but mildly protesting, into the middle of the room, and he now beckoned to Heath with his free hand.

"You, too, Sergeant. Sorry you had all this trouble. My fault. I should have foreseen this thing. A devilish shame; but my mind was on Monets all yesterday afternoon. . . . You know where Skeel lives?"

Heath nodded mechanically. He had fallen under the spell of Vance's strange and dynamic importunities.

"Then, don't wait. And, Sergeant! You'd better bring Burke or Snitkin along. They won't be needed here—nobody'll be needed here any more today."

Heath looked inquiringly to Markham for counsel; his bewilderment had thrown him into a state of mute indecision. Markham nodded his approval of Vance's suggestions, and, without a word, slipped into his raincoat. A few minutes later the four of us, accompanied by Snitkin, had entered Vance's car and were lurching uptown. Swacker had been sent home; the office had been locked up; and Burke and Emery had departed for the Homicide Bureau to await further instructions.

Skeel lived in 35th Street, near the East River, in a dingy, but once pretentious, house which formerly had been the residence of some old family of the better class. It now had an air of dilapidation and decay; there was rubbish in the areaway; and a large sign announcing rooms for rent was posted in one of the ground-floor windows.

As we drew up before it Heath sprang to the street and looked sharply about him. Presently he espied an unkempt man slouching in the doorway of a grocery store diagonally opposite, and beckoned to him. The man shambled over furtively.

"It's all right, Guilfoyle," the sergeant told him. "We're paying the Dude a social visit. What's the trouble? Why didn't you report?"

Guilfoyle looked surprised. "I was told to phone in when he left the house, sir. But he ain't left yet. Mallory tailed him home last night round ten o'clock, and I relieved Mallory at nine this morning. The Dude's still inside."

"Of course he's still inside, Sergeant," said Vance, a bit impatiently.

"Where's his room situated, Guilfoyle?" asked Heath.

"Second floor, at the back."

"Right. We're going in. Stand by."

"Look out for him," admonished Guilfoyle. "He's got a gat."

Heath took the lead up the worn steps which led from the pavement to the little vestibule. Without ringing, he roughly grasped the doorknob and shook it. The door was unlocked, and we stepped into the stuffy lower hallway.

A bedraggled woman of about forty, in a disreputable dressing gown, and with hair hanging in strings over her shoulders, emerged suddenly from a rear door and came toward us unsteadily, her bleary eyes focused on us with menacing resentment.

"Say!" she burst out, in a rasping voice. "What do youse mean by bustin' in like this on a respectable lady?" And she launched forth upon a stream of profane epithets.

Heath, who was nearest her, placed his large hand over her face, and gave her a gentle but firm shove backward.

"You keep outa this, Cleopatra!" he advised her, and began to ascend the stairs.

The second-floor hallway was dimly lighted by a small flickering gas jet, and at the rear we could distinguish the outlines of a single door set in the middle of the wall.

"That'll be Mr. Skeel's abode," observed Heath.

He walked up to it and, dropping one hand in his right coat pocket, turned the knob. But the door was locked. He then knocked violently upon it and, placing his ear to the jamb, listened. Snitkin stood directly behind him, his hand also in his pocket. The rest of us remained a little in the rear.

Heath had knocked a second time when Vance's voice spoke up from the semidarkness. "I say, Sergeant, you're wasting time with all that formality."

"I guess you're right," came the answer after a moment of what seemed unbearable silence.

Heath bent down and looked at the lock. Then he took some instrument from his pocket and inserted it into the keyhole.

"You're right," he repeated. "The key's gone."

He stepped back and, balancing on his toes like a sprinter, sent his shoulders crashing against the panel directly over the knob. But the lock held.

"Come on, Snitkin," he ordered.

The two detectives hurled themselves against the door. At the third onslaught there was a splintering of wood and a tearing of the lock's bolt through the molding. The door swung drunkenly inward.

The room was in almost complete darkness. We all hesitated on the threshold, while Snitkin crossed warily to one of the windows and sent the shade clattering up. The yellow-gray light filtered in, and the objects of the room at once took definable form. A large, old-fashioned bed projected from the wall on the right.

"Look!" cried Snitkin, pointing; and something in his voice sent a shiver over me.

We pressed forward. On the foot of the bed, at the side toward the door, sprawled the crumpled body of Skeel. Like the Canary, he had been strangled. His head hung back over the footboard, his face a hideous distortion. His arms were outstretched, and one leg trailed over the edge of the mattress, resting on the floor.

"Thuggee," murmured Vance. "Lindquist mentioned it. Curious!"

Heath stood staring fixedly at the body, his shoulders hunched. His normal ruddiness of complexion was gone, and he seemed like a man hypnotized.

"Mother o' God!" he breathed, awestricken. And, with an involuntary motion, he crossed himself.

Markham was shaken also. He set his jaw rigidly.

"You're right, Vance." His voice was strained and unnatural. "Something sinister and terrible has been going on here. . . . There's a fiend loose in this town—a werewolf."

"I wouldn't say that, old man." Vance regarded the murdered Skeel critically. "No, I wouldn't say that. Not a werewolf. Just a desperate human being. A man of extremes, perhaps, but quite rational, and logical—oh, how deuced logical!"

## 24. AN ARREST

(Sunday, P.M., Monday, A.M.; September 16-17)

The investigation into Skeel's death was pushed with great vigor by the authorities. Doctor Doremus, the medical examiner, arrived promptly and declared that the crime had taken place between ten o'clock and midnight. Immediately Vance insisted that all the men who were known to have been intimately acquainted with the Odell girl—Mannix, Lindquist, Cleaver, and Spotswoode—be interviewed at once and made to explain where they were during these two hours. Markham agreed without hesitation and gave the order to Heath, who at once put four of his men on the task.

Mallory, the detective who had shadowed Skeel the previous night, was questioned regarding possible visitors; but inasmuch as the house where Skeel lived accommodated over twenty roomers, who were constantly coming and going at all hours, no information could be gained through that channel. All that Mallory could say definitely was that Skeel had returned home at about ten o'clock, and had not come out again. The landlady, sobered and subdued by the tragedy, repudiated all knowledge of the affair. She explained that she had been "ill" in her room from dinnertime until we had disturbed her recuperation the next morning. The front door, it seemed, was never locked, since her tenants objected to such an unnecessary inconvenience. The tenants themselves were questioned, but without result; they were not of a class likely to give information to the police, even had they possessed any.

The fingerprint experts made a careful examination of the room but failed to find any marks except Skeel's own. A thorough search through the murdered man's effects occupied several hours; but nothing was discovered that gave any hint of the murderer's identity. A .38 Colt automatic, fully loaded, was found under one of the pillows on the bed; and eleven hundred dollars, in bills of large denomination, was taken from a hollow brass curtain rod. Also, under a loose board in the hall, the missing steel chisel, with the fissure in the blade, was found. But these items were of no value in solving the mystery of Skeel's death; and at four o'clock in the afternoon the room was closed with an emergency padlock and put under guard.

Markham and Vance and I had remained several hours after our discovery of the body. Markham had taken immediate charge of the case and had conducted the interrogation of the tenants. Vance had watched the routine activities of the police with unwonted intentness, and had even taken part in the search. He had seemed particularly interested in Skeel's evening clothes, and had examined them garment by garment. Heath had looked at him from time to time, but there had been neither contempt nor amusement in the sergeant's glances.

At half past two Markham departed, after informing Heath that he would be at the Stuyvesant Club during the remainder of the day; and Vance and I went with him. We had a belated luncheon in the empty grill.

"This Skeel episode rather knocks the foundation from under everything," Markham said dispiritedly, as our coffee was served.

"Oh, no—not that," Vance answered. "Rather, let us say that it has added a new column to the edifice of my giddy theory."

"Your theory—yes. It's about all that's left to go on," Markham sighed. "It has certainly received substantiation this morning. . . . Remarkable how you called the turn when Skeel failed to show up."

Again Vance contradicted him.

"You overestimate my little flutter in forensics, Markham dear. You see, I assumed that the lady's strangler knew of Skeel's offer to you. That offer was probably a threat of some kind on Skeel's part; otherwise he wouldn't have set the appointment a day ahead. He no doubt hoped the victim of his threat would become amenable in the meantime. And that money hidden in the curtain rod leads me to think he was blackmailing the Canary's murderer and had been refused a further donation just before he phoned you yesterday. That would account, too, for his having kept his guilty knowledge to himself all this time."

"You may be right. But now we're worse off than ever, for we haven't even Skeel to guide us."

"At least we've forced our elusive culprit to commit a second crime to cover up his first, don't y' know. And when we have learned what the Canary's various amorists were doing last night between ten and twelve, we may have something suggestive on which to work. By the bye, when may we expect this thrillin' information?"

"It depends upon what luck Heath's men have. Tonight sometime, if everything goes well."

It was, in fact, about half past eight when Heath telephoned the reports. But here again Markham seemed to have drawn a blank. A less satisfactory account could scarcely be imagined. Doctor Lindquist had suffered a "nervous stroke" the preceding afternoon, and had been taken to the Episcopal Hospital. He was still there under the care of two eminent physicians whose word it was impossible to doubt; and it would be a week at least before he would be able to resume his work. This report was the only definite one of the four, and it completely exonerated the doctor from any participation in the previous night's crime.

By a curious coincidence neither Mannix, nor Cleaver, nor Spotswoode could furnish a satisfactory alibi. All three of them, according to their statements, had remained at home the night before. The weather had been inclement; and though Mannix and Spotswoode admitted to having been out earlier in the evening, they stated that they had returned home before ten o'clock. Mannix lived in an apartment hotel, and, as it was Saturday night, the lobby was crowded, so that no one would have been likely to see him come in. Cleaver lived in a small private apartment house without a doorman or hall-boys to observe his movements. Spotswoode was staying at the Stuyvesant Club, and since his rooms were on the third floor, he rarely used the elevator. Moreover, there had been a political reception and dance at the club the previous night, and he might have walked in and out at random a dozen times without being noticed.

"Not what you'd call illuminatin'," said Vance, when Markham had given him this information.

"It eliminates Lindquist, at any rate."

"Quite. And, automatically, it eliminates him as an object of suspicion in the Canary's death also; for these two crimes are part of a whole—integers of the same problem. They complement each other. The latter was conceived in relation to the first—was, in fact, a logical outgrowth of it."

Markham nodded.

"That's reasonable enough. Anyway, I've passed the combative stage. I think I'll drift for a while on the stream of your theory and see what happens."

"What irks me is the disquietin' feeling that positively nothing will happen unless we force the issue. The lad who maneuvered those two obits had real bean in him."

As he spoke Spotswoode entered the room and looked about as if searching for someone. Catching sight of Markham, he came briskly forward, with a look of inquisitive perplexity.

"Forgive me for intruding, sir," he apologized, nodding pleasantly to Vance and me, "but a police officer was here this afternoon inquiring as to my whereabouts last night. It struck me as strange, but I thought little of it until I happened to see the name of Tony Skeel in the headlines of a 'special' tonight and read he had been strangled. I remember you asked me regarding such a man in connection with Miss Odell, and I wondered if, by any chance, there could be any connection between the two murders, and if I was, after all, to be drawn into the affair."

"No, I think not," said Markham. "There seemed a possibility that the two crimes were related; and, as a matter of routine, the police questioned all the close friends of Miss Odell in the hope of turning up something suggestive. You may dismiss the matter from your mind. I trust," he added, "the officer was not unpleasantly importunate."

"Not at all." Spotswoode's look of anxiety disappeared. "He was extremely courteous but a bit mysterious. Who was this man Skeel?"

"A half-world character and ex-burglar. He had some hold on Miss Odell, and, I believe, extorted money from her."

A cloud of angry disgust passed over Spotswoode's face. "A creature like that deserves the fate that overtook him."

We chatted on various matters until ten o'clock, when Vance rose and gave Markham a reproachful look.

"I'm going to try to recover some lost sleep. I'm temperamentally unfitted for a policeman's life."

Despite this complaint, however, nine o'clock the next morning found him at the district attorney's office. He had brought several newspapers with him, and was reading, with much amusement, the first complete accounts of Skeel's murder. Monday was generally a busy day for Markham and he arrived at the office before half past eight in an effort to clean up some pressing routine matters before proceeding with his investigation of the Odell case. Heath, I knew, was to come for a conference at ten o'clock. In the meantime there was nothing for Vance to do but read the newspapers; and I occupied myself in like manner.

Punctually at ten Heath arrived, and from his manner it was plain that something had happened to cheer him immeasurably. He was almost jaunty, and his formal, self-satisfied salutation to Vance was like that of a conqueror to a vanquished adversary. He shook hands with Markham with more than his customary punctility.

"Our troubles are over, sir," he said, and paused to light his cigar. "I've arrested Jessup."

It was Vance who broke the dramatic silence following this astounding announcement.

"In the name of Heaven—what for?"

Heath turned deliberately, in no wise abashed by the other's tone.

"For the murder of Margaret Odell and Tony Skeel."

"Oh, my aunt! Oh, my precious aunt!" Vance sat up and stared at him in amazement. "Sweet angels of Heaven, come down and solace me!"

Heath's complacency was unshaken. "You won't need no angels, or aunts either, when you hear what I've found out about this fellow. I've got him tied up in a sack, ready to hand to the jury."

The first wave of Markham's astonishment had subsided. "Let's have the story, Sergeant."

Heath settled himself in a chair. He took a few moments to arrange his thoughts.

"It's like this, sir. Yesterday afternoon I got to thinking. Here was Skeel murdered, same like Odell, after he'd promised to squeal; and it certainly looked as though the same guy had strangled both of 'em. Therefore, I concluded that there musta been two guys in the apartment Monday night—the Dude and the murderer—just like Mr. Vance has been saying all along. Then I figured that they knew each other pretty well, because not only did the other fellow know where the Dude lived, but he musta been wise to the fact that the Dude was going to squeal yesterday. It looked to me, sir, like they had pulled the Odell job together—which is why the Dude didn't squeal in the first place. But after the other fellow lost his nerve and threw the jewelry away, Skeel thought he'd play safe by turning state's evidence, so he phoned you."

The sergeant smoked a moment.

"I never put much stock in Mannix and Cleaver and the doc. They weren't the kind to do a job like that, and they certainly weren't the kind that would be mixed up with a jailbird like Skeel. So I stood all three of 'em to one side and began looking around for a bad egg—somebody who'd have been likely to be Skeel's accomplice. But first I tried to figure out what you might call the physical obstacles in the case—that is, the snags we were up against in our reconstruction of the crime."

Again he paused.

"Now, the thing that's been bothering us most is that side door. How did it get unbolted after six o'clock? And who bolted it again after the crime? Skeel musta come in by it before eleven, because he was in the apartment when Spotswoode and Odell returned from the theater; and he probably went out by it after Cleaver had come to the apartment at about midnight. But that wasn't explaining how it got bolted again on the inside. Well, sir, I studied over this for a long time yesterday and then I went up to the house and took another look at the door. Young Spively was running the switchboard, and I asked him where Jessup was, for I wanted to ask him some questions. And Spively told me he'd quit his job the day before—Saturday afternoon!"

Heath waited to let this fact sink in.

"I was on my way downtown before the idea came to me. Then it hit me sudden-like; and the whole case broke wide open. Mr. Markham, nobody but Jessup coulda opened that side door and locked it again—nobody. Figure it out for yourself, sir—though I guess you've pretty well done it already. Skeel couldn't've done it. And there wasn't nobody else to do it."

Markham had become interested and leaned forward.

"After this idea had hit me," Heath continued, "I decided to take a chance; so I got outa the subway at the Penn Station and phoned Spively for Jessup's address. Then I got my first good news: Jessup lived on Second Avenue, right around the corner from Skeel! I picked up a coupla men from the local station and went to his house. We found him packing up his things, getting ready to go to Detroit. We locked him up, and I took his fingerprints and sent 'em to Dubois. I thought I might get a line on him that way, because crooks don't generally begin with a job as big as the Canary prowl."

Heath permitted himself a grin of satisfaction.

"Well, sir, Dubois nailed him up! His name ain't Jessup at all. The William part is all right, but his real moniker is Benton. He was convicted of assault and battery in Oakland in 1909 and served a year in San Quentin when Skeel was a prisoner there. He was also grabbed as a lookout in a bank robbery in Brooklyn in 1914, but didn't come to trial—that's how we happen to have his fingerprints at Headquarters. When we put him on the grill last night, he said he changed his name after the Brooklyn racket and enlisted in the army. That's all we could get outa him; but we didn't need any more. Now, here are the facts: Jessup has served time for assault and battery. He was mixed up in a bank robbery. Skeel was a fellow prisoner of his. He's got no alibi for Saturday night when Skeel was killed and he lives round the corner. He quit his job suddenly Saturday afternoon. He's husky and strong and could easily have done the business. He was planning his getaway when we nabbed him. *And*—he's the only person who could've unbolted and rebolted that side door Monday night. . . . Is that a case, or ain't it, Mr. Markham?"

Markham sat several minutes in thought.

"It's a good case as far as it goes," he said slowly. "But what was his motive in strangling the girl?"

"That's easy. Mr. Vance here suggested it the first day. You remember he asked Jessup about his feelings for Odell; and Jessup turned red and got nervous."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Vance. "Am I to be made responsible for any part of this priceless lunacy? . . . True, I pried into the chap's emotions toward the lady; but that was before anything had come to light. I was bein' careful—tryin' to test each possibility as it arose."

"Well, that was a lucky question of yours, just the same." Heath turned back to Markham. "As I see it: Jessup was stuck on Odell, and she told him to trot along and sell his papers. He got all worked up over it, sitting there night after night, seeing these other guys calling on her. Then Skeel comes along, and, recognizing him, suggests burglarizing Odell's apartment. Skeel can't do the job without help, for he has to pass the phone operator coming and going; and as he's been there before, he'd be recognized. Jessup sees a chance of getting even with Odell and putting the blame on someone else; so the two of 'em cook up the job for Monday night. When Odell goes out, Jessup unlocks the side door, and the Dude lets himself into the apartment with his own key. Then Odell and Spotswoode arrive unexpectedly. Skeel hides in the closet, and after Spotswoode has gone, he accidentally makes a noise, and Odell screams. He steps out, and when she sees who he is, she tells Spotswoode it's a mistake. Jessup now knows Skeel has been discovered, and decides to make use of the fact. Soon after Spotswoode has gone, he enters the apartment with a passkey. Skeel, thinking it's somebody else, hides again in the closet; and then Jessup grabs the girl and strangles her, intending to let Skeel get the credit for it. But Skeel comes out of hiding and they talk it over. Finally they come to an agreement, and proceed with their original plan to loot the place. Jessup tries to open the jewel case with the poker, and Skeel finishes the job with his chisel. Then they go out. Skeel leaves by the side door, and Jessup rebolts it. The next day Skeel hands the swag to Jessup to keep till things blow over; and Jessup gets scared and throws it away. Then they have a row. Skeel decides to tell everything, so he can get out from under; and Jessup, suspecting he's going to do it, goes round to his house Saturday night and strangles him like he did Odell."

Heath made a gesture of finality and sank back in his chair.

"Clever—deuced clever," murmured Vance. "Sergeant, I apologize for my little outburst a moment ago. Your logic is irreproachable. You've reconstructed the crime beautifully. You've solved the case. . . . It's wonderful—simply wonderful. But it's wrong."

"It's right enough to send Mr. Jessup to the chair."

"That's the terrible thing about logic," said Vance. "It so often leads one irresistably to a false conclusion."

He stood up and walked across the room and back, his hands in his coat pockets. When he came abreast of Heath he halted.

"I say, Sergeant; if somebody else could have unlocked that side door and then rebolted it again after the crime, you'd be willing to admit that it would weaken your case against Jessup—eh, what?"

Heath was in a generous mood.

"Sure. Show me someone else who coulda done that, and I'll admit that maybe I'm wrong."

"Skeel could have done it, Sergeant. And he did do it—without anyone knowing it."

"Skeel! This ain't the age of miracles, Mr. Vance."

Vance swung about and faced Markham. "Listen! I'm telling you Jessup's innocent." He spoke with a fervor that amazed me. "And I'm going to prove it to you—some way. My theory is pretty complete; it's deficient only in one or two small points; and, I'll confess, I haven't yet been able to put a name to the culprit. But it's the right theory, Markham, and it's diametrically opposed to the sergeant's. Therefore, you've got to give me an opportunity to demonstrate it before you proceed against Jessup. Now, I can't demonstrate it here; so you and Heath must come over with me to the Odell house. It won't take over an hour. But if it took a week, you'd have to come just the same."

He stepped nearer to the desk.

"I know that it was Skeel, and not Jessup, who unbolted that door before the crime and rebolted it afterward."

Markham was impressed.

"You know this—you know it for a fact?"

"Yes! And I know how he did it!"



## 25. VANCE DEMONSTRATES

(Monday, September 17; 11:30 A.M.)

Half an hour later we entered the little apartment house in 71st Street. Despite the plausibility of Heath's case against Jessup, Markham was not entirely satisfied with the arrest; and Vance's attitude had sown further seeds of doubt in his mind. The strongest point against Jessup was that relating to the bolting and unbolting of the side door; and when Vance had asserted that he was able to demonstrate how Skeel could have manipulated his own entrance and exit, Markham, though only partly convinced, had agreed to accompany him. Heath, too, was interested, and, though supercilious, had expressed a willingness to go along.

Spively, scintillant in his chocolate-colored suit, was at the switchboard and stared at us apprehensively. But when Vance suggested pleasantly that he take a ten-minute walk round the block, he appeared greatly relieved and lost no time in complying.

The officer on guard outside of the Odell apartment came forward and saluted.

"How goes it?" asked Heath. "Any visitors?"

"Only one—a toff who said he'd known the Canary and wanted to see the apartment. I told him to get an order from you or the district attorney."

"That was correct, Officer," said Markham; then, turning to Vance: "Probably Spotswoode, poor devil."

"Quite," murmured Vance. "So persistent! Rosemary and all that. . . . Touchin'."

Heath told the officer to go for a half-hour's stroll; and we were left alone.

"And now, Sergeant," said Vance cheerfully, "I'm sure you know how to operate a switchboard. Be so kind as to act as Spively's understudy for a few minutes—there's a good fellow. . . . But, first, please bolt the side door—and be sure that you bolt it securely, just as it was on the fatal night."

Heath grinned good-naturedly.

"Sure thing." He put his forefinger to his lips mysteriously, and crouching, tiptoed down the hall like a burlesque detective in a farce. After a few moments he came tiptoeing back to the switchboard, his finger still on his lips. Then, glancing surreptitiously about him with globular eyes, he put his mouth to Vance's ear.

"His-s-st!" he whispered. "The door's bolted. Gr-r-r. . . ." He sat down at the switchboard. "When does the curtain go up, Mr. Vance?"

"It's up, Sergeant." Vance fell in with Heath's jocular mood. "Behold! The hour is half past nine on Monday night. You are Spively—not nearly so elegant; and you forgot the moustache—but still Spively. And I am the bedizened Skeel. For the sake of realism, please try to imagine me in chamois gloves and a pleated silk shirt. Mr. Markham and Mr. Van Dine here represent 'the many-headed monster of the pit.'—And, by the bye, Sergeant, let me have the key to the Odell apartment; Skeel had one, don't y' know."

Heath produced the key and handed it over, still grinning.

"A word of stage direction," Vance continued. "When I have departed by the front door, you are to wait exactly three minutes, and then knock at the late Canary's apartment."

He sauntered to the front door and, turning, walked back toward the switchboard. Markham and I stood behind Heath in the little alcove, facing the front of the building.

"Enter Mr. Skeel!" announced Vance. "Remember, it's half past nine." Then, as he came abreast of the switchboard: "Dash it all! You forgot your lines, Sergeant. You should have told me that Miss Odell was out. But it doesn't matter. . . . Mr. Skeel continues to the lady's door . . . thus."

He walked past us, and we heard him ring the apartment bell. After a brief pause, he knocked on the door. Then he came back down the hall.

"I guess you were right," he said, quoting the words of Skeel as reported by Spively; and went on to the front door. Stepping out into the street, he turned toward Broadway.

For exactly three minutes we waited. None of us spoke. Heath had become serious, and his accelerated puffing on his cigar bore evidence of his state of expectancy. Markham was frowning stoically. At the end of the three minutes Heath rose and hurried up the hall, with Markham and me at his heels. In answer to his knock, the apartment door was opened from the inside. Vance was standing in the little foyer.

"The end of the first act," he greeted us airy. "Thus did Mr. Skeel enter the lady's boudoir Monday night after the side door had been bolted, without the operator's seeing him."

Heath narrowed his eyes but said nothing. Then he suddenly swung round and looked down the rear passageway to the oak door at the end. The handle of the bolt was in a vertical position, showing that the catch had been turned and that the door was unbolted. Heath regarded it for several moments; then he turned his eyes toward the switchboard. Presently he let out a gleeful whoop.

"Very good, Mr. Vance—very good!" he proclaimed, nodding his head knowingly. "That was easy, though. And it don't take psychology to explain it. After you rang the apartment bell, you ran down this rear hallway and unbolted the door. Then you ran back and knocked. After that you went out the front entrance, turned toward Broadway, swung round across the street, came in the alley, walked in the side door, and quietly let yourself into the apartment behind our backs."

"Simple, wasn't it?" agreed Vance.

"Sure." The sergeant was almost contemptuous. "But that don't get you nowhere. Anybody coulda figured it out if that had been the only problem connected with Monday night's operations. But it's the rebolting of that side door, after Skeel had gone, that's been occupying my mind. Skeel might've—*might've*, mind you—got in the way you did. But he couldn't have got out that way, because the door was bolted the next morning. And if there was someone here to bolt the door after him, then that same person could've unbolted the door for him earlier, without his doing the ten-foot dash down the rear hall to unbolt the door himself at half past nine. So I don't

see that your interesting little drama helps Jessup out any."

"Oh, but the drama isn't over," Vance replied. "The curtain is about to go up on the next act."

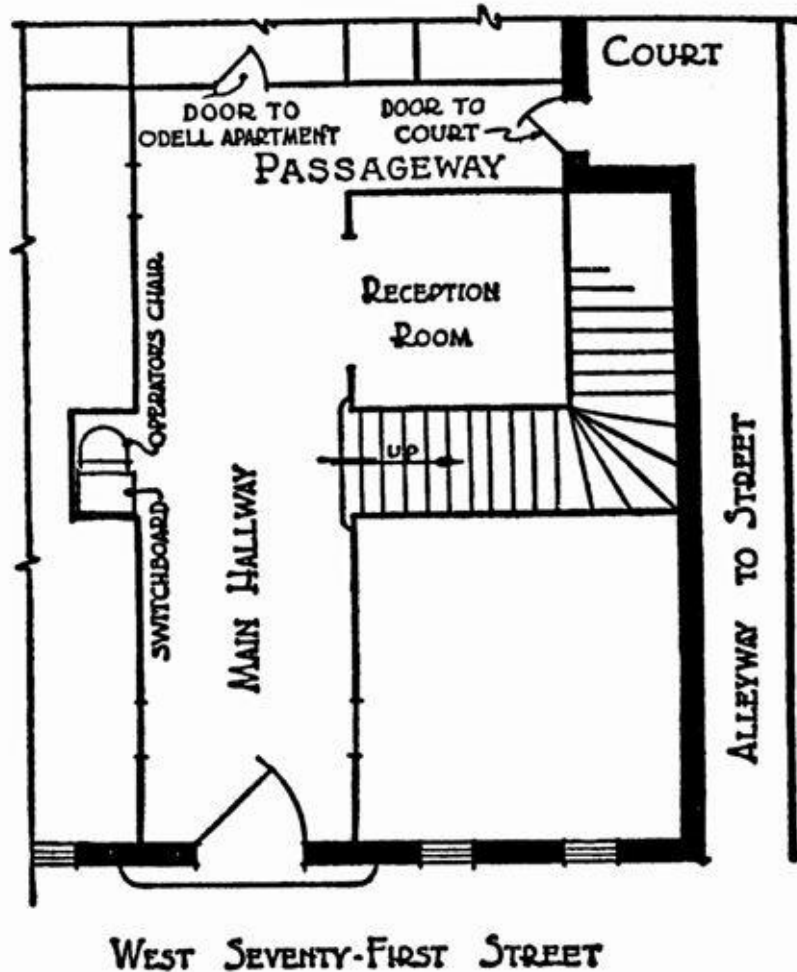
Heath lifted his eyes sharply.

"Yeah?" His tone was one of almost jeering incredulity, but his expression was searching and dubious. "And you're going to show us how Skeel got out and bolted the door on the inside without Jessup's help?"

"That is precisely what I intend to do, my sergeant."

Heath opened his mouth to speak but thought better of it. Instead, he merely shrugged his shoulders and gave Markham a sly look.

"Let us repair to the public atrium," proceeded Vance; and he led us into the little reception room diagonally opposite to the switchboard. This room as I have explained, was just beyond the staircase, and along its rear wall ran the little passageway to the side door. (A glance at the accompanying diagram will clarify the arrangement.)



Vance shepherded us ceremoniously to chairs and cocked his eye at the sergeant.

"You will be so good as to rest here until you hear me knock at the side door. Then come and open it for me." He went toward the archway. "Once more I personate the departed Mr. Skeel; so picture me again *en grande tenue*—sartorially radiant. . . . The curtain ascends."

He bowed and, stepping from the reception room into the main hall, disappeared round the corner into the rear passageway.

Heath shifted his position restlessly and gave Markham a questioning troubled look. "Will he pull it off, sir, do you think?" All jocularity had gone out of his tone.

"I can't see how," Markham was scowling. "If he does, though, it will knock the chief underpinning from your theory of Jessup's guilt."

"I'm not worrying," declared Heath. "Mr. Vance knows a lot; he's got ideas. But how in hell—?"

He was interrupted by a loud knocking on the side door. The three of us sprang up simultaneously and hurried round the corner of the main hall. The rear passageway was empty. There was no door or aperture of any kind on either side of it. It consisted of two blank

walls; and at the end, occupying almost its entire width, was the oak door which led to the court. Vance could have disappeared only through that oak door. And the thing we all noticed at once—for our eyes had immediately sought it—was the horizontal position of the bolt handle. This meant that the door was bolted.

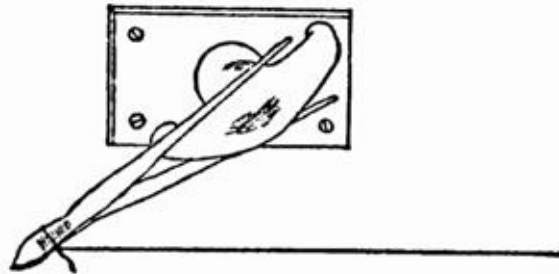
Heath was not merely astonished—he was dumbfounded. Markham had halted abruptly, and stood staring down the empty passageway as if he saw a ghost. After a momentary hesitation Heath walked rapidly to the door. But he did not open it at once. He went down on his knees before the lock and scrutinized the bolt carefully. Then he took out his pocket knife and inserted the blade into the crack between the door and the casing. The point halted against the inner moulding, and the edge of the blade scraped upon the circular bolt. There was no question that the heavy oak casings and mouldings of the door were solid and well fitted, and that the bolt had been securely thrown from the inside. Heath, however, was still suspicious and, grasping the doorknob, he tugged at it violently. But the door held firmly. At length he threw the bolt handle to a vertical position and opened the door. Vance was standing in the court, placidly smoking and inspecting the brickwork of the alley wall.

"I say, Markham," he remarked, "here's a curious thing. This wall, d' ye know, must be very old. It wasn't built in these latter days of breathless efficiency. The beauty-loving mason who erected it laid the bricks in Flemish bond instead of the Running—or Stretcher—bond of our own restless age. And up there a bit"—he pointed toward the rear yard—"is a Rowlock and Checkerboard pattern. Very neat and very pretty—more pleasing even than the popular English Cross bond. And the mortar joints are all V-tooled. . . . Fancy!"

Markham was fuming. "Damn it, Vance! I'm not building brick walls. What I want to know is how you got out here and left the door bolted on the inside."

"Oh, that!" Vance crushed out his cigarette and reentered the building. "I merely made use of a bit of clever criminal mechanism. It's very simple, like all truly effective appliances—oh, simple beyond words. I blush at its simplicity. . . . Observe!"

He took from his pocket a tiny pair of tweezers to the end of which was tied a piece of purple twine about four feet long. Placing the tweezers over the vertical bolt handle, he turned them at a very slight angle to the left and then ran the twine under the door so that about a foot of it projected over the sill. Stepping into the court, he closed the door. The tweezers still held the bolt handle as in a vise, and the string extended straight to the floor and disappeared under the door into the court. The three of us stood watching the bolt with fascinated attention. Slowly the string became taut, as Vance gently pulled upon the loose end outside, and then the downward tug began slowly but surely to turn the bolt handle. When the bolt had been thrown and the handle was in a horizontal position, there came a slight jerk on the string. The tweezers were disengaged from the bolt handle and fell noiselessly to the carpeted floor. Then as the string was pulled from without, the tweezers disappeared under the crack between the bottom of the door and the sill.



"Childish, what?" commented Vance, when Heath had let him in. "Silly, too, isn't it? And yet, Sergeant dear, that's how the deceased Tony left these premises last Monday night. . . . But let's go into the lady's apartment, and I'll tell you a story. I see that Mr. Spively has returned from his promenade; so he can resume his telephonic duties and leave us free for a *causerie*."

"When did you think up that hocus-pocus with the tweezers and string?" demanded Markham irritably, when we were seated in the Odell living room.

"I didn't think it up at all, don't y' know," Vance told him carelessly, selecting a cigarette with annoying deliberation. "It was Mr. Skeel's idea. Ingenious lad—eh, what?"

"Come, come!" Markham's equanimity was at last shaken. "How can you possibly know that Skeel used this means of locking himself out?"

"I found the little apparatus in his evening clothes yesterday morning."

"What!" cried Heath belligerently. "You took that outa Skeel's room yesterday during the search without saying anything about it?"

"Oh, only after your ferrets had passed it by. In fact, I didn't even look at the gentleman's clothes until your experienced searchers had inspected them and relocked the wardrobe door. Y' see, Sergeant, this little thingumbob was stuffed away in one of the pockets of Skeel's dress waistcoat, under the silver cigarette case. I'll admit I went over his evening suit rather lovin'ly. He wore it, y' know, on the night the lady departed this life, and I hoped to find some slight indication of his collaboration in the event. When I found this little eyebrow plucker, I hadn't the slightest inkling of its significance. And the purple twine attached to it bothered me frightfully, don't y' know. I could see that Mr. Skeel didn't pluck his eyebrows; and even if he had been addicted to the practice, why the twine? The tweezers are a delicate little gold affair—just what the ravishin' Margaret might have used; and last Tuesday morning I noticed a small lacquer tray containing similar toilet accessories on her dressing table near the jewel case. But that wasn't all."

He pointed to the little vellum wastebasket beside the escritoire, in which lay a large crumpled mass of heavy paper.

"I also noticed that piece of discarded wrapping-paper stamped with the name of a well-known Fifth Avenue novelty shop; and this morning, on my way downtown, I dropped in at the shop and learned that they make a practice of tying up their bundles with purple

twine. Therefore, I concluded that Skeel had taken the tweezers and the twine from this apartment during his visit here that eventful night. . . . Now, the question was: Why should he have spent his time tying strings to eyebrow pluckers? I confess, with maidenly modesty, that I couldn't find an answer. But this morning when you told of arresting Jessup and emphasized the rebolting of the side door after Skeel's departure, the fog lifted, the sun shone, the birds began to sing. I became suddenly mediumistic; I had a psychic seizure. The whole *modus operandi* came to me—as they say—in a flash. . . . I told you, Markham old thing, it would take spiritualism to solve this case."

## 26. RECONSTRUCTING THE CRIME

(Monday, September 17; noon)

When Vance finished speaking, there was several minutes' silence. Markham sat deep in his chair glaring into space. Heath, however, was watching Vance with a kind of grudging admiration. The cornerstone in the foundation of his case against Jessup had been knocked out, and the structure he had built was tottering precariously. Markham realized this, and the fact played havoc with his hopes.

"I wish your inspirations were more helpful," he grumbled, turning his gaze upon Vance. "This latest revelation of yours puts us back almost to where we started from."

"Oh, don't be pessimistic. Let us face the future with a bright eye. . . . Want to hear my theory?—it's fairly bulging with possibilities." He arranged himself comfortably in his chair. "Skeel needed money—no doubt his silk shirts were running low—and after his unsuccessful attempt to extort it from the lady a week before her demise, he came here last Monday night. He had learned she would be out, and he intended to wait for her; for she had probably refused to receive him in the custom'ry social way. He knew the side door was bolted at night, and, as he didn't want to be seen entering the apartment, he devised the little scheme of unbolting the door for himself under cover of a futile call at half past nine. The unbolting accomplished, he returned via the alleyway, and let himself into the apartment at some time before eleven. When the lady returned with an escort, he quickly hid in the clothes closet, and remained there until the escort had departed. Then he came forth, and the lady, startled by his sudden appearance, screamed. But, on recognizing him, she told Spotswoode, who was now hammering at the door, that it was all a mistake. So Spotswoode ran along and played poker. A financial discussion between Skeel and the lady—probably a highly acrimonious tiff—ensued. In the midst of it the telephone rang, and Skeel snatched off the receiver and said the Canary was out. The tiff was resumed; but presently another suitor appeared on the scene. Whether he rang the bell or let himself in with a key I can't say—probably the latter, for the phone operator was unaware of his visit. Skeel hid himself a second time in the closet and luckily took the precaution of locking himself in. Also, he quite naturally put his eye to the keyhole to see who the second intruder was."

Vance pointed to the closet door.

"The keyhole, you will observe, is on a line with the davenport; and as Skeel peered out into the room he saw a sight that froze his blood. The new arrival—in the midst, perhaps, of some endearing sentence—seized the lady by the throat and proceeded to throttle her. . . . Imagine Skeel's emotions, my dear Markham. There he was, crouching in a dark closet, and a few feet from him stood a murderer in the act of strangling a lady! *Pauvre Antoine!* I don't wonder he was petrified and speechless. He saw what he imagined to be maniacal fury in the strangler's eyes; and the strangler must have been a fairly powerful creature, whereas Skeel was slender and almost undersized. . . . No, *merci*. Skeel wasn't having any. He lay doggo. And I can't say that I blame the beggar, what?"

He made a gesture of interrogation.

"What did the strangler do next? Well, well; we'll probably never know, now that Skeel, the horrified witness, has gone to his Maker. But I rather imagine he got out that black document box, opened it with a key he had taken from the lady's handbag, and extracted a goodly number of incriminating documents. Then, I fancy, the fireworks began. The gentleman proceeded to wreck the apartment in order to give the effect of a professional burglary. He tore the lace on the lady's gown and severed the shoulder strap; snatched her orchid corsage and threw it in her lap; stripped off her rings and bracelets; and tore the pendant from its chain. After that he upset the lamp, rifled the *escritoire*, ransacked the *Boule* cabinet, broke the mirror, overturned the chairs, tore the draperies. . . . And all the time Skeel kept his eye glued to the keyhole with fascinated horror, afraid to move, terrified lest he be discovered and sent to join his erstwhile *inamorata*, for by now he was no doubt thoroughly convinced that the man outside was a raving lunatic. I can't say that I envy Skeel his predicament; it was ticklish, y' know. Rather! And the devastation went on. He could hear it even when the operations had passed from out his radius of vision. And he himself was caught like a rat in a trap, with no means of escape. A harrowin' situation—my word!"

Vance smoked a moment and then shifted his position slightly.

"Y' know, Markham, I imagine that the worst moment in the whole of Skeel's checkered career came when that mysterious wrecker tried to open the closet door behind which he was crouching. Fancy! There he was cornered, and not two inches from him stood, apparently, a homicidal maniac trying to get to him, rattling that thin barricade of white pine. . . . Can you picture the blighter's relief when the murderer finally released the knob and turned away? It's a wonder he didn't collapse from the reaction. But he didn't. He listened and watched in a sort of hypnotic panic, until he heard the invader leave the apartment. Then, weak-kneed and in a cold sweat, he came forth and surveyed the battlefield."

Vance glanced about him.

"Not a pretty sight—eh, what? And there on the davenport reclined the lady's strangled body. That corpse was Skeel's dominant horror. He staggered to the table to look at it, and steadied himself with his right hand—that's how you got your fingerprints, Sergeant. Then the realization of his own position suddenly smote him. Here he was alone with a murdered person. He was known to have been intimate with the lady; and he was a burglar with a record. Who would believe that he was innocent? And though he had probably recognized the man who had negotiated the business, he was in no position to tell his story. Everything was against him—his sneaking in, his presence in the house at half past nine, his relations with the girl, his profession, his reputation. He hadn't a chance in the world. . . . I say, Markham, would *you* have credited his tale?"

"Never mind that," retorted Markham. "Go on with your theory." He and Heath had been listening with rapt interest.

"My theory from this point on," resumed Vance, "is what you might term self-developing. It proceeds on its own inertia, so to speak.—Skeel was confronted by the urgent problem of getting away and covering up his tracks. His mind in this emergency became keen and highly active; his life was forfeit if he didn't succeed. He began to think furiously. He could have left by the side door at once

without being seen; but then, the door would have been unbolted. And this fact, taken in connection with his earlier visit that night, would have suggested his manner of unbolting the door. . . . No, that method of escape wouldn't do—decidedly it wouldn't do. He knew he was likely, in any event, to be suspected of the murder, in view of his shady association with the lady and his general character. Motive, place, opportunity, time, means, conduct, and his own record—all were against him. Either he must cover up his tracks, don't y' know, or else his career as a Lothario was at an end. A sweet dilemma! He realized, of course, that if he could get out and leave that side door bolted on the inside, he'd be comparatively safe. No one could then explain how he had come in or gone out. It would establish his only possible alibi—a negative one, to be sure; but, with a good lawyer, he could probably make it hold. Doubtless he searched for other means of escape, but found himself confronted with obstacles on every hand. The side door was his only hope. How could it be worked?"

Vance rose and yawned.

"That's my caressin' theory. Skeel was caught in a trap, and with his shrewd, tricky brain he figured his way out. He may have roamed up and down these two rooms for hours before he hit on his plan; and it's not unlikely that he appealed to the Deity with an occasional 'Oh, my God!' As for his using the tweezers, I'm inclined to think the mechanism of the idea came to him almost immediately—Y' know, Sergeant, this locking of a door on the inside is an old trick. There are any number of recorded cases of it in the criminal literature of Europe. Indeed, in Professor Hans Gross's handbook of criminology there's a whole chapter on the devices used by burglars for illegal entries and exits.<sup>[15]</sup> But all such devices have had to do with the locking, not the bolting, of doors. The principle, of course, is the same, but the technic is different. To lock a door on the inside, a needle, or strong slender pin, is inserted through the bow of the key and pulled downward with a string. But on the side door of this house there is no lock and key; nor is there a bow in the bolt handle.—Now, the resourceful Skeel, while pacing nervously about, looking for something that might offer a suggestion, probably espied the tweezers on the lady's dressing table—no lady nowadays is without these little eyebrow pluckers, don't y' know—and immediately his problem was solved. It remained only to test the device. Before departing, however, he chiseled open the jewel case which the other chap had merely dented, and found the solitaire diamond ring that he later attempted to pawn. Then he erased, as he thought, all his fingerprints, forgetting to wipe off the inside doorknob of the closet and overlooking the hand mark on the table. After that he let himself out quietly and rebolted the side door the same as I did, stuffing the tweezers in his waistcoat pocket and forgetting them."

Heath nodded his head oracularly.

"A crook, no matter how clever he is, always overlooks something."

"Why single out crooks for your criticism, Sergeant?" asked Vance lazily. "Do you know of anybody in this imperfect world who doesn't always overlook something?" He gave Heath a benignant smile. "Even the police, don't y' know, overlooked the tweezers."

Heath grunted. His cigar had gone out, and he relighted it slowly and thoroughly. "What do you think, Mr. Markham?"

"The situation doesn't become much clearer," was Markham's gloomy comment.

"My theory isn't exactly a blindin' illumination," said Vance. "Yet I wouldn't say that it left things in pristine darkness. There are certain inferences to be drawn from my vagaries. To wit: Skeel either knew or recognized the murderer; and once he had made good his escape from the apartment and had regained a modicum of self-confidence, he undoubtedly blackmailed his homicidal confreere. His death was merely another manifestation of our *inconnu's* bent for ridding himself of persons who annoyed him. Furthermore, my theory accounts for the chiseled jewel case, the fingerprints, the unmolested closet, the finding of the gems in the refuse tin—the person who took them really didn't want them, y' know—and Skeel's silence. It also explains the unbolting and bolting of the side door."

"Yes," sighed Markham. "It seems to clarify everything but the one all important point—the identity of the murderer."

"Exactly," said Vance. "Let's go to lunch."

Heath, morose and confused, departed for police headquarters; and Markham, Vance, and I rode to Delmonico's, where we chose the main dining room in preference to the grill.

"The case now would seem to center in Cleaver and Mannix," said Markham, when we had finished our luncheon. "If your theory that the same man killed both Skeel and the Canary is correct, then Lindquist is out of it, for he certainly was in the Episcopal Hospital Saturday night."

"Quite," agreed Vance. "The doctor is unquestionably eliminated. . . . Yes: Cleaver and Mannix—they're the allurin' twins. Don't see any way to go beyond them." He frowned and sipped his coffee. "My original quartet is dwindling, and I don't like it. It narrows the thing down too much—there's no scope for the mind, as it were, in only two choices. What if we should succeed in eliminating Cleaver and Mannix? Where would we be—eh, what? Nowhere—simply nowhere. And yet, one of the quartet is guilty; let's cling to that consolin' fact. It can't be Spotswoode and it can't be Lindquist. Cleaver and Mannix remain: two from four leaves two. Simple arithmetic, what? The only trouble is, this case isn't simple. Lord, no!—I say, how would the equation work out if we used algebra, or spherical trigonometry, or differential calculus? Let's cast it in the fourth dimension—or the fifth, or the sixth. . . ." He held his temples in both hands. "Oh, promise, Markham—promise me that you'll hire a kind, gentle keeper for me."

"I know how you feel. I've been in the same mental state for a week."

"It's the quartet idea that's driving me mad," moaned Vance. "It wrings me to have my tetrad lopped off in such brutal fashion. I'd set my young trustin' heart on that quartet, and now it's only a pair. My sense of order and proportion has been outraged. . . . I want my quartet."

"I'm afraid you'll have to be satisfied with two of them," Markham returned wearily. "One of them can't qualify, and one is in bed. You might send some flowers to the hospital if it would cheer you any."

"One is in bed—one is in bed," repeated Vance. "Well, well—to be sure! And one from four leaves three. More arithmetic. Three! . . . On the other hand, there is no such thing as a straight line. All lines are curved; they transcribe circles in space. They look straight, but they're not. Appearances, y' know—so deceptive! . . . Let's enter the silence, and substitute mentation for sight."

He gazed up out of the great windows into Fifth Avenue. For several moments he sat smoking thoughtfully. When he spoke again, it was in an even, deliberate voice.

"Markham, would it be difficult for you to invite Mannix and Cleaver and Spotswoode to spend an evening—this evening, let us say—in your apartment?"

Markham set down his cup with a clatter and regarded Vance narrowly. "What new harlequinade is this?"

"Fie on you! Answer my question."

"Well, of course, I might arrange it," replied Markham hesitantly. "They're all more or less under my jurisdiction at present."

"So that such an invitation would be rather in line with the situation—eh, what? And they wouldn't be likely to refuse you, old dear—would they?"

"No, I hardly think so. . . ."

"And if, when they had assembled in your quarters, you should propose a few hands of poker, they'd probably accept, without thinking the suggestion strange?"

"Probably," said Markham, nonplussed at Vance's amazing request. "Cleaver and Spotswoode both play, I know; and Mannix doubtless knows the game. But why poker? Are you serious, or has your threatened dementia already overtaken you?"

"Oh, I'm deuced serious." Vance's tone left no doubt as to the fact. "The game of poker, d' ye see, is the crux of the matter. I knew Cleaver was an old hand at the game; and Spotswoode, of course, played with Judge Redfern last Monday night. So that gave me a basis for my plan. Mannix, we'll assume, also plays."

He leaned forward, speaking earnestly.

"Nine-tenths of poker, Markham, is psychology; and if one understands the game, one can learn more of a man's inner nature at a poker table in an hour than during a year's casual association with him. You rallied me once when I said I could lead you to the perpetrator of any crime by examining the factors of the crime itself. But naturally I must know the man to whom I am to lead you; otherwise I cannot relate the psychological indications of the crime to the culprit's nature. In the present case, I know the kind of man who committed the crime; but I am not sufficiently acquainted with the suspects to point out the guilty one. However, after our game of poker I hope to be able to tell you who planned and carried out the Canary's murder." [16]

Markham gazed at him in blank astonishment. He knew that Vance played poker with amazing skill and that he possessed an uncanny knowledge of the psychological elements in the game; but he was unprepared for the latter's statement that he might be able to solve the Odell murder by means of it. Yet Vance had spoken with such undoubted earnestness that Markham was impressed. I knew what was passing in his mind almost as well as if he had voiced his thoughts. He was recalling the way in which Vance had, in a former murder case, put his finger unerringly on the guilty man by a similar process of psychological deduction. And he was also telling himself that, however incomprehensible and seemingly extravagant Vance's requests were, there was always a fundamentally sound reason behind them.

"Damn it!" he muttered at last. "The whole scheme seems idiotic. . . . And yet, if you really want a game of poker with these men, I've no special objection. It'll get you nowhere—I'll tell you that beforehand. It's stark nonsense to suppose that you can find the guilty man by such fantastic means."

"Ah, well," sighed Vance, "a little futile recreation will do us no harm."

"But why do you include Spotswoode?"

"Really, y' know, I haven't the slightest notion—except, of course, that he's one of my quartet. And we'll need an extra hand."

"Well, don't tell me afterwards that I'm to lock him up for murder. I'd have to draw the line. Strange as it may seem to your layman's mind, I wouldn't care to prosecute a man, knowing that it was physically impossible for him to have committed the crime."

"As to that," drawled Vance, "the only obstacles that stand in the way of physical impossibilities are material facts. And material facts are notoriously deceivin'. Really, y' know, you lawyers would do better if you ignored them entirely."

Markham did not deign to answer such heresy, but the look he gave Vance was most expressive.



## 27. A GAME OF POKER

(Monday, September 17; 9 P.M.)

Vance and I went home after lunch, and at about four o'clock Markham telephoned to say that he had made the necessary arrangements for the evening with Spotswoode, Mannix, and Cleaver. Immediately following this confirmation Vance left the house and did not return until nearly eight o'clock. Though I was filled with curiosity at so unusual a proceeding, he refused to enlighten me. But when, at a quarter to nine, we went downstairs to the waiting car, there was a man I did not know in the tonneau; and I at once connected him with Vance's mysterious absence.

"I've asked Mr. Allen to join us tonight," Vance vouchsafed, when he had introduced us. "You don't play poker, and we really need another hand to make the game interestin', y' know. Mr. Allen, by the bye, is an old antagonist of mine."

The fact that Vance would, apparently without permission, bring an uninvited guest to Markham's apartment amazed me but little more than the appearance of the man himself. He was rather short, with sharp, shrewd features; and what I saw of his hair beneath his jauntily tipped hat was black and sleek, like the painted hair on Japanese dolls. I noted, too, that his evening tie was enlivened by a design of tiny white forget-me-nots, and that his shirtfront was adorned with diamond studs.

The contrast between him and the immaculately stylish and meticulously correct Vance was aggressively evident. I wondered what could be the relationship between them. Obviously it was neither social nor intellectual.

Cleaver and Mannix were already on hand when we were ushered into Markham's drawing room, and a few minutes later Spotswoode arrived. The amenities of introduction over, we were soon seated comfortably about the open log fire, smoking, and sipping very excellent Scotch highballs. Markham had, of course, accepted the unexpected Mr. Allen cordially, but his occasional glances in the latter's direction told me he was having some difficulty in reconciling the man's appearance with Vance's sponsorship.

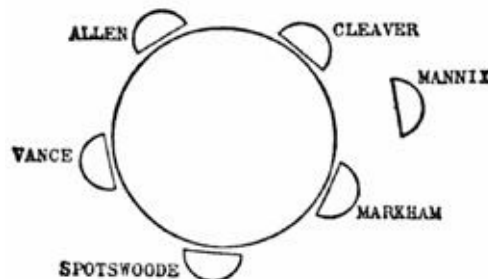
A tense atmosphere lay beneath the spurious and affected affability of the little gathering. Indeed, the situation was scarcely conducive to spontaneity. Here were three men each of whom was known to the others to have been interested in the same woman; and the reason for their having been brought together was the fact that this woman had been murdered. Markham, however, handled the situation with such tact that he largely succeeded in giving each one the feeling of being a disinterested spectator summoned to discuss an abstract problem. He explained at the outset that the "conference" had been actuated by his failure to find any approach to the problem of the murder. He hoped, he said, by a purely informal discussion, divested of all officialism and coercion, to turn up some suggestion that might lead to a fruitful line of inquiry. His manner was one of friendly appeal, and when he finished speaking, the general tension had been noticeably relaxed.

During the discussion that followed I was interested in the various attitudes of the men concerned. Cleaver spoke bitterly of his part in the affair, and was more self-condemnatory than suggestive. Mannix was voluble and pretentiously candid, but beneath his comments ran a strain of apologetic wariness. Spotswoode, unlike Mannix, seemed loath to discuss the matter and maintained a consistently reticent attitude. He responded politely to Markham's questions, but he did not succeed entirely in hiding his resentment at thus being dragged into a general discussion. Vance had little to say, limiting himself to occasional remarks directed always to Markham. Allen did not speak but sat contemplating the others with a sort of canny amusement.

The entire conversation struck me as utterly futile. Had Markham really hoped to garner information from it, he would have been woefully disappointed. I realized, though, that he was merely endeavoring to justify himself for having taken so unusual a step and to pave the way for the game of poker which Vance had requested. When the time came to broach the subject, however, there was no difficulty about it.

It was exactly eleven o'clock when he made the suggestion. His tone was gracious and unassuming; but by couching his invitation in terms of a personal request, he practically precluded declination. But his verbal strategy, I felt, was unnecessary. Both Cleaver and Spotswoode seemed genuinely to welcome the opportunity of dropping a distasteful discussion in favor of playing cards; and Vance and Allen, of course, concurred instantly. Mannix alone declined. He explained that he knew the game only slightly and disliked it; though he expressed an enthusiastic desire to watch the others. Vance urged him to reconsider but without success; and Markham finally ordered his man to arrange the table for five.

I noticed that Vance waited until Allen had taken his place, and then dropped into the chair at his right. Cleaver took the seat at Allen's left. Spotswoode sat at Vance's right; and then came Markham. Mannix drew up his chair midway behind Markham and Cleaver. Thus:





Cleaver first named a rather moderate limit, but Spotswoode at once suggested much larger stakes. Then Vance went still higher, and as both Markham and Allen signified their agreement, his figure was accepted. The prices placed on the chips somewhat took my breath away, and even Mannix whistled softly.

That all five men at the table were excellent players became obvious before the game had progressed ten minutes. For the first time that night Vance's friend Allen seemed to have found his milieu and to be wholly at ease.

Allen won the first two hands, and Vance the third and fourth. Spotswoode then had a short run of good luck, and a little later Markham took a large jackpot, which put him slightly in the lead. Cleaver was the only loser thus far; but in another half-hour he had succeeded in recovering a large portion of his losses. After that Vance forged steadily ahead, only to relinquish his winning streak to Allen. Then for a while the fortunes of the game were rather evenly distributed. But later on both Cleaver and Spotswoode began to lose heavily. By half past twelve a grim atmosphere had settled over the party; for so high were the stakes, and so rapidly did the betting pyramid, that even for men of means—such as all these players undoubtedly were—the amounts which continually changed hands represented very considerable items.

Just before one o'clock, when the fever of the game had reached a high point, I saw Vance glance quickly at Allen and pass his handkerchief across his forehead. To a stranger the gesture would have appeared perfectly natural; but, so familiar was I with Vance's mannerisms, I immediately recognized its artificiality. And simultaneously I noticed that it was Allen who was shuffling the cards preparatory to dealing. Some smoke from his cigar evidently went into his eye at that moment, for he blinked, and one of the cards fell to the floor. Quickly retrieving it, he reshuffled the deck and placed it before Vance to cut.

The hand was a jackpot, and there was a small fortune in chips already on the table. Cleaver, Markham, and Spotswoode passed. The decision thus reached Vance, and he opened for an unusually large amount. Allen at once laid down his hand, but Cleaver stayed. Then Markham and Spotswoode both dropped out, leaving the entire play between Vance and Cleaver. Cleaver drew one card, and Vance, who had opened, drew two. Vance made a nominal wager, and Cleaver raised it substantially. Vance in turn raised Cleaver, but only for a small amount; and Cleaver again raised Vance—this time for an even larger sum than before. Vance hesitated, and called him. Cleaver exposed his hand triumphantly.

"Straight flush—jack high," he announced. "Can you beat that?"

"Not on a two-card draw," said Vance ruefully. He put his cards down to show his openers. He had four kings.

About half an hour later Vance again took out his handkerchief and passed it across his forehead. As before, I noted that it was Allen's deal, and also that the hand was a jackpot which had been twice sweetened. Allen paused to take a drink of his highball and to light his cigar. Then, after Vance had cut the cards, he dealt them.

Cleaver, Markham, and Spotswoode passed, and again Vance opened, for the full amount of the pot. No one stayed except Spotswoode; and this time it was a struggle solely between him and Vance. Spotswoode asked for one card; and Vance stood pat. Then there followed a moment of almost breathless silence. The atmosphere seemed to me to be electrically charged, and I think the others sensed it too, for they were watching the play with a curiously strained intentness. Vance and Spotswoode, however, appeared frozen in attitudes of superlative calm. I watched them closely, but neither revealed the slightest indication of any emotion.

It was Vance's first bet. Without speaking he moved a stack of yellow chips to the center of the table—it was by far the largest wager that had been made during the game. But immediately Spotswoode measured another stack alongside of it. Then he coolly and deftly counted the remainder of his chips, and pushed them forward with the palm of his hand, saying quietly, "The limit."

Vance shrugged almost imperceptibly.

"The pot, sir, is yours." He smiled pleasantly at Spotswoode and put down his hand face up, to establish his openers. He had held four aces!

"Gad! That's poker!" exclaimed Allen, chuckling.

"Poker?" echoed Markham. "To lay down four aces with all that money at stake?"

Cleaver also grunted his astonishment, and Mannix pursed his lips disgustedly.

"I don't mean any offense, y' understand, Mr. Vance," he said. "But looking at that play from a strictly business standpoint, I'd say you quit too soon."

Spotswoode glanced up.

"You gentlemen wrong Mr. Vance," he said. "He played his hand perfectly. His withdrawal, even with four aces, was scientifically correct."

"Sure it was," agreed Allen. "Oh, boy! What a battle that was!"

Spotswoode nodded and, turning to Vance, said, "Since the exact situation is never likely to occur again, the least I can do, by way of showing my appreciation of your remarkable perception, is to gratify your curiosity. I held nothing."

Spotswoode put down his hand and extended his fingers gracefully toward the upturned cards. There were revealed a five, six, seven, and eight of clubs, and a knave of hearts.

"I can't say that I follow your reasoning, Mr. Spotswoode," Markham confessed. "Mr. Vance had you beaten—and he quit."

"Consider the situation," Spotswoode replied, in a suave, even voice. "I most certainly would have opened so rich a pot, had I been able to, after Mr. Cleaver and you had passed. But since I nevertheless stayed after Mr. Vance had opened for so large an amount, it goes without saying that I must have had either a four-straight, a four-flush, or a four-straight-flush. I believe I may state without immodesty that I am too good a player to have stayed otherwise. . . ."

"And I assure you, Markham," interrupted Vance, "that Mr. Spotswoode is too good a player to have stayed unless he had actually had a four-straight-flush. That is the only hand he would have been justified in backing at the betting odds of two to one. You see, I had opened for the amount in the pot, and Mr. Spotswoode had to put up half the amount of the money on the table in order to stay—making it a two-to-one bet. Now, these odds are not high, and any nonopening hand smaller than a four-straight-flush would not have warranted the risk. As it was, he had, with a one-card draw, two chances in forty-seven of making a straight-flush, nine chances in forty-seven of making a flush, and eight chances in forty-seven of making a straight; so that he had nineteen chances in forty-seven—

or more than one chance in three—of strengthening his hand into either a straight-flush, a flush, or a straight."

"Exactly," assented Spotswoode. "However, after I had drawn my one card, the only possible question in Mr. Vance's mind was whether or not I had made my straight-flush. If I had not made it—or had merely drawn a straight or a flush—Mr. Vance figured, and figured rightly, that I would not have seen his large bet and also have raised it the limit. To have done so, in those circumstances, would have been irrational poker. Not one player in a thousand would have taken such a risk on a mere bluff. Therefore, had Mr. Vance not laid down his four aces when I raised him, he would have been foolhardy in the extreme. It turned out, of course, that I was actually bluffing; but that does not alter the fact that the correct and logical thing was for Mr. Vance to quit."

"Quite true," Vance agreed. "As Mr. Spotswoode says, not one player in a thousand would have wagered the limit without having filled his straight-flush, knowing I had a pat hand. Indeed, one might also say that Mr. Spotswoode, by doing so, has added another decimal point to the psychological subtleties of the game; for, as you see, he analyzed my reasoning, and carried his own reasoning a step further."

Spotswoode acknowledged the compliment with a slight bow; and Cleaver reached for the cards and began to shuffle them. But the tension had been broken, and the game was not resumed.

Something, however, seemed to have gone wrong with Vance. For a long while he sat frowning at his cigarette and sipping his highball in troubled abstraction. At last he rose and walked to the mantel, where he stood studying a Cézanne watercolor he had given Markham years before. His action was a typical indication of his inner puzzlement.

Presently, when there came a lull in the conversation, he turned sharply and looked at Mannix.

"I say, Mr. Mannix"—he spoke with only casual curiosity—"how does it happen you've never acquired a taste for poker? All good businessmen are gamblers at heart."

"Sure they are," Mannix replied, with pensive deliberation. "But poker, now, isn't my idea of gambling—positively not. It's got too much science. And it ain't quick enough for me—it hasn't got the kick in it, if you know what I mean. Roulette's my speed. When I was in Monte Carlo last summer, I dropped more money in ten minutes than you gentlemen lost here this whole evening. But I got action for my money."

"I take it, then, you don't care for cards at all."

"Not to play games with." Mannix had become expansive. "I don't mind betting money on the draw of a card, for instance. But no two out of three, y' understand. I want my pleasures to come rapid." And he snapped his thick fingers several times in quick succession to demonstrate the rapidity with which he desired to have his pleasures come.

Vance sauntered to the table and carelessly picked up a deck of cards. "What do you say to cutting once for a thousand dollars?"

Mannix rose instantly. "You're on!"

Vance handed the cards over, and Mannix shuffled them. Then he put them down and cut. He turned up a ten. Vance cut and showed a king.

"A thousand I owe you," said Mannix, with no more concern than if it had been ten cents.

Vance waited without speaking, and Mannix eyed him craftily.

"I'll cut with you again—two thousand this time. Yes?"

Vance raised his eyebrows. "Double? . . . By all means." He shuffled the cards and cut a seven.

Mannix's hand swooped down and turned a five.

"Well, that's three thousand I owe you," he said. His little eyes had now narrowed into slits, and he held his cigar clamped tightly between his teeth.

"Like to double it again—eh, what?" Vance asked. "Four thousand this time?"

Markham looked at Vance in amazement, and over Allen's face there came an expression of almost ludicrous consternation. Everyone present, I believe, was astonished at the offer, for obviously Vance knew that he was giving Mannix tremendous odds by permitting successive doubling. In the end he was sure to lose. I believe Markham would have protested if at that moment Mannix had not snatched the cards from the table and begun to shuffle them.

"Four thousand it is!" he announced, putting down the deck and cutting. He turned up the queen of diamonds. "You can't beat the lady—positively not!" He was suddenly jovial.

"I fancy you're right," murmured Vance; and he cut a trey.

"Want some more?" asked Mannix, with good-natured aggressiveness.

"That's enough." Vance seemed bored. "Far too excitin'. I haven't your rugged constitution, don't y' know."

He went to the desk and made out a check to Mannix for a thousand dollars. Then he turned to Markham and held out his hand. "Had a jolly evening and all that sort of thing. . . . And, don't forget: we lunch together tomorrow. One o'clock at the club, what?"

Markham hesitated. "If nothing interferes."

"But really, y' know, it mustn't," insisted Vance. "You've no idea how eager you are to see me."

He was unusually silent and thoughtful during the ride home. Not one explanatory word could I get out of him. But when he bade me good night he said, "There's a vital part of the puzzle still missing, and until it's found, none of it has any meaning."

## 28. THE GUILTY MAN

(Tuesday, September 18; 1 P.M.)

Vance slept late the following morning and spent the hour or so before lunch checking a catalog of ceramics which were to be auctioned next day at the Anderson Galleries. At one o'clock we entered the Stuyvesant Club and joined Markham in the grill.

"The lunch is on you, old thing," said Vance. "But I'll make it easy. All I want is a rasher of English bacon, a cup of coffee, and a croissant."

Markham gave him a mocking smile.

"I don't wonder you're economizing after your bad luck of last night."

Vance's eyebrows went up. "I rather fancied my luck was most extr'ordin'ry."

"You held four of a kind twice and lost both hands."

"But, y' see," blandly confessed Vance, "I happened to know both times exactly what cards my opponents held."

Markham stared at him in amazement.

"Quite so," Vance assured him. "I had arranged before the game, d' ye see, to have those particular hands dealt." He smiled benignly. "I can't tell you, old chap, how I admire your delicacy in not referring to my rather unique guest, Mr. Allen, whom I had the bad taste to introduce so unceremoniously into your party. I owe you an explanation and an apology. Mr. Allen is not what one would call a charming companion. He is deficient in the patrician elegancies, and his display of jewelry was a bit vulgar—though I infinitely preferred his diamond studs to his piebald tie. But Mr. Allen has his points—decidedly he has his points. He ranks with Andy Blakely, Canfield, and Honest John Kelly as an indoor soldier of fortune. In fact, our Mr. Allen is none other than Doc Wiley Allen, of fragrant memory."

"Doc Allen! Not the notorious old crook who ran the Eldorado Club?"

"The same. And, incidentally, one of the cleverest card manipulators in a once lucrative but shady profession."

"You mean this fellow Allen stacked the cards last night?" Markham was indignant.

"Only for the two hands you mentioned. Allen, if you happen to remember, was the dealer both times. I, who purposely sat on his right, was careful to cut the cards in accordance with his instructions. And you really must admit that no stricture can possibly attach to my deception, inasmuch as the only beneficiaries of Allen's manipulations were Cleaver and Spotswoode. Although Allen did deal me four of a kind on each occasion, I lost heavily both times."

Markham regarded Vance for a moment in puzzled silence and then laughed good-naturedly. "You appear to have been in a philanthropic mood last night. You practically gave Mannix a thousand dollars by permitting him to double the stakes on each draw. A rather quixotic procedure, I should say."

"It all depends on one's point of view, don't y' know. Despite my financial losses—which, by the bye, I have every intention of charging up to your office budget—the game was most successful. . . . Y' see, I attained the main object of my evening's entertainment."

"Oh, I remember!" said Markham vaguely, as if the matter, being of slight importance, had for the moment eluded his memory. "I believe you were going to ascertain who murdered the Odell girl."

"Amazin' memory! . . . Yes, I let fall the hint that I might be able to clarify the situation today."

"And whom am I to arrest?"

Vance took a drink of coffee and slowly lit a cigarette.

"I'm quite convinced, y' know, that you won't believe me," he returned in an even, matter-of-fact voice. "But it was Spotswoode who killed the girl."

"You don't tell me!" Markham spoke with undisguised irony. "So it was Spotswoode! My dear Vance, you positively bowl me over. I would telephone Heath at once to polish up his handcuffs, but, unfortunately, miracles—such as strangling persons from across town—are not recognized possibilities in this day and age. . . . Do let me order you another croissant."

Vance extended his hands in a theatrical gesture of exasperated despair. "For an educated, civilized man, Markham, there's something downright primitive about the way you cling to optical illusions. I say, y' know, you're exactly like an infant who really believes that the magician generates a rabbit in a silk hat, simply because he sees it done."

"Now you're becoming insulting."

"Rather!" Vance pleasantly agreed. "But something drastic must be done to disentangle you from the Lorelei of legal facts. You're so deficient in imagination, old thing."

"I take it that you would have me close my eyes and picture Spotswoode sitting upstairs here in the Stuyvesant Club and extending his arms to 71st Street. But I simply couldn't do it. I'm a commonplace chap. Such a vision would strike me as ludicrous; it would smack of a hasheesh dream. . . . You yourself don't use *Cannabis indica*, do you?"

"Put that way, the idea does sound a bit supernatural. And yet: *Certum est quia impossibile est*. I rather like that maxim, don't y' know; for, in the present case, the impossible is true. Oh, Spotswoode's guilty—no doubt about it. And I'm going to cling tenaciously to that apparent hallucination. Moreover, I'm going to try to lure you into its toils; for your own—as we absurdly say—good name is at stake. As it happens, Markham, you are at this moment shielding the real murderer from publicity."

Vance had spoken with the easy assurance that precludes argument; and from the altered expression on Markham's face I could see he was moved.

"Tell me," he said, "how you arrived at your fantastic belief in Spotswoode's guilt."

Vance crushed out his cigarette and folded his arms on the table.

"We begin with my quartet of possibilities—Mannix, Cleaver, Lindquist, and Spotswoode. Realizing, as I did, that the crime was

carefully planned with the sole object of murder, I knew that only someone hopelessly ensnared in the lady's net could have done it. And no suitor outside of my quartet could have been thus enmeshed, or we would have learned of him. Therefore, one of the four was guilty. Now, Lindquist was eliminated when we found out that he was bedridden in a hospital at the time of Skeel's murder; for obviously the same person committed both crimes—"

"But," interrupted Markham, "Spotswoode had an equally good alibi for the night of the Canary's murder. Why eliminate one and not the other?"

"Sorry, but I can't agree with you. Being prostrated at a known place surrounded by incorruptible and disinterested witnesses, both preceding and during an event, is one thing; but being actually on the ground, as Spotswoode was that fatal evening, within a few minutes of the time the lady was murdered, and then being alone in a taxicab for fifteen minutes or so following the event—that is another thing. No one, as far as we know, actually saw the lady alive after Spotswoode took his departure."

"But the proof of her having been alive and spoken to him is incontestable."

"Granted. I admit that a dead woman doesn't scream and call for help and then converse with her murderer."

"I see." Markham spoke with sarcasm. "You think it was Skeel, disguising his voice."

"Lord no! What a priceless notion! Skeel didn't want anyone to know he was there. Why should he have staged such a masterpiece of idiocy? That certainly isn't the explanation. When we find the answer it will be reasonable and simple."

"That's encouraging," smiled Markham. "But proceed with your reason for Spotswoode's guilt."

"Three of my quartet, then, were potential murderers," Vance resumed. "Accordingly, I requested an evening of social relaxation, that I might put them under the psychological microscope, as it were. Although Spotswoode's ancestry was wholly consistent with his having been the guilty one, nevertheless I confess I thought that Cleaver or Mannix had committed the crime; for, by their own statements, either of them could have done it without contradicting any of the known circumstances of the situation. Therefore, when Mannix declined your invitation to play poker last night, I put Cleaver to the first test. I wig-wagged to Mr. Allen, and he straightway proceeded to perform his first feat of prestidigitation."

Vance paused and looked up.

"You perhaps recall the circumstances? It was a jackpot. Allen dealt Cleaver a four-straight-flush and gave me three kings. The other hands were so poor that everyone else was compelled to drop out. I opened, and Cleaver stayed. On the draw, Allen gave me another king, and gave Cleaver the card he needed to complete his straight-flush. Twice I bet a small amount, and each time Cleaver raised me. Finally I called him, and, of course, he won. He couldn't help but win d' ye see. He was betting on a sure thing. Since I opened the pot and drew two cards, the highest hand I could possibly have held would have been four of a kind. Cleaver knew this, and having a straight-flush, he also knew, before he raised my bet, that he had me beaten. At once I realized that he was not the man I was after."

"By what reasoning?"

"A poker player, Markham, who would bet on a sure thing is one who lacks the egotistical self-confidence of the highly subtle and supremely capable gambler. He is not a man who will take hazardous chances and tremendous risks, for he possesses, to some degree, what the psychoanalysts call an inferiority complex, and instinctively he grasps at every possible opportunity of protecting and bettering himself. In short, he is not the ultimate, unadulterated gambler. And the man who killed the Odell girl was a supreme gambler who would stake everything on a single turn of the wheel, for, in killing her, that is exactly what he did. And only a gambler whose paramount self-confidence would make him scorn, through sheer egotism, to bet on a sure thing, could have committed such a crime. Therefore, Cleaver was eliminated as a suspect."

Markham was now listening intently.

"The test to which I put Spotswoode a little later," Vance went on, "had originally been intended for Mannix, but he was out of the game. That didn't matter, however, for, had I been able to eliminate both Cleaver and Spotswoode, then Mannix would undoubtedly have been the guilty man. Of course I would have planned something else to substantiate the fact; but, as it was, that wasn't necessary. . . . The test I applied to Spotswoode was pretty well explained by the gentleman himself. As he said, not one player in a thousand would have wagered the limit against a pat hand, when he himself held nothing. It was tremendous—superb! It was probably the most remarkable bluff ever made in a game of poker. I couldn't help admiring him when he calmly shoved forward all his chips, knowing, as I did, that he held nothing. He staked everything, d' ye see, wholly on his conviction that he could follow my reasoning step by step and, in the last analysis, outwit me. It took courage and daring to do that. And it also took a degree of self-confidence which would never have permitted him to bet on a sure thing. The psychological principles involved in that hand were identical with those of the Odell crime. I threatened Spotswoode with a powerful hand—a pat hand—just as the girl, no doubt, threatened him; and instead of compromising—instead of calling me or laying down—he outreached me; he resorted to one supreme coup, though it meant risking everything. . . . My word, Markham! Can't you see how the man's character, as revealed in that amazing gesture, dovetails with the psychology of the crime?"

Markham was silent for a while; he appeared to be pondering the matter. "But you yourself, Vance, were not satisfied at the time," he submitted at length. "In fact, you looked doubtful and worried."

"True, old dear. I was no end worried. The psychological proof of Spotswoode's guilt came so dashed unexpectedly—I wasn't looking for it, don't y' know. After eliminating Cleaver I had a *parti pris*, so to speak, in regard to Mannix; for all the material evidence in favor of Spotswoode's innocence—that is, the seeming physical impossibility of his having strangled the lady—had, I admit, impressed me. I'm not perfect, don't y' know. Being unfortunately human, I'm still susceptible to the malicious animal magnetism about facts and appearances, which you lawyer chaps are continuously exuding over the earth like some vast asphyxiating effluvium. And even when I found that Spotswoode's psychological nature fitted perfectly with all the factors of the crime, I still harbored a doubt in regard to Mannix. It was barely possible that he would have played the hand just as Spotswoode played it. That is why, after the game was over, I tackled him on the subject of gambling. I wanted to check his psychological reactions."

"Still, he staked everything on one turn of the wheel, as you put it."

"Ah! But not in the same sense that Spotswoode did. Mannix is a cautious and timid gambler as compared with Spotswoode. To begin with, he had an equal chance and an even bet, whereas Spotswoode had no chance at all—his hand was worthless. And yet

Spotswoode wagered the limit on a pure bit of mental calculation. That was gambling in the higher ether. On the other hand, Mannix was merely tossing a coin, with an even chance of winning. Furthermore, no calculation of any kind entered into it; there was no planning, no figuring, no daring. And, as I have told you from the start, the Odell murder was premeditated and carefully worked out with shrewd calculation and supreme daring. . . . And what true gambler would ask an adversary to double a bet on the second flip of the coin, and then accept an offer to redouble on the third flip? I purposely tested Mannix in that way, so as to preclude any possibility of error. Thus I not only eliminated him, I expunged him, eradicated him, wiped him out utterly. It cost me a thousand dollars, but it purged my mind of any lingering doubt. I then knew, despite all the contr'ry material indications, that Spotswoode had done away with the lady."

"You make your case theoretically plausible. But, practically, I'm afraid I can't accept it." Markham was more impressed, I felt, than he cared to admit. "Damn it, man!" he exploded after a moment. "Your conclusion demolishes all the established landmarks of rationality and sane credibility.—Just consider the facts." He had now reached the argumentative stage of his doubt. "You say Spotswoode is guilty. Yet we know, on irrefutable evidence, that five minutes after he came out of the apartment, the girl screamed and called for help. He was standing by the switchboard, and, accompanied by Jessup, he went to the door and carried on a brief conversation with her. She was certainly alive then. Then he went out the front door, entered a taxicab, and drove away. Fifteen minutes later he was joined by Judge Redfern as he alighted from the taxicab in front of the club here—nearly forty blocks away from the apartment house! It would have been impossible for him to have made the trip in less time; and, moreover, we have the chauffeur's record. Spotswoode simply did not have either the opportunity or the time to commit the murder between half past eleven and ten minutes of twelve, when Judge Redfern met him. And, remember, he played poker in the club here until three in the morning—hours after the murder took place."

Markham shook his head with emphasis.

"Vance, there's no human way to get round those facts. They're firmly established; and they preclude Spotswoode's guilt as effectively and finally as though he had been at the North Pole that night."

Vance was unmoved.

"I admit everything you say," he rejoined. "But as I have stated before, when material facts and psychological facts conflict, the material facts are wrong. In this case, they may not actually be wrong, but they're deceptive."

"Very well, *magnus Apollo!*" The situation was too much for Markham's exacerbated nerves. "Show me how Spotswoode could have strangled the girl and ransacked the apartment, and I'll order Heath to arrest him."

"Pon my word, I can't do it," expostulated Vance. "Omniscience was denied me. But—deuce take it—I think I've done rather well in pointing out the culprit. I never agreed to expound his technic, don't y' know."

"So! Your vaunted penetration amounts only to that, does it? Well, well! Here and now I become a professor of the higher mental sciences, and I pronounce solemnly that Doctor Crippen murdered the Odell girl. To be sure, Crippen's dead; but that fact doesn't interfere with my newly adopted psychological means of deduction. Crippen's nature, you see, fits perfectly with all the esoteric and recondite indications of the crime. Tomorrow I'll apply for an order of exhumation."

Vance looked at him with waggish reproachfulness and sighed. "Recognition of my transcendent genius, I see, is destined to be posthumous. *Omnia post obitum fingit majora vetustas*. In the meantime I bear the taunts and jeers of the multitude with a stout heart. 'My head is bloody, but unbowed.'"

He looked at his watch and then seemed to become absorbed with some line of thought.

"Markham," he said, after several minutes, "I've a concert at three o'clock, but there's an hour to spare. I want to take another look at that apartment and its various approaches. Spotswoode's trick—and I'm convinced it was nothing more than a trick—was enacted there; and if we are ever to find the explanation, we shall have to look for it on the scene."

I had got the impression that Markham, despite his emphatic denial of the possibility of Spotswoode's guilt, was not entirely unconvinced. Therefore, I was not surprised when, with only a halfhearted protest, he assented to Vance's proposal to revisit the Odell apartment.

## 29. BEETHOVEN'S "ANDANTE"

(Tuesday, September 18; 2 P.M.)

Less than half an hour later we again entered the main hall of the little apartment building in 71st Street. Spively, as usual, was on duty at the switchboard. Just inside the public reception room the officer on guard reclined in an easy chair, a cigar in his mouth. On seeing the district attorney, he rose with forced alacrity.

"When you going to open things up, Mr. Markham?" he asked. "This rest cure is ruinin' my health."

"Very soon, I hope, Officer," Markham told him. "Any more visitors?"

"Nobody, sir." The man stifled a yawn.

"Let's have your key to the apartment. Have you been inside?"

"No, sir. Orders were to stay out here."

We passed into the dead girl's living room. The shades were still up, and the sunlight of midday was pouring in. Nothing apparently had been touched; not even the overturned chairs had been righted. Markham went to the window and stood, his hands behind him, surveying the scene despondently. He was laboring under a growing uncertainty, and he watched Vance with a cynical amusement which was far from spontaneous.

Vance, after lighting a cigarette, proceeded to inspect the two rooms, letting his eyes rest searchingly on the various disordered objects. Presently he went into the bathroom and remained several minutes. When he came out he carried a towel with several dark smudges on it.

"This is what Skeel used to erase his fingerprints," he said, tossing the towel on the bed.

"Marvelous!" Markham rallied him. "That, of course, convicts Spotswoode."

"Tut, tut! But it helps substantiate my theory of the crime." He walked to the dressing table and sniffed at a tiny silver atomizer. "The lady used Coty's Chypre," he murmured. "Why *will* they all do it?"

"And just what does that help substantiate?"

"Markham dear, I'm absorbing atmosphere. I'm attuning my soul to the apartment's vibrations. Do let me attune in peace. I may have a visitation at any moment—a revelation from Sinai, as it were."

He continued his round of investigation and at last passed out into the main hall, where he stood, one foot holding open the door, looking about him with curious intentness. When he returned to the living room, he sat down on the edge of the rosewood table and surrendered himself to gloomy contemplation. After several minutes he gave Markham a sardonic grin.

"I say! This *is* a problem. Dash it all, it's uncanny!"

"I had an idea," scoffed Markham, "that sooner or later you'd revise your deductions in regard to Spotswoode."

Vance stared idly at the ceiling.

"You're devilish stubborn, don't y' know. Here I am trying to extricate you from a deuced unpleasant predicament, and all you do is to indulge in caustic observations calculated to damp my youthful ardor."

Markham left the window and seated himself on the arm of the davenport facing Vance. His eyes held a worried look.

"Vance, don't get me wrong. Spotswoode means nothing in my life. If he did this thing, I'd like to know it. Unless this case is cleared up, I'm in for an ungodly walloping by the newspapers. It's not to my interests to discourage any possibility of a solution. But your conclusion about Spotswoode is impossible. There are too many contradictory facts."

"That's just it, don't y' know. The contradic'try indications are far too perfect. They fit together too beautifully; they're almost as fine as the forms in a Michelangelo statue. They're too carefully coordinated, d' ye see, to have been merely a haphazard concatenation of circumstances. They signify conscious design."

Markham rose and, slowly returning to the window, stood looking out into the little rear yard.

"If I could grant your premise that Spotswoode killed the girl," he said, "I could follow your syllogism. But I can't very well convict a man on the grounds that his defense is too perfect."

"What we need, Markham, is inspiration. The mere contortions of the sibyl are not enough." Vance took a turn up and down the room. "What really infuriates me is that I've been outwitted. And by a manufacturer of automobile access'ries! . . . It's most humiliatin'."

He sat down at the piano and played the opening bars of Brahms's Capriccio No. 1. "Needs tuning," he muttered; and, sauntering to the Boule cabinet, he ran his finger over the marquetry. "Pretty and all that," he said, "but a bit fussy. Good example, though. The deceased's aunt from Seattle should get a very fair price for it." He regarded a pendent girandole at the side of the cabinet. "Rather nice, that, if the original candles hadn't been supplanted with modern frosted bulbs." He paused before the little china clock on the mantel. "Gingerbread. I'm sure it kept atrocious time." Passing on to the escritoire, he examined it critically. "Imitation French Renaissance. But rather dainty, what?" Then his eye fell on the wastepaper basket, and he picked it up. "Silly idea," he commented, "—making a basket out of vellum. The artistic triumph of some lady interior decorator, I'll wager. Enough vellum here to bind a set of Epictetus. But why ruin the effect with hand-painted garlands? The aesthetic instinct has not as yet invaded these fair States—decidedly not."

Setting the basket down, he studied it meditatively for a moment. Then he leaned over and took from it the piece of crumpled wrapping paper to which he had referred the previous day.

"This doubtless contained the lady's last purchase on earth," he mused. "Very touchin'. Are you sentimental about such trifles, Markham? Anyway, the purple string round it was a godsend to Skeel. . . . What knickknack, do you suppose, paved the way for the frantic Tony's escape?"

He opened the paper, revealing a broken piece of corrugated cardboard and a large square dark-brown envelope.

"Ah, to be sure! Phonograph records." He glanced about the apartment. "But, I say, where did the lady keep the bally machine?"

"You'll find it in the foyer," said Markham wearily, without turning. He knew that Vance's chatter was only the outward manifestation of serious and perplexed thinking; and he was waiting with what patience he could muster.

Vance sauntered idly through the glass doors into the little reception hall, and stood gazing abstractedly at a console phonograph of Chinese Chippendale design which stood against the wall at one end. The squat cabinet was partly covered with a prayer rug, and upon it sat a polished bronze flower bowl.

"At any rate, it doesn't look phonographic," he remarked. "But why the prayer rug?" He examined it casually. "Anatolian—probably called a Caesarian for sale purposes. Not very valuable—too much on the Oushak type. . . . Wonder what the lady's taste in music was. Victor Herbert, doubtless." He turned back the rug and lifted the lid of the cabinet. There was a record already on the machine, and he leaned over and looked at it.

"My word! The Andante from Beethoven's C-Minor Symphony!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "You know the movement, of course, Markham. The most perfect Andante ever written." He wound up the machine. "I think a little music might clear the atmosphere and volatilize our perturbation, what?"

Markham paid no attention to his banter; he was still gazing dejectedly out of the window.

Vance started the motor, and placing the needle on the record, returned to the living room. He stood staring at the davenport, concentrating on the problem in hand. I sat in the wicker chair by the door waiting for the music. The situation was getting on my nerves, and I began to feel fidgety. A minute or two passed, but the only sound which came from the phonograph was a faint scratching. Vance looked up with mild curiosity, and walked back to the machine. Inspecting it cursorily, he once more set it in operation. But though he waited several minutes, no music came forth.

"I say! That's deuced queer, y' know," he grumbled, as he changed the needle and rewound the motor.

Markham had now left the window and stood watching him with good-natured tolerance. The turntable of the phonograph was spinning, and the needle was tracing its concentric revolutions; but still the instrument refused to play. Vance, with both hands on the cabinet, was leaning forward, his eyes fixed on the silently revolving record with an expression of amused bewilderment.

"The sound box is probably broken," he said. "Silly machines, anyway."

"The difficulty, I imagine," Markham chided him, "lies in your patrician ignorance of so vulgar and democratic a mechanism. Permit me to assist you."

He moved to Vance's side, and I stood looking curiously over his shoulder. Everything appeared to be in order, and the needle had now almost reached the end of the record. But only a faint scratching was audible.

Markham stretched forth his hand to lift the sound box. But his movement was never completed.

At that moment the little apartment was filled with several terrifying treble screams, followed by two shrill calls for help. A cold chill swept my body, and there was a tingling at the roots of my hair.

After a short silence, during which the three of us remained speechless, the same feminine voice said in a loud, distinct tone: "*No; nothing is the matter. I'm sorry. . . . Everything is all right. . . . Please go home, and don't worry.*"

The needle had come to the end of the record. There was a slight click, and the automatic device shut off the motor. The almost terrifying silence that followed was broken by a sardonic chuckle from Vance.

"Well, old dear," he remarked languidly, as he strolled back into the living room, "so much for your irrefutable facts!"

There came a loud knocking on the door, and the officer on duty outside looked in with a startled face.

"It's all right," Markham informed him in a husky voice. "I'll call you when I want you."

Vance lay down on the davenport and took out another cigarette. Having lighted it, he stretched his arms far over his head and extended his legs, like a man in whom a powerful physical tension had suddenly relaxed.

"Pon my soul, Markham, we've all been babes in the woods," he drawled. "An incontrovertible alibi—my word! If the law supposes that, as Mr. Bumble said, the law is a ass, a idiot.—Oh, Sammy, Sammy, vy worn't there a alleybi! . . . Markham, I blush to admit it, but it's you and I who've been the unutterable asses."

Markham had been standing by the instrument like a man dazed, his eyes riveted hypnotically on the telltale record. Slowly he came into the room and threw himself wearily into a chair.

"Those precious facts of yours!" continued Vance. "Stripped of their carefully disguised appearance, what are they?—Spotswoode prepared a phonograph record—a simple enough task. Everyone makes 'em nowadays—"

"Yes. He told me he had a workshop at his home on Long Island where he tinkered a bit."

"He really didn't need it, y' know. But it facilitated things, no doubt. The voice on the record is merely his own in falsetto—better for the purpose than a woman's, for it's stronger and more penetrating. As for the label, he simply soaked it off an ordin'ry record, and pasted it on his own. He brought the lady several new records that night, and concealed this one among them. After the theater he enacted his gruesome little drama and then carefully set the stage so that the police would think it was a typical burglar's performance. When this had been done, he placed the record on the machine, set it going, and calmly walked out. He had placed the prayer rug and bronze bowl on the cabinet of the machine to give the impression that the phonograph was rarely used. And the precaution worked, for no one thought of looking into it. Why should they? . . . Then he asked Jessup to call a taxicab—everything quite natural, y' see. While he was waiting for the car the needle reached the recorded screams. They were heard plainly: it was night, and the sounds carried distinctly. Moreover, being filtered through a wooden door, their phonographic timbre was well disguised. And, if you'll note, the enclosed horn is directed toward the door, not three feet away."

"But the synchronization of his questions and the answers on the record. . . ?"

"The simplest part of it. You remember Jessup told us that Spotswoode was standing with one arm on the switchboard when the screams were heard. He merely had his eye on his wristwatch. The moment he heard the cry, he calculated the intermission on the record and put his question to the imagin'ry lady at just the right moment to receive the record's response. It was all carefully figured out beforehand; he no doubt rehearsed it in his laborat'ry. It was deuced simple, and practically proof against failure. The record is a large one—twelve-inch diameter, I should say—and it requires about five minutes for the needle to traverse it. By putting the screams at the end, he allowed himself ample time to get out and order a taxicab. When the car at last came, he rode direct to the Stuyvesant

Club, where he met Judge Redfern and played poker till three. If he hadn't met the judge, rest assured he would have impressed his presence on someone else so as to have established an alibi."

Markham shook his head gravely.

"Good God! No wonder he importuned me on every possible occasion to let him visit this apartment again. Such a damning piece of evidence as that record must have kept him awake at night."

"Still, I rather fancy that if I hadn't discovered it, he would have succeeded in getting possession of it as soon as your *sergent-de-ville* was removed. It was annoyin' to be unexpectedly barred from the apartment, but I doubt if it worried him much. He would have been on hand when the Canary's aunt took possession, and the retrieving of the record would have been comparatively easy. Of course the record constituted a hazard, but Spotswoode isn't the type who'd shy at a low bunker of that kind. No, the thing was planned scientifically enough. He was defeated by sheer accident."

"And Skeel?"

"He was another unfortunate circumstance. He was hiding in the closet there when Spotswoode and the lady came in at eleven. It was Spotswoode whom he saw strangle his erstwhile *amoureuse* and rifle the apartment. Then, when Spotswoode went out, he came forth from hiding. He was probably looking down at the girl when the phonograph emitted its blood-chilling wails. . . . My word! Fancy being in a cold funk, gazing at a murdered woman, and then hearing piercing screams behind you! It was a bit too much even for the hardened Tony. I don't wonder he forgot all caution and put his hand on the table to steady himself. . . . And then came Spotswoode's voice through the door, and the record's answer. This must have puzzled Skeel. I imagine he thought for a moment he'd lost his reason. But pretty soon the significance of it dawned on him; and I can see him grinning to himself. Obviously he knew who the murderer was—it would not have been in keeping with his character had he failed to learn the identities of the Canary's admirers. And now there had fallen into his lap, like manna from heaven, the most perfect opportunity for blackmail that any such charmin' young gentleman could desire. He doubtless indulged himself with roseate visions of a life of opulence and ease at Spotswoode's expense. When Cleaver phoned a few minutes later, he merely said the lady was out, and then set to work planning his own departure."

"But I don't see why he didn't take the record with him."

"And remove from the scene of the crime the one piece of unanswerable evidence? . . . Bad strategy, Markham. If he himself had produced the record later, Spotswoode would simply have denied all knowledge of it, and accused the blackmailer of a plot. Oh, no; Skeel's only course was to leave it and apply for an enormous settlement from Spotswoode at once. And I imagine that's what he did. Spotswoode no doubt gave him something on account and promised him the rest anon, hoping in the meantime to retrieve the record. When he failed to pay, Skeel phoned you and threatened to tell everything, thinking to spur Spotswoode to action. . . . Well, he spurred him—but not to the action desired. Spotswoode probably met him by appointment last Saturday night, ostensibly to hand over the money, but instead, throttled the chap. Quite in keeping with his nature, don't y' know. . . . Stout fella, Spotswoode."

"The whole thing . . . it's amazing."

"I shouldn't say that, now. Spotswoode had an unpleasant task to perform and he set about it in a cool, logical, forthright, businesslike manner. He had decided that his little Canary must die for his peace of mind; she'd probably made herself most annoyin'. So he arranged the date—like any judge passing sentence on a prisoner at the bar—and then proceeded to fabricate an alibi. Being something of a mechanic, he arranged a mechanical alibi. The device he chose was simple and obvious enough—no tortuosities or complications. And it would have succeeded but for what the insurance companies piously call an act of God. No one can foresee accidents, Markham; they wouldn't be accidental if one could. But Spotswoode certainly took every precaution that was humanly possible. It never occurred to him that you would thwart his every effort to return here and confiscate the record; and he couldn't anticipate my taste in music, nor know that I would seek solace in the tonal art. Furthermore, when one calls on a lady, one doesn't expect that another suitor is going to hide himself in the clothes press. It isn't done, don't y' know. . . . All in all, the poor johnny was beaten by a run of abominable luck."

"You overlook the fiendishness of the crime," Markham reproached him tartly.

"Don't be so confoundedly moral, old thing. Everyone's a murderer at heart. The person who has never felt a passionate hankering to kill someone is without emotions. And do you think it's ethics or theology that stays the average person from homicide? Dear no! It's lack of courage—the fear of being found out, or haunted, or cursed with remorse. Observe with what delight the people *en masse*—to wit, the state—put men to death and then gloat over it in the newspapers. Nations declare war against one another on the slightest provocation, so they can, with immunity, vent their lust for slaughter. Spotswoode, I'd say, is merely a rational animal with the courage of his convictions."

"Society unfortunately isn't ready for your nihilistic philosophy just yet," said Markham. "And during the intervening transition human life must be protected."

He rose resolutely and, going to the telephone, called up Heath.

"Sergeant," he ordered, "get a John-Doe warrant and meet me immediately at the Stuyvesant Club. Bring a man with you—there's an arrest to be made."

"At last the law has evidence after its own heart," chirped Vance, as he lazily donned his topcoat and picked up his hat and stick. "What a grotesque affair your legal procedure is, Markham! Scientific knowledge—the facts of psychology—mean nothing to you learned Solons. But a phonograph record—ah! There, now, is something convincing, irrefragable, final, what?"

On our way out Markham beckoned to the officer on guard. "Under no conditions," he said, "is anyone to enter this apartment until I return—not even with a signed permit."

When we had entered the taxicab, he directed the chauffeur to the club.

"So the newspapers want action, do they? Well, they're going to get it. . . . You've helped me out of a nasty hole, old man."

As he spoke, his eyes turned to Vance. And that look conveyed a profounder gratitude than any words could have expressed.



### 30. THE END

(Tuesday, September 18; 3:30 P.M.)

It was exactly half past three when we entered the rotunda of the Stuyvesant Club. Markham at once sent for the manager and held a few words of private conversation with him. The manager then hastened away and was gone about five minutes.

"Mr. Spotswoode is in his rooms," he informed Markham, on returning. "I sent the electrician up to test the light bulbs. He reports that the gentleman is alone, writing at his desk."

"And the room number?"

"Three forty-one." The manager appeared perturbed. "There won't be any fuss, will there, Mr. Markham?"

"I don't look for any." Markham's tone was chilly. "However, the present matter is considerably more important than your club."

"What an exaggerated point of view!" sighed Vance when the manager had left us. "The arrest of Spotswoode, I'd say, was the acme of futility. The man isn't a criminal, don't y' know; he has nothing in common with Lombroso's *Uomo Delinquente*. He's what one might term a philosophic behaviorist."

Markham grunted but did not answer. He began pacing up and down agitatedly, keeping his eyes expectantly on the main entrance. Vance sought a comfortable chair and settled himself in it with placid unconcern.

Ten minutes later Heath and Snitkin arrived. Markham at once led them into an alcove and briefly explained his reason for summoning them.

"Spotswoode's upstairs now," he said. "I want the arrest made as quietly as possible."

"Spotswoode!" Heath repeated the name in astonishment. "I don't see—"

"You don't have to see—yet," Markham cut in sharply. "I'm taking all responsibility for the arrest. And you're getting the credit—if you want it. That suit you?"

Heath shrugged his shoulders. "It's all right with me . . . anything you say, sir." He shook his head uncomprehendingly. "But what about Jessup?"

"We'll keep him locked up. Material witness."

We ascended in the elevator and emerged at the third floor. Spotswoode's rooms were at the end of the hall, facing the Square. Markham, his face set grimly, led the way.

In answer to his knock Spotswoode opened the door and, greeting us pleasantly, stepped aside for us to enter.

"Any news yet?" he asked, moving a chair forward.

At this moment he got a clear view of Markham's face in the light, and at once he sensed the minatory nature of our visit. Though his expression did not alter, I saw his body suddenly go taut. His cold, indecipherable eyes moved slowly from Markham's face to Heath and Snitkin. Then his gaze fell on Vance and me, who were standing a little behind the others, and he nodded stiffly.

No one spoke; yet I felt that an entire tragedy was somehow being enacted, and that each actor heard and understood every word.

Markham remained standing, as if reluctant to proceed. Of all the duties of his office, I knew that the arrest of malefactors was the most distasteful to him. He was a worldly man, with the worldly man's tolerance for the misfortunes of evil. Heath and Snitkin had stepped forward and now waited with passive alertness for the district attorney's order to serve the warrant.

Spotswoode's eyes were again on Markham. "What can I do for you, sir?" His voice was calm and without the faintest quaver.

"You can accompany these officers, Mr. Spotswoode," Markham told him quietly, with a slight inclination of his head toward the two imperturbable figures at his side. "I arrest you for the murder of Margaret Odell."

"Ah!" Spotswoode's eyebrows lifted mildly. "Then you have—discovered something?"

"The Beethoven Andante."

Not a muscle of Spotswoode's face moved; but after a short pause he made a barely perceptible gesture of resignation. "I can't say that it was wholly unexpected," he said evenly, with the tragic suggestion of a smile; "especially as you thwarted every effort of mine to secure the record. But then . . . the fortunes of the game are always uncertain." His smile faded, and his manner became grave. "You have acted generously toward me, Mr. Markham, in shielding me from the *canaille*; and because I appreciate that courtesy I should like you to know that the game I played was one in which I had no alternative."

"Your motive, however powerful," said Markham, "cannot extenuate your crime."

"Do you think I seek extenuation?" Spotswoode dismissed the imputation with a contemptuous gesture. "I'm not a schoolboy. I calculated the consequences of my course of action and, after weighing the various factors involved, decided to risk it. It was a gamble, to be sure; but it's not my habit to complain about the misfortunes of a deliberately planned risk. Furthermore, the choice was practically forced upon me. Had I not gambled in this instance, I stood to lose heavily nevertheless."

His face grew bitter.

"This woman, Mr. Markham, had demanded the impossible of me. Not content with bleeding me financially, she demanded legal protection, position, social prestige—such things as only my name could give her. She informed me I must divorce my wife and marry her. I wonder if you apprehend the enormity of that demand? . . . You see, Mr. Markham, I love my wife, and I have children whom I love. I will not insult your intelligence by explaining how, despite my conduct, such a thing is entirely possible. . . . And yet, this woman commanded me to wreck my life and crush utterly those I held dear, solely to gratify her petty, ridiculous ambition! When I refused, she threatened to expose our relations to my wife, to send her copies of the letters I had written, to sue me publicly—in fine, to create such a scandal that, in any event, my life would be ruined, my family disgraced, my home destroyed."

He paused and drew a deep inspiration.

"I have never been partial to halfway measures," he continued impassively. "I have no talent for compromise. Perhaps I am a victim of my heritage. But my instinct is to play out a hand to the last chip—to force whatever danger threatens. And for just five minutes, a

week ago, I understood how the fanatics of old could, with a calm mind and a sense of righteousness, torture their enemies who threatened them with spiritual destruction. . . . I chose the only course which might save those I love from disgrace and suffering. It meant taking a desperate risk. But the blood within me was such that I did not hesitate, and I was fired by the agony of a tremendous hate. I staked my life against a living death, on the remote chance of attaining peace. And I lost."

Again he smiled faintly.

"Yes—the fortunes of the game. . . . But don't think for a minute that I am complaining or seeking sympathy. I have lied to others perhaps, but not to myself. I detest a whiner—a self-excuser. I want you to understand that."

He reached to the table at his side and took up a small limp-leather volume. "Only last night I was reading Wilde's 'De Profundis.' Had I been gifted with words, I might have made a similar confession. Let me show you what I mean so that, at least, you won't attribute to me the final infamy of cravenness."

He opened the book, and began reading in a voice whose very fervor held us all silent:

"I brought about my own downfall. No one, be he high or low, need be ruined by any other hand than his own. Readily as I confess this, there are many who will, at this time at least, receive the confession sceptically. And although I thus mercilessly accuse myself, bear in mind that I do so without offering any excuse. Terrible as is the punishment inflicted upon me by the world, more terrible is the ruin I have brought upon myself. . . . In the dawn of manhood I recognized my position. . . . I enjoyed an honored name, an eminent social position. . . . Then came the turning-point. I had become tired of dwelling on the heights—and descended by my own will into the depths. . . . I satisfied my desires wherever it suited me, and passed on. I forgot that every act, even the most insignificant act of daily life, in some degree, makes or unmakes the character; and every occurrence which transpires in the seclusion of the chamber will some day be proclaimed from the housetops. I lost control of myself. I was no longer at the helm, and knew it not. I had become a slave to pleasure. . . . One thing only is left to me—complete humility."

He tossed the book aside.

"You understand now, Mr. Markham?"

Markham did not speak for several moments.

"Do you care to tell me about Skeel?" he at length asked.

"That swine!" Spotswoode sneered his disgust. "I could murder such creatures every day and regard myself as a benefactor of society. . . . Yes, I strangled him, and I would have done it before, only the opportunity did not offer. . . . It was Skeel who was hiding in the closet when I returned to the apartment after the theater, and he must have seen me kill the woman. Had I known he was behind that locked closet door, I would have broken it down and wiped him out then. But how was I to know? It seemed natural that the closet might have been kept locked—I didn't give it a second thought. . . . And the next night he telephoned me to the club here. He had first called my home on Long Island and learned that I was staying here. I had never seen him before—didn't know of his existence. But, it seems, he had equipped himself with a knowledge of my identity—probably some of the money I gave to the woman went to him. What a muck heap I had fallen into! . . . When he phoned, he mentioned the phonograph, and I knew he had found out something. I met him in the Waldorf lobby, and he told me the truth: there was no doubting his word. When he saw I was convinced, he demanded so enormous a sum that I was staggered."

Spotswoode lit a cigarette with steady fingers.

"Mr. Markham, I am no longer a rich man. The truth is, I am on the verge of bankruptcy. The business my father left me has been in a receiver's hands for nearly a year. The Long Island estate on which I live belongs to my wife. Few people know these things, but unfortunately they are true. It would have been utterly impossible for me to raise the amount Skeel demanded, even had I been inclined to play the coward. I did, however, give him a small sum to keep him quiet for a few days, promising him all he asked as soon as I could convert some of my holdings. I hoped in the interim to get possession of the record and thus spike his guns. But in that I failed; and so, when he threatened to tell you everything, I agreed to bring the money to his home late Saturday night. I kept the appointment, with the full intention of killing him. I was careful about entering, but he had helped me by explaining when and how I could get in without being seen. Once there, I wasted no time. The first moment he was off his guard I seized him—and gloried in the act. Then, locking the door and taking the key, I walked out of the house quite openly, and returned here to the club.—That's all, I think."

Vance was watching him musingly.

"So when you raised my bet last night," he said, "the amount represented a highly important item in your exchequer."

Spotswoode smiled faintly. "It represented practically every cent I had in the world."

"Astonishin'! And would you mind if I asked you why you selected the label of Beethoven's Andante for your record?"

"Another miscalculation," the man said wearily. "It occurred to me that if anyone should, by any chance, open the phonograph before I could return and destroy the record, he wouldn't be as likely to want to hear the classics as he would a more popular selection."

"And one who detests popular music had to find it! I fear, Mr. Spotswoode, that an unkind fate sat in at your game."

"Yes. . . . If I were religiously inclined, I might talk poppycock about retribution and divine punishment."

"I'd like to ask you about the jewelry," said Markham. "It's not sportsmanlike to do it, and I wouldn't suggest it, except that you've already confessed voluntarily to the main points at issue."

"I shall take no offense at any question you desire to ask, sir," Spotswoode answered. "After I had recovered my letters from the document box, I turned the rooms upside down to give the impression of a burglary—being careful to use gloves, of course. And I took the woman's jewelry for the same reason. Parenthetically, I had paid for most of it. I offered it as a sop to Skeel, but he was afraid to accept it; and finally I decided to rid myself of it. I wrapped it in one of the club newspapers and threw it in a wastebin near the Flatiron Building."

"You wrapped it in the morning *Herald*," put in Heath. "Did you know that Pop Cleaver reads nothing but the *Herald*?"

"Sergeant!" Vance's voice was a cutting reprimand. "Certainly Mr. Spotswoode was not aware of that fact—else he would not have selected the *Herald*."

Spotswoode smiled at Heath with pitying contempt. Then, with an appreciative glance at Vance, he turned back to Markham.

"An hour or so after I had disposed of the jewels, I was assailed by the fear that the package might be found and the paper traced. So

I bought another *Herald* and put it on the rack." He paused. "Is that all?"

Markham nodded.

"Thank you—that's all; except that I must now ask you to go with these officers."

"In that case," said Spotswoode quietly, "there's a small favor I have to ask of you, Mr. Markham. Now that the blow has fallen, I wish to write a certain note—to my wife. But I want to be alone when I write it. Surely you understand that desire. It will take but a few moments. Your men may stand at the door—I can't very well escape. . . . The victor can afford to be generous to that extent."

Before Markham had time to reply, Vance stepped forward and touched his arm.

"I trust," he interposed, "that you won't deem it necessary to refuse Mr. Spotswoode's request."

Markham looked at him hesitantly.

"I guess you've pretty well earned the right to dictate, Vance," he acquiesced.

Then he ordered Heath and Snitkin to wait outside in the hall, and he and Vance and I went into the adjoining room. Markham stood, as if on guard, near the door; but Vance, with an ironical smile, sauntered to the window and gazed out into Madison Square.

"My word, Markham!" he declared. "There's something rather colossal about that chap. Y' know, one can't help admiring him. He's so eminently sane and logical."

Markham made no response. The drone of the city's midafternoon noises, muffled by the closed windows, seemed to intensify the ominous silence of the little bedchamber where we waited.

Then came a sharp report from the other room.

Markham flung open the door. Heath and Snitkin were already rushing toward Spotswoode's prostrate body, and were bending over it when Markham entered. Immediately he wheeled about and glared at Vance, who now appeared in the doorway.

"He's shot himself!"

"Fancy that," said Vance.

"You—you knew he was going to do that?" Markham spluttered.

"It was rather obvious, don't y' know."

Markham's eyes flashed angrily.

"And you deliberately interceded for him—to give him the opportunity?"

"Tut, tut, my dear fellow!" Vance reproached him. "Pray don't give way to conventional moral indignation. However unethical—theoretically—it may be to take another's life, a man's own life is certainly his to do with as he chooses. Suicide is his inalienable right. And under the paternal tyranny of our modern democracy, I'm rather inclined to think it's about the only right he has left, what?"

He glanced at his watch and frowned.

"D' ye know, I've missed my concert, bothering with your beastly affairs," he complained amiably, giving Markham an engaging smile; "and now you're actually scolding me. 'Pon my word, old fellow, you're deuced ungrateful!"

## Footnotes

[1] The Antlers Club has since been closed by the police; and Red Raegan is now serving a long term in Sing Sing for grand larceny.

[2] Written especially for her by B. G. De Sylva.

[3] "The Benson Murder Case"

[4] The Loeb-Leopold crime, the Dorothy King case, and the Hall-Mills murder came later; but the Canary murder proved fully as conspicuous a case as the Nan Patterson-"Caesar" Young affair, Durant's murder of Blanche Lamont and Minnie Williams in San Francisco, the Molineux arsenic-poisoning case, and the Carlyle Harris morphine murder. To find a parallel in point of public interest one must recall the Borden double-murder in Fall River, the Thaw case, the shooting of Elwell, and the Rosenthal murder.

[5] The case referred to here was that of Mrs. Elinor Quiggly, a wealthy widow living at the Adlon Hotel in West 96th Street. She was found on the morning of September 5 suffocated by a gag which had been placed on her by robbers who had evidently followed her home from the Club Turque—a small but luxurious all-night cafe at 89 West 48th Street. The killing of the two detectives, McQuade and Cannison, was, the police believe, due to the fact that they were in possession of incriminating evidence against the perpetrators of the crime. Jewelry amounting to over \$50,000 was stolen from the Quiggly apartment.

[6] The Stuyvesant was a large club, somewhat in the nature of a glorified hotel; and its extensive membership was drawn largely from the political, legal, and financial ranks.

[7] The case to which Vance referred, I ascertained later, was *Shatterham v. Shatterham*, 417 Mich., 79—a testamentary case.

[8] Heath had become acquainted with Vance during the investigation of the Benson murder case two months previously.

[9] It is an interesting fact that for the nineteen years he had been connected with the New York Police Department, he had been referred to, by his superiors and subordinates alike, as "the Professor."

[10] His full name was William Elmer Jessup, and he had been attached to the 308th Infantry of the 77th Division of the Overseas Forces.

[11] "Ben" was Colonel Benjamin Hanlon, the commanding officer of the Detective Division attached to the district attorney's office.

[12] Vance was here referring to the famous Molineux case, which, in 1898, sounded the death knell of the old Knickerbocker Athletic Club at Madison Avenue and 45th Street. But it was commercialism that ended the Stuyvesant's career. This club, which stood on the north side of Madison Square, was razed a few years later to make room for a skyscraper.

[13] Abe Rubin was at that time the most resourceful and unscrupulous criminal lawyer in New York. Since his disbarment two years ago, little has been heard from him.

[14] I sent a proof of the following paragraphs to Vance, and he edited and corrected them; so that, as they now stand, they represent his theories in practically his own words.

[15] The treatise referred to by Vance was *Handbuch für Untersuchungsrichter als System der Kriminalistik*.

[16] Recently I ran across an article by Doctor George A. Dorsey, professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago, and author of "Why We Behave Like Human Beings," which bore intimate testimony to the scientific accuracy of Vance's theory. In it Doctor Dorsey said: "Poker is a cross-section of life. The way a man behaves in a poker game is the way he behaves in life. . . . His success or failure lies in the way his physical organism responds to the stimuli supplied by the game. . . . I have studied humanity all my life from the anthropologic and psychological viewpoint. And I have yet to find a better laboratory exercise than to observe the manners of men as they see my raise and come back at me. . . . The psychologist's verbalized, visceral, and manual behaviors are functioning at their highest in a poker game. . . . I can truthfully say that I learned about men from poker."

### 03. GREENE

#### 1. A DOUBLE TRAGEDY

(Tuesday, November 9; 10 a.m.)

IT has long been a source of wonder to me why the leading criminological writers—men like Edmund Lester Pearson, H. B. Irving, Filson Young, Canon Brookes, William Bolitho, and Harold Eaton—have not devoted more space to the Greene tragedy; for here, surely, is one of the outstanding murder mysteries of modern times—a case practically unique in the annals of latter-day crime. And yet I realize, as I read over my own voluminous notes on the case, and inspect the various documents relating to it, how little of its inner history ever came to light, and how impossible it would be for even the most imaginative chronicler to fill in the hiatuses.

The world, of course, knows the external facts. For over a month the Press of two continents was filled with accounts of this appalling tragedy; and even the bare outline was sufficient to gratify the public's craving for the abnormal and the spectacular. But the inside story of the catastrophe surpassed even the wildest flights of public fancy; and, as I now sit down to divulge those facts for the first time, I am oppressed with a feeling akin to unreality, although I was a witness to most of them and hold in my possession the incontestable records of their actuality.

Of the fiendish ingenuity which lay behind this terrible crime, of the warped psychological motives that inspired it, and of the strange hidden sources of its technique, the world is completely ignorant. Moreover, no explanation has ever been given of the analytic steps that led to its solution. Nor have the events attending the mechanism of that solution—events in themselves highly dramatic and unusual—ever been recounted. The public believes that the termination of the case was a result of the usual police methods of investigation; but this is because the public is unaware of many of the vital factors of the crime itself, and because both the Police Department and the District Attorney's office have, as if by tacit agreement, refused to make known the entire truth—whether for fear of being disbelieved or merely because there are certain things so terrible that no man wishes to talk of them, I do not know.

The record, therefore, which I am about to set down is the first complete and unedited history of the Greene holocaust.<sup>[1]</sup> I feel that now the truth should be known, for it is history, and one should not shrink from historical facts. Also, I believe that the credit for the solution of this case should go where it belongs.

The man who elucidated the mystery and brought to a close that palimpsest of horror was, curiously enough, in no way officially connected with the police; and in all the published accounts of the murder his name was not once mentioned. And yet, had it not been for him and his novel methods of criminal deduction, the heinous plot against the Greene family would have been conclusively successful. The police in their researches were dealing dogmatically with the evidential appearances of the crime, whereas the operations of the criminal were being conducted on a plane quite beyond the comprehension of the ordinary investigator.

This man who, after weeks of sedulous and disheartening analysis, eventually ferreted out the source of the horror, was a young social aristocrat, an intimate friend of John F.-X. Markham, the District Attorney. His name I am not at liberty to divulge, but for the purposes of these chronicles I have chosen to call him Philo Vance. He is no longer in this country, having transferred his residence several years ago to a villa outside Florence; and, since he has no intention of returning to America, he has acceded to my request to publish the history of the criminal cases in which he participated as a sort of *amicus curiae*. Markham also has retired to private life; and Sergeant Ernest Heath, that doughty and honest officer of the Homicide Bureau who officially handled the Greene case for the Police Department, has, through an unexpected legacy, been able to gratify his life's ambition to breed fancy Wyandottes on a model farm in the Mohawk Valley. Thus circumstances have made it possible for me to publish my intimate records of the Greene tragedy.

A few words are necessary to explain my own participation in the case. (I say "participation," though, in reality, my role was that of passive spectator.) For several years I had been Vance's personal attorney. I had resigned from my father's law firm—Van Dine, Davis & Van Dine—in order to devote myself exclusively to Vance's legal and financial needs, which, by the way, were not many. Vance and I had been friends from our undergraduate days at Harvard, and I found in my new duties as his legal agent and monetary steward a sinecure combined with many social and cultural compensations.

Vance at that time was thirty-four years old. He was just under six feet, slender, sinewy, and graceful. His chiselled regular features gave his face the attraction of strength and uniform modelling, but a sardonic coldness of expression precluded the designation of handsome. He had aloof grey eyes, a straight, slender nose, and a mouth suggesting both cruelty and asceticism. But, despite the severity of his lineaments—which acted like an impenetrable glass wall between him and his fellows—he was highly sensitive and mobile; and, though his manner was somewhat detached and supercilious, he exerted an undeniable fascination over those who knew him at all well.

Much of his education had been acquired in Europe, and he still retained a slight Oxonian accent and intonation, though I happen to be aware that this was no affectation: he cared too little for the opinions of others to trouble about maintaining any pose. He was an indefatigable student. His mind was ever eager for knowledge, and he devoted much of his time to the study of ethnology and psychology. His greatest intellectual enthusiasm was art, and he fortunately had an income sufficient to indulge his passion for collecting. It was, however, his interest in psychology and his application of it to individual behaviourism that first turned his attention to the criminal problems which came under Markham's jurisdiction.

The first case in which he participated was, as I have recorded elsewhere, the murder of Alvin Benson<sup>[2]</sup>. The second was the seemingly insoluble strangling of the famous Broadway beauty, Margaret Odell<sup>[3]</sup>. And in the late fall of the same year came the Greene tragedy. As in the two former cases, I kept a complete record of this new investigation. I possessed myself of every available document, making verbatim copies of those claimed for the police archives, and even jotted down the numerous conversations that took place in and out of conference between Vance and the official investigators. And, in addition, I kept a diary which, for elaborateness and completeness, would have been the despair of Samuel Pepys.

The Greene murder case occurred toward the end of Markham's first year in office. As you may remember, the winter came very early that season. There were two severe blizzards in November, and the amount of snow-fall for that month broke all local records for

eighteen years. I mention this fact of the early snows because it played a sinister part in the Greene affair: it was, indeed, one of the vital factors of the murderer's scheme. No one has yet understood, or even sensed, the connection between the unseasonable weather of that late fall and the fatal tragedy that fell upon the Greene household; but that is because all of the dark secrets of the case were not made known.

Vance was projected into the Benson murder as the result of a direct challenge from Markham; and his activities in the Canary case were due to his own expressed desire to lend a hand. But pure coincidence was responsible for his participation in the Greene investigation. During the two months that had elapsed since his solution of the Canary's death Markham had called upon him several times regarding moot points of criminal detection in connection with the routine work of the District Attorney's office; and it was during an informal discussion of one of these problems that the Greene case was first mentioned.

Markham and Vance had long been friends. Though dissimilar in tastes and even in ethical outlook, they nevertheless respected each other profoundly. I have often marvelled at the friendship of these two antipodal men; but as the years went by I came more and more to understand it. It was as if they were drawn together by those very qualities which each realized—perhaps with a certain repressed regret—were lacking in his own nature. Markham was forthright, brusque, and, on occasion, domineering, taking life with grim and serious concern, and following the dictates of his legal conscience in the face of every obstacle: honest, incorruptible, and untiring. Vance, on the other hand, was volatile, debonair, and possessed of a perpetual Juvenalian cynicism, smiling ironically at the bitterest realities, and consistently fulfilling the role of a whimsically disinterested spectator of life. But, withal, he understood people as profoundly as he understood art, and his dissection of motives and his shrewd readings of character were—as I had many occasions to witness—uncannily accurate. Markham apprehended these qualities in Vance, and sensed their true value.

It was not yet ten o'clock of the morning of November the 9th when Vance and I, after motoring to the old Criminal Courts Building on the corner of Franklin and Centre Streets, went directly to the District Attorney's office on the fourth floor. On that momentous forenoon two gangsters, each accusing the other of firing the fatal shot in a recent pay-roll hold-up, were to be cross-examined by Markham; and this interview was to decide the question as to which of the men would be charged with murder and which held as a State's witness. Markham and Vance had discussed the situation the night before in the lounge-room of the Stuyvesant Club, and Vance had expressed a desire to be present at the examination. Markham had readily assented, and so we had risen early and driven downtown.

The interview with the two men lasted for an hour, and Vance's disconcerting opinion was that neither was guilty of the actual shooting.

"Y' know, Markham," he drawled, when the sheriff had returned the prisoners to the Tombs, "those two Jack Sheppards are quite sincere: each one thinks he's telling the truth. Ergo, neither of 'em fired the shot. A distressin' predicament. They're obvious gallows-birds—born for the gibbet; and it's a beastly shame not to be able to round out their destinies in proper fashion...I say, wasn't there another participant in the hold-up?"

Markham nodded. "A third got away. According to these two, it was a well-known gangster named Eddie Maleppo."

"Then Eduardo is your man." [4]

Markham did not reply, and Vance rose lazily and reached for his ulster.

"By the by," he said, slipping into his coat, "I note that our upliftin' Press bedecked its front pages this morning with head-lines about a pogrom at the old Greene mansion last night. Wherefore?"

Markham glanced quickly at the clock on the wall, and frowned.

"That reminds me. Chester Greene called up the first thing this morning and insisted on seeing me. I told him eleven o'clock."

"Where do you fit in?" Vance had taken his hand from the door-knob, and drew out his cigarette-case.

"I don't!" snapped Markham. "But people think the District Attorney's office is a kind of clearing-house for all their troubles. It happens, however, that I've known Chester Greene a long time—we're both members of the Marylebone Golf Club—and so I must listen to his plaint about what was obviously an attempt to annex the famous Greene plate."

"Burglary—eh, what?" Vance took a few puffs on his cigarette. "With two women shot?"

"Oh, it was a miserable business! An amateur, no doubt. Got in a panic, shot up the place, and bolted."

"Seems a dashed curious proceeding." Vance abstractedly re-seated himself in a large arm-chair near the door. "Did the antique cutlery actually disappear?"

"Nothing was taken. The thief was evidently frightened off before he made his haul."

"Sounds a bit thick, don't y' know.—An amateur thief breaks into a prominent home, casts a preda'try eye on the dining-room silver, takes alarm, goes upstairs and shoots two women in their respective boudoirs, and then flees...Very touchin' and all that, but unconvincin'. Whence came this caressin' theory?"

Markham was glowering, but when he spoke it was with an effort at restraint.

"Feathergill was on duty last night when the call was relayed from Head-quarters, and accompanied the police to the house. He agrees with their conclusions." (Amos Feathergill was then an Assistant District Attorney. He later ran on the Tammany ticket for assemblyman, and was elected.)

"Nevertheless, I could bear to know why Chester Greene is desirous of having polite converse with you."

Markham compressed his lips. He was not in cordial mood that morning, and Vance's flippant curiosity irked him. After a moment, however, he said grudgingly:

"Since the attempted robbery interests you so keenly, you may, if you insist, wait and hear what Greene has to say."

"I'll stay," smiled Vance, removing his coat. "I'm weak; just can't resist a passionate entreaty...Which one of the Greens is Chester? And how is he related to the two deceased?"

"There was only one murder," Markham corrected him in a tone of forbearance. "The oldest daughter—an unmarried woman in her early forties—was killed instantly. A younger daughter, who was also shot, has, I believe, a chance of recovery."

"And Chester?"

"Chester is the elder son, a man of forty or thereabouts. He was the first person on the scene after the shot had been fired."

"What other members of the family are there? I know old Tobias Greene has gone to his Maker."

"Yes, old Tobias died about twelve years ago. But his wife is still living, though she's a helpless paralytic. Then there are—or rather were—five children: the oldest, Julia; next, Chester; then another daughter, Sibella, a few years under thirty, I should say; then Rex, a sickly, bookish boy a year or so younger than Sibella; and Ada, the youngest, an adopted daughter twenty-two or three, perhaps."

"And it was Julia who was killed, eh? Which of the other two girls was shot?"

"The younger—Ada. Her room, it seems, is across the hall from Julia's, and the thief apparently got in it by mistake while making his escape. As I understand it, he entered Ada's room immediately after firing on Julia, saw his error, fired again, and then fled, eventually going down the stairs and out the main entrance."

Vance smoked a while in silence.

"Your hypothetical intruder must have been deuced confused to have mistaken Ada's bedroom door for the staircase, what? And then there's the query: what was this anonymous gentleman who had called to collect the plate, doing above-stairs?"

"Probably looking for jewellery." Markham was rapidly losing patience. "*I* am not omniscient." There was irony in his inflection.

"Now, now, Markham!" pleaded Vance cajolingly. "Don't be vindictive. Your Greene burglary promises several nice points in academic speculation. Permit me to indulge my idle whims."

At that moment Swacker, Markham's youthful and alert secretary, appeared at the swinging door which communicated with a narrow chamber between the main waiting-room and the District Attorney's private office.

"Mr. Chester Greene is here," he announced.



## 2. THE INVESTIGATION OPENS

(Tuesday, November 9th; 11 a.m.)

WHEN Chester Greene entered it was obvious he was under a nervous strain; but his nervousness evoked no sympathy in me. From the very first I disliked the man. He was of medium height and was bordering on corpulence. There was something soft and flabby in his contours; and, though he was dressed with studied care, there were certain signs of overemphasis about his clothes. His cuffs were too tight; his collar was too snug; and the coloured silk handkerchief hung too far out of his breast-pocket. He was slightly bald, and the lids of his close-set eyes projected like those of a man with Bright's disease. His mouth, surmounted by a close-cropped blond moustache, was loose; and his chin receded slightly and was deeply creased below the under lip. He typified the pampered idler.

When he had shaken hands with Markham, and Vance and I had been introduced, he seated himself and meticulously inserted a brown Russian cigarette in a long amber-and-gold holder.

"I'd be tremendously obliged, Markham," he said, lighting his cigarette from an ivory pocket-lighter, "if you'd make a personal investigation of the row that occurred at our diggin's last night. The police will never get anywhere the way they're going about it. Good fellows, you understand—the police. But...well, there's something about this affair—don't know just how to put it. Anyway, I don't like it."

Markham studied him closely for several moments. "Just what's on your mind, Greene?"

The other crushed out his cigarette, though he had taken no more than half a dozen puffs, and drummed indecisively on the arm of his chair.

"Wish I knew. It's a rum affair—damned rum. There's something back of it, too—something that's going to raise the very devil if we don't stop it. Can't explain it. It's a feeling I've got."

"Perhaps Mr. Greene is psychic," commented Vance, with a look of bland innocence.

The man swung about and scrutinized Vance with aggressive condescension. "Tosh!" He brought out another Russian cigarette, and turned again to Markham. "I do wish you'd take a peep at the situation."

Markham hesitated. "Surely you've some reason for disagreeing with the police and appealing to me."

"Funny thing, but I haven't." (It seemed to me his hand shook slightly as he lit his second cigarette.) "I simply know that my mind rejects the burglar story automatically."

It was difficult to tell if he were being frank or deliberately hiding something. I did feel, however, that some sort of fear lurked beneath his uneasiness; and I also got the impression that he was far from being heart-broken over the tragedy.

"It seems to me," declared Markham, "that the theory of the burglar is entirely consistent with the facts. There have been many other cases of a housebreaker suddenly taking alarm, losing his head, and needlessly shooting people."

Greene rose abruptly and began pacing up and down.

"I can't argue the case," he muttered. "It's beyond all that, if you understand me." He looked quickly at the District Attorney with staring eyes. "Gad! It's got me in a cold sweat."

"It's all too vague and intangible," Markham observed kindly. "I'm inclined to think the tragedy has upset you. Perhaps after a day or two—"

Greene lifted a protesting hand.

"It's no go. I'm telling you, Markham, the police will never find their burglar. I feel it—here." He mincingly laid a manicured hand on his breast.

Vance had been watching him with a faint suggestion of amusement. Now he stretched his legs before him and gazed up at the ceiling.

"I say, Mr. Greene—pardon the intrusion on your esoteric gropings—but do you know of anyone with a reason for wanting your two sisters out of the way?"

The man looked blank for a moment.

"No," he answered finally; "can't say that I do. Who, in Heaven's name, would want to kill two harmless women?"

"I haven't the groggiest notion. But, since you repudiate the burglar theory, and since the two ladies were undoubtedly shot, it's inferable that someone sought their demise; and it occurred to me that you, being their brother and domiciled *en famille*, might know of someone who harboured homicidal sentiments towards them."

Greene bristled, and thrust his head forward. "I know of no one," he blurted. Then, turning to Markham, he continued wheedlingly: "If I had the slightest suspicion, don't you think I'd come out with it? This thing has got on my nerves. I've been mulling over it all night, and it's—it's bothersome, frightfully bothersome."

Markham nodded non-committally, and rising, walked to the window, where he stood, his hands behind him, gazing down on the grey stone masonry of the Tombs.

Vance, despite his apparent apathy, had been studying Greene closely; and, as Markham turned to the window, he straightened up slightly in his chair.

"Tell me," he began, an ingratiating note in his voice; "just what happened last night? I understand you were the first to reach the prostrate women."

"I was the first to reach my sister Julia," retorted Greene, with a hint of resentment. "It was Sproot, the butler, who found Ada unconscious, bleeding from a nasty wound in her back."

"Her back, eh?" Vance leaned forward, and lifted his eyebrows. "She was shot from behind, then?"

"Yes." Greene frowned and inspected his finger-nails, as if he, too, sensed something disturbing in the fact.

"And Miss Julia Greene: was she, too, shot from behind?"



"No—from the front."

"Extraordinary!" Vance blew a ring of smoke toward the dusty chandelier. "And had both women retired for the night?"

"An hour before...But what has all that got to do with it?"

"One never knows, does one? However, it's always well to be in possession of these little details when trying to run down the elusive source of a psychic seizure."

"Psychic seizure be damned!" growled Greene truculently. "Can't a man have a feeling about something without—"

"Quite—quite. But you've asked for the District Attorney's assistance, and I'm sure he would like a few data before making a decision."

Markham came forward and sat down on the edge of the table. His curiosity had been aroused, and he indicated to Greene his sympathy with Vance's interrogation.

Greene pursed his lips, and returned his cigarette-holder to his pocket.

"Oh, very well. What else do you want to know?"

"You might relate for us," dulcetly resumed Vance, "the exact order of events after you heard the first shot. I presume you did hear the shot."

"Certainly I heard it—couldn't have helped hearing it. Julia's room is next to mine, and I was still awake. I jumped into my slippers and pulled on my dressing-gown; then I went out into the hall. It was dark, and I felt my way along the wall until I reached Julia's door. I opened it and looked in—didn't know who might be there waiting to pop me—and I saw her lying in bed, the front of her night-gown covered with blood. There was no one else in the room, and I went to her immediately. Just then I heard another shot which sounded as if it came from Ada's room. I was a bit muzzy by this time—didn't know what I'd better do; and as I stood by Julia's bed in something of a funk—oh, I was in a funk all right..."

"Can't say that I blame you," Vance encouraged him.

Greene nodded. "A damned ticklish position to be in. Well, anyway, as I stood there, I heard someone coming down the stairs from the servants' quarters on the third floor, and recognized old Sproot's tread. He fumbled along in the dark, and I heard him enter Ada's door. Then he called to me, and I hurried over. Ada was lying in front of the dressingtable; and Sproot and I lifted her on the bed. I'd gone a bit weak in the knees; was expecting any minute to hear another shot—don't know why. Anyway, it didn't come; and then I heard Sproot's voice at the hall telephone calling up Doctor Von Blon."

"I see nothing in your account, Greene, inconsistent with the theory of a burglar," observed Markham. "And furthermore, Feathergill, my assistant, says there were two sets of confused footprints in the snow outside the front door."

Greene shrugged his shoulders, but did not answer.

"By the by, Mr. Greene"—Vance had slipped down in his chair and was staring into space—"you said that when you looked into Miss Julia's room you saw her in bed. How was that? Did you turn on the light?"

"Why, no!" The man appeared puzzled by the question. "The light was on."

There was a flutter of interest in Vance's eyes.

"And how about Miss Ada's room? Was the light on there also?"

"Yes."

Vance reached into his pocket, and, drawing out his cigarette-case, carefully and deliberately selected a cigarette. I recognized in the action an evidence of repressed inner excitement.

"So the lights were on in both rooms. Most interestin'."

Markham, too, recognized the eagerness beneath his apparent indifference, and regarded him expectantly.

"And," pursued Vance, after lighting his cigarette leisurely, "how long a time would you say elapsed between the two shots?"

Greene was obviously annoyed by this cross-examination, but he answered readily.

"Two or three minutes—certainly no longer."

"Still," ruminated Vance, "after you heard the first shot you rose from your bed, donned slippers and robe, went into the hall, felt along the wall to the next room, opened the door cautiously, peered inside, and then crossed the room to the bed—all this, I gather, before the second shot was fired. Is that correct?"

"Certainly it's correct."

"Well, well! As you say, two or three minutes. Yes, at least that. Astonishin'!" Vance turned to Markham. "Really, y' know, old man, I don't wish to influence your judgment, but I rather think you ought to accede to Mr. Greene's request to take a hand in this investigation. I too have a psychic feeling about the case. Something tells me that your eccentric burglar will prove an *ignis fatuus*."

Markham eyed him with meditative curiosity. Not only had Vance's questioning of Greene interested him keenly, but he knew, as a result of long experience, that Vance would not have made the suggestion had he not had a good reason for doing so. I was in no wise surprised, therefore, when he turned to his restive visitor and said:

"Very well, Greene, I'll see what I can do in the matter. I'll probably be at your house early this afternoon. Please see that everyone is present, as I'll want to question them."

Greene held out a trembling hand. "The domestic roster—family and servants—will be complete when you arrive."

He strode pompously from the room.

Vance sighed. "Not a nice creature, Markham—not at all a nice creature. I shall never be a politician if it involves an acquaintance with such gentlemen."

Markham seated himself at his desk with a disgruntled air.

"Greene is highly regarded as a social—not a political—decoration," he said maliciously. "He belongs to your totem, not mine."

"Fancy that!" Vance stretched himself luxuriously. "Still, it's you who fascinate him. Intuition tells me he is not overfond of me."

"You did treat him a bit cavalierly. Sarcasm is not exactly a means of endearment."

"But, Markham, old thing, I wasn't pining for Chester's affection."

"You think he knows, or suspects, something?" Vance gazed through the long window into the bleak sky beyond.

"I wonder," he murmured. Then: "Is Chester, by any chance, a typical representative of the Greene family? Of recent years I've done so little mingling with the elite that I'm woefully ignorant of the East Side nabobs."

Markham nodded reflectively.

"I'm afraid he is. The original Greene stock was sturdy, but the present generation seems to have gone somewhat to pot. Old Tobias the Third—Chester's father—was a rugged and, in many ways, admirable character. He appears, however, to have been the last heir of the ancient Greene qualities. What's left of the family has suffered some sort of disintegration. They're not exactly soft, but tainted with patches of incipient decay, like fruit that's lain on the ground too long. Too much money and leisure, I imagine, and too little restraint. On the other hand, there's a certain intellectuality lurking in the new Greenes. They all seem to have good minds, even if futile and misdirected. In fact, I think you underestimate Chester. For all his banalities and effeminate mannerisms, he's far from being as stupid as you regard him."

"I regard Chester as stupid! My dear Markham—my very dear Markham! You wrong me abominably. No, no. There's nothing of the anointed ass about our Chester. He's shrewder even than you think him. Those oedematous eyelids veil a pair of particularly crafty eyes. Indeed, it was largely his studied pose of fatuousness that led me to suggest that you aid and abet in the investigation."

Markham leaned back and narrowed his eyes.

"What's in your mind, Vance?"

"I told you. A psychic seizure—same like Chester's subliminal visitation."

Markham knew, by this elusive answer, that for the moment Vance had no intention of being more definite; and after a moment of scowling silence he turned to the telephone.

"If I'm to take on this case, I'd better find out who has charge of it and get what preliminary information I can."

He called up Inspector Moran, the commanding officer of the Detective Bureau. After a brief conversation he turned to Vance with a smile.

"Your friend, Sergeant Heath, has the case in hand. He happened to be in the office just now, and is coming here immediately." [5]

In less than fifteen minutes Heath arrived. Despite the fact that he had been up most of the night, he appeared unusually alert and energetic. His broad, pugnacious features were as imperturbable as ever, and his pale-blue eyes held their habitual penetrating intentness. He greeted Markham with an elaborate, though perfunctory handshake; and then, seeing Vance, relaxed his features into a good-natured smile.

"Well, if it isn't Mr. Vance! What have you been up to, sir?"

Vance rose and shook hands with him.

"Alas, Sergeant, I've been immersed in the terra-cotta ornamentation of Renaissance facades, and other such trivialities, since I saw you last. [6] But I'm happy to note that crime is picking up again. It's a deuced drab world without a nice murky murder now and then, don't y' know."

Heath cocked an eye, and turned inquiringly to the District Attorney. He had long since learned how to read between the lines of Vance's badinage.

"It's this Greene case, Sergeant," said Markham.

"I thought so." Heath sat down heavily, and inserted a black cigar between his lips. "But nothing's broken yet. We're rounding up all the regulars, and looking into their alibis for last night. But it'll take several days before the check-up's complete. If the bird who did the job hadn't got scared before he grabbed the swag, we might be able to trace him through the pawnshops and fences. But something rattled him, or he wouldn't have shot up the works the way he did. And that's what makes me think he may be a new one at the racket. If he is, it'll make our job harder." He held a match in cupped hands to his cigar, and puffed furiously. "What did you want to know about the prowl, sir?"

Markham hesitated. The Sergeant's matter-of-fact assumption that a common burglar was the culprit disconcerted him.

"Chester Greene was here," he explained presently; "and he seems convinced that the shooting was not the work of a thief. He asked me, as a special favour, to look into the matter."

Heath gave a derisive grunt.

"Who but a burglar in a panic would shoot down two women?"

"Quite so, Sergeant." It was Vance who answered. "Still, the lights were turned on in both rooms, though the women had gone to bed an hour before; and there was an interval of several minutes between the two shots."

"I know all that." Heath spoke impatiently. "But if an amachoor did the job, we can't tell exactly what did happen upstairs there last night. When a bird loses his head—"

"Ah! There's the rub. When a thief loses his head, d'ye see, he isn't apt to go from room to room turning on the lights, even assuming he knows where and how to turn them on. And he certainly isn't going to dally around for several minutes in a black hall between such fantastic operations, especially after he has shot someone and alarmed the house, what? It doesn't look like panic to me; it looks strangely like design. Moreover, why should this precious amateur of yours be cavorting about the boudoirs upstairs when the loot was in the dining-room below?"

"We'll learn all about that when we've got our man," countered Heath doggedly.

"The point is, Sergeant," put in Markham, "I've given Mr. Greene my promise to look into the matter, and I wanted to get what details I could from you. You understand, of course," he added mollifyingly, "that I shall not interfere with your activities in any way. Whatever the outcome of the case, your department will receive entire credit."

"Oh, that's all right, sir." Experience had taught Heath that he had nothing to fear in the way of lost *kudos* when working with Markham. "But I don't think, in spite of Mr. Vance's ideas, that you'll find much in the Greene case to warrant attention."

"Perhaps not," Markham admitted. "However, I've committed myself, and I think I'll run out this afternoon and look over the situation, if you'll give me the lie of the land."

"There isn't much to tell." Heath chewed on his cigar cogitatively. "A Doctor Von Blon—the Greene family physician—phoned Headquarters about midnight. I'd just got in from an up-town stick-up call, and I hopped out to the house with a couple of the boys

from the Bureau. I found the two women, like you know, one dead and the other unconscious—both shot. I phoned, Doc Doremus,<sup>[7]</sup> and then looked the place over. Mr. Feathergill came along and lent a hand; but we didn't find much of anything. The fellow that did the job musta got in by the front door some way, for there was a set of footprints in the snow coming and going, besides Doctor Von Blon's. But the snow was too flaky to get any good impressions. It stopped snowing along about eleven o'clock last night; and there's no doubt that the prints belonged to the burglar, for no one else, except the doctor, had come or gone after the storm."

"An amateur housebreaker with a front-door key to the Greene mansion," murmured Vance. "Extr'ordin'ry!"

"I'm not saying he had a key, sir," protested Heath. "I'm simply telling you what we found. The door mighta been unlatched by mistake; or someone mighta opened it for him."

"Go on with the story, Sergeant," urged Markham, giving Vance a reproving look.

"Well, after Doc Doremus got there and made an examination of the older woman's body and inspected the younger one's wound, I questioned all the family and the servants—a butler, two maids, and a cook. Chester Greene and the butler were the only ones who had heard the first shot, which was fired about half-past eleven. But the second shot roused old Mrs. Greene—her room adjoins the younger daughter's. The rest of the household had slept through all the excitement; but this Chester fellow had woke 'em all up by the time I got there. I talked to all of 'em, but nobody knew anything. After a coupla hours I left a man inside and another outside, and came away. Then I set the usual machinery going; and this morning Captain Dubois went over the place the best he could for fingerprints. Doc Doremus has got the body for an autopsy, and we'll get a report to-night. But there'll be nothing helpful from that quarter. She was fired on from in front at close range—almost a contact shot. And the other woman—the young one—was all powder-marked, and her night-gown was burnt. She was shot from behind.—That's about all the dope."

"Have you been able to get any sort of a statement from the younger one?"

"Not yet. She was unconscious last night, and this morning she was too weak to talk. But the doctor—Von Blon—said we could probably question her this afternoon. We may get something out of her, in case she got a look at the bird before he shot her."

"That suggests something to me, Sergeant." Vance had been listening passively to the recital, but now he drew in his legs, and lifted himself a little. "Did any member of the Greene household possess a gun?"

Heath gave him a sharp look.

"This Chester Greene said he had an old .32 revolver he used to keep in a desk drawer in his bedroom."

"Oh, did he, now? And did you see the gun?"

"I asked him for it, but he couldn't find it. Said he hadn't seen it for years, but that probably it was around somewheres. Promised to dig it up for me to-day."

"Don't hang any fond hopes on his finding it, Sergeant." Vance looked at Markham musingly. "I begin to comprehend the basis of Chester's psychic perturbation. I fear he's a crass materialist after all...Sad, sad."

"You think he missed the gun, and took fright?"

"Well—something like that...perhaps. One can't tell. It's deuced confusin'." He turned an indolent eye on the Sergeant. "By the by, what sort of gun did your burglar use?"

Heath gave a gruff, uneasy laugh.

"You score there, Mr. Vance. I've got both bullets—thirty-two's, fired from a revolver, not an automatic. But you're not trying to intimate—"

"Tut, tut, Sergeant. Like Goethe, I'm merely seeking for more illumination, if one may translate *Licht*—"

Markham interrupted this garrulous evasion.

"I'm going to the Greene house after lunch, Sergeant. Can you come along?"

"Sure I can, sir. I was going out anyway."

"Good." Markham brought forth a box of cigars. "Meet me here at two... And take a couple of these *Perfectos* before you go."

Heath selected the cigars, and put them carefully into his breast pocket. At the door he turned with a bantering grin.

"You coming along with us, Mr. Vance—to guide our erring footsteps, as they say?"

"Nothing could keep me away," declared Vance.

### 3. AT THE GREENE MANSION

(Tuesday, November 9th; 2.30 p.m.)

THE Greene Mansion—as it was commonly referred to by New Yorkers—was a relic of the city's *ancien regime*. It had stood for three generations at the eastern extremity of 53rd Street, two of its oriel windows actually overhanging the murky waters of the East River. The lot upon which the house was built extended through the entire block—a distance of two hundred feet—and had an equal frontage on the cross-streets. The character of the neighbourhood had changed radically since the early days; but the spirit of commercial advancement had left the domicile of the Greenes untouched. It was an oasis of idealism and calm in the midst of moiling commercial enterprise; and one of the stipulations in old Tobias Greene's last will and testament had been that the mansion should stand intact for at least a quarter of a century after his death, as a monument to him and his ancestors. One of his last acts on earth was to erect a high stone wall about the entire property, with a great double iron gateway opening on 53rd Street and a postern-gate for tradesmen giving on 52nd Street.

The mansion itself was two and a half stories high, surmounted by gabled spires and chimney clusters. It was what architects call, with a certain intonation of contempt, a "château flamboyant"; but no derogatory appellation could detract from the quiet dignity and the air of feudal traditionalism that emanated from its great rectangular blocks of grey limestone. The house was sixteenth-century Gothic in style, with more than a suspicion of the new Italian ornament in its parts; and the pinnacles and shelves suggested the Byzantine. But for all its diversity of detail, it was not flowery, and would have held no deep attraction for the Freemason architects of the Middle Ages. It was not "bookish" in effect; it exuded the very essence of the old.

In the front yard were maples and clipped evergreens, interspersed with hydrangea and lilac bushes; and at the rear was a row of weeping willows overhanging the river. Along the herring-bone-bond brick walls were high quick-set hedges of hawthorn; and the inner sides of the encircling wall were covered with compact escaliers. To the west of the house an asphalt driveway led to a double garage at the rear—an addition built by the newer generation of Greenes. But here too were boxwood hedgerows which cloaked the driveway's modernity.

As we entered the grounds that grey November afternoon an atmosphere of foreboding bleakness seemed to have settled over the estate. The trees and shrubs were all bare, except the evergreens, which were laden with patches of snow. The trellises stood stripped along the walls, like clinging black skeletons; and, save for the front walk, which had been hastily and imperfectly swept, the grounds were piled high with irregular snow-drifts. The grey of the mansion's masonry was almost the colour of the brooding overcast sky; and I felt a premonitory chill of eeriness pass over me as we mounted the shallow steps that led to the high front door, with its pointed pediment above the deeply arched entrance.

Sproot, the butler—a little old man with white hair and a heavily seamed capriform face—admitted us with silent, funereal dignity (he had evidently been apprised of our coming); and we were ushered at once into the great gloomy drawing-room whose heavily curtained windows overlooked the river. A few moments later Chester Greene came in and greeted Markham fulsomely. Heath and Vance and me he included in a single supercilious nod.

"Awfully good of you to come, Markham," he said, with nervous eagerness, seating himself on the edge of a chair and taking out his cigarette-holder. "I suppose you'll want to hold an inquisition first. Whom'll I summon as a starter?"

"We can let that go for the moment," said Markham. "First, I'd like to know something concerning the servants. Tell me what you can about them."

Greene moved restlessly in his chair, and seemed to have difficulty lighting his cigarette.

"There's only four. Big house and all that, but we don't need much help. Julia always acted as housekeeper, and Ada looked after the Mater.—To begin with, there's old Sproot. He's been butler, seneschal, and major-domo for us for thirty years. Regular family retainer—kind you read about in English novels—devoted, loyal, humble, dictatorial, and snooping. And a damned nuisance, I may add. Then there are two maids—one to look after the rooms and the other for general service, though the women monopolize her, mostly for useless fiddle-faddle. Hemming, the older maid, has been with us ten years. Still wears corsets and fit-easy shoes. Deep-water Baptist, I believe—excruciatingly devout. Barton, the other maid, is young and flighty: thinks she's irresistible, knows a little *table d'hôte* French, and is the kind that's constantly expecting the males of the family to kiss her behind the door. Sibella picked her out—she's just the kind Sibella would pick out. Been adorning our house and shirking the hard work for about two years. The cook's a stodgy German woman, a typical *Hausfrau*—voluminous bosoms and number-ten feet. Puts in all her spare time writing to distant nieces and nephews in the upper reaches of the Rhine basin somewhere; and boasts that the most fastidious person could eat off her kitchen floor, it's that clean; though I've never tried it. The old man engaged her a year before he died; gave orders she was to remain as long as she liked.—There you have the personnel of the backstairs. Of course, there is a gardener who loafs about the lawn in summer. He hibernates in a speak-easy up Harlem way."

"No chauffeur?"

"A nuisance we dispense with. Julia hated motorcars, and Rex is afraid to travel in them—squeamish lad, Rex. I drive my own racer, and Sibella's a regular Barney Oldfield. Ada drives, too, when the Mater isn't using her and Sibella's car is idle.—So endeth."

Markham had been making notes as Greene rambled along with his information. At length he put out the cigar he had been smoking.

"Now, if you don't mind, I want to look over the house."

Greene rose with alacrity and led the way into the main lower hall—a vaulted, oak-panelled entrance containing two large carved Flemish tables of the Sabin school, against opposite walls, and several Anglo-Dutch crown-back chairs. A great Daghestan rug stretched along the parqueted floor, its faded colours repeated in the heavy draperies of the archways.

"We have, of course, just come from the drawing-room," explained Greene, with a pompous air. "Back of it, down the hall"—he pointed past the wide marble stairway—"was the governor's library and den—what he called his *sanctum sanctorum*. Nobody's been in

it for twelve years. The Mater has kept it locked up ever since the old man died. Sentiment of some kind; though I've often told her she ought to clean the place out and make a billiard-room of it. But you can't move the Mater, once she's got an idea in her head. Try it some time when you're looking for heavy exercise."

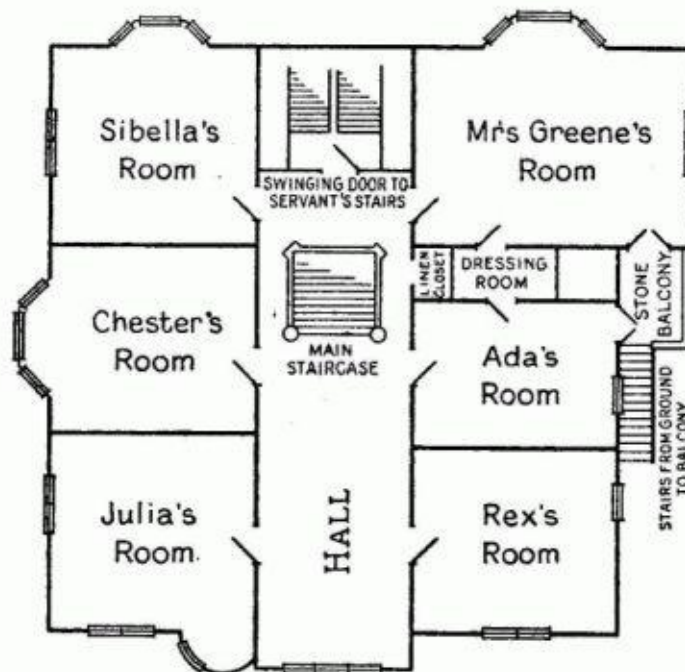
He walked across the hall and pulled aside the draperies of the archway opposite to the drawing-room.

"Here's the reception-room, though we don't use it much nowadays. Stuffy, silly place, and the flue doesn't draw worth a damn. Every time we've built a fire here, we've had to have the cleaners in to remove the soot from the tapestries." He waved his cigarette-holder toward two beautiful Gobelins. "Back there, through those sliding doors, is the dining-room; and farther on are the butler's pantry and the kitchen where one may eat off the floor. Care to inspect the culinary department?"

"No, I think not," said Markham. "And I'll take the kitchen floor for granted.—Now, can we look at the second floor?"

We ascended the main stairs, which led round a piece of marble statuary—a Falguière figure, I think—and emerged into the upper hall facing the front of the house where three large close-set windows looked out over the bare trees.

The arrangement of the rooms on the second floor was simple and in keeping with the broad four-square architecture of the house; but for the sake of clarification I am embodying in this record a rough diagram of it; for it was the disposition of these rooms that made possible the carrying out of the murderer's hideous and unnatural plot.



There were six bedrooms on the floor—three on either side of the hall, each occupied by a member of the family. At the front of the house, on our left, was the bedroom of Rex Greene, the younger brother. Next to it was the room occupied by Ada Greene; and at the rear were Mrs. Greene's quarters, separated from Ada's by a fair-sized dressing-room through which the two apartments communicated. It will be seen from the diagram that Mrs. Greene's room projected beyond the main western elevation of the house, and that in the L thus formed was a small balustraded stone porch with a narrow flight of stairs, set against the house, leading to the lawn below. French doors opened upon this porch from both Ada's and Mrs. Greene's rooms.

On the opposite side of the hall were the three rooms occupied by Julia, Chester, and Sibella, Julia's room being at the front of the house, Sibella's at the rear, and Chester's in the centre. None of these rooms communicated with the other. It might also be noted that the doors to Sibella's and Mrs. Greene's rooms were just behind the main staircase, whereas Chester's and Ada's were directly at the head of the stairs, and Julia's and Rex's farther toward the front of the house. There was a small linen closet between Ada's room and Mrs. Greene's; and at the rear of the hall were the servants' stairs.

Chester Greene explained this arrangement to us briefly, and then walked up the hall to Julia's room.

"You'll want to look in here first, I imagine," he said, throwing open the door. "Nothing's been touched—police orders. But I can't see what good all that stained bed-linen is to anyone. It's a frightful mess."

The room was large and richly furnished with sage-green satin-upholstered furniture of the Marie Antoinette period. Opposite to the door was a canopied bedstead on a dais; and several dark blotches on the embroidered linen gave mute evidence of the tragedy that had been enacted there the night before.

Vance, after noting the disposition of the furniture, turned his gaze upon the old-fashioned crystal chandelier.

"Were those the lights that were on when you found your sister last night, Mr. Greene?" he asked casually.

The other nodded with surly annoyance.

"And where, may I ask, is the switch?"

"Behind the end of that cabinet." Greene indifferently indicated a highly elaborate *armoire* near the door.

"Invisible—eh, what?" Vance strolled to the *armoire* and looked behind it. "An amazin' burglar!" Then he went up to Markham and spoke to him in a low voice. After a moment Markham nodded.

"Greene," he said, "I wish you'd go to your room and lie down on the bed just as you were last night when you heard the shot. Then, when I tap on the wall, get up and do everything you did last night—in just the way you did it. I want to time you."

The man stiffened, and gave Markham a look of resentful protestation.

"Oh, I say!" he began. But almost at once he shrugged compliance and swaggered from the room, closing the door behind him.

Vance took out his watch, and Markham, giving Greene time to reach his room, rapped on the wall. For what seemed an interminable time we waited. Then the door opened slightly, and Greene peered round the casing. Slowly his eyes swept the room; he swung the door farther ajar, stepped inside hesitantly, and moved to the bed.

"Three minutes and twenty seconds," announced Vance. "Most disquietin'... What do you imagine, Sergeant, the intruder was doing in the interim of the two shots?"

"How do I know?" retorted Heath. "Probably groping round the hall outside looking for the stairs."

"If he'd groped that length of time he'd have fallen down 'em."

Markham interrupted this discussion with a suggestion that we take a look at the servants' stairway down which the butler had come after hearing the first shot.

"We needn't inspect the other bedrooms just yet," he added, "though we'll want to see Miss Ada's room as soon as the doctor thinks it's advisable. When, by the way, will you know his decision, Greene?"

"He said he'd be here at three. And he's a punctual beggar—a regular fiend for efficiency. He sent a nurse over early this morning, and she's looking after Ada and the Mater now."

"I say, Mr. Greene," interposed Vance, "was your sister Julia in the habit of leaving her door unlocked at night?"

Greene's jaw dropped a little, and his eyes opened wider.

"By Jove—no! Now that you mention it ... she always locked herself in."

Vance nodded absently, and we passed out into the hall. A thin, swinging baize door hid the servants' stairwell at the rear, and Markham pushed it open.

"Nothing much here to deaden the sound," he observed.

"No," agreed Greene. "And old Sproot's room is right at the head of the steps. He's got good ears, too—too damned good sometimes."

We were about to turn back, when a high-pitched querulous voice issued from the partly open door on our right.

"Is that you, Chester? What's all this disturbance? Haven't I had enough distraction and worry—?"

Greene had gone to his mother's door and put his head inside.

"It's all right, Mater," he said irritably. "It's only the police nosing around."

"The police?" Her voice was contemptuous. "What do they want? Didn't they upset me enough last night? Why don't they go and look for the villain instead of congregating outside my door and annoying me?—So, it's the police." Her tone became vindictive. "Bring them in here at once, and let me talk to them. The police, indeed!"

Greene looked helplessly at Markham, who merely nodded; and we entered the invalid's room. It was a spacious chamber, with windows on three sides, furnished elaborately with all manner of conflicting objects. My first glance took in an East Indian rug, a buhl cabinet, an enormous gilded Buddha, several massive Chinese chairs of carved tak-wood, a faded Persian tapestry, two wrought-iron standard lamps, and a red-and-gold lacquered high-boy. I looked quickly at Vance, and surprised an expression of puzzled interest in his eyes.

In an enormous bed, with neither head-piece nor foot-posts, reclined the mistress of the house, propped up in a semi-recumbent attitude on a sprawling pile of varicoloured silken pillows. She must have been between sixty-five and seventy, but her hair was almost black. Her long, chevaline face, though yellowed and wrinkled like ancient parchment, still radiated an amazing vigour: it reminded me of the portraits I had seen of George Eliot. About her shoulders was drawn an embroidered Oriental shawl; and the picture she presented in the setting of that unusual and diversified room was exotic in the extreme. At her side sat a rosy-cheeked imperturbable nurse in a stiff white uniform, making a singular contrast to the woman on the bed.

Chester Greene presented Markham, and let his mother take the rest of us for granted. At first she did not acknowledge the introduction, but, after appraising Markham for a moment, she gave him a nod of resentful forbearance and held out to him a long bony hand.

"I suppose there's no way to avoid having my home overrun in this fashion," she said wearily, assuming an air of great toleration. "I was just endeavouring to get a little rest. My back pains me so much to-day, after all the excitement last night. But what do I matter—an old paralyzed woman like me? No one considers me anyway, Mr. Markham. But they're perfectly right. We invalids are of no use in the world, are we?"

Markham muttered some polite protestation, to which Mrs. Greene paid not the slightest attention. She had turned, with seemingly great difficulty, to the nurse.

"Fix my pillows, Miss Craven," she ordered impatiently, and then added, in a whining tone: "Even you don't give a thought to my comfort." The nurse complied without a word. "Now, you can go in and sit with Ada until Doctor Von Blon comes—How is the dear child?" Suddenly her voice had assumed a note of simulated solicitude.

"She's much better, Mrs. Greene." The nurse spoke in a colourless, matter-of-fact tone, and passed quietly into the dressing-room.

The woman on the bed turned complaining eyes upon Markham.

"It's a terrible thing to be a cripple, unable to walk or even stand alone. Both my legs have been hopelessly paralyzed for ten years.

Think of it, Mr. Markham: I've spent ten years in this bed and that chair"—she pointed to an invalid's chair in the alcove—"and I can't even move from one to the other unless I'm lifted bodily. But I console myself with the thought that I'm not long for this world; and I try to be patient. It wouldn't be so bad, though, if my children were only more considerate. But I suppose I expect too much. Youth and health give little thought to the old and feeble—it's the way of the world. And so I make the best of it. It's my fate to be a burden to every one."

She sighed and drew the shawl more closely about her.

"You want to ask me some questions perhaps? I don't see what I can tell you that will be of any help, but I'm only too glad to do whatever I can. I haven't slept a wink, and my back has been paining me terribly as a result of all this commotion. But I'm not complaining."

Markham had stood looking at the old lady sympathetically. Indeed, she was a pitiful figure. Her long invalidism and solitude had warped what had probably been a brilliant and generous mind: and she had now become a kind of introspective martyr, with an exaggerated sensitiveness to her affliction. I could see that Markham's instinct was to leave her immediately with a few consoling words; but his sense of duty directed him to remain and learn what he could.

"I don't wish to annoy you any more than is absolutely necessary, madam," he said in a kindly voice. "But it might help considerably if you permitted me to put one or two questions."

"What's a little annoyance, more or less?" she asked. "I've long since become used to it. Ask me anything you choose."

Markham bowed with Old World courtesy. "You are very kind, madam." Then, after a moment's pause: "Mr. Greene tells me you did not hear the shot that was fired in your oldest daughter's room, but that the shot in Miss Ada's room awakened you."

"That is so." She nodded slowly. "Julia's room is a considerable distance away—across the hall. But Ada always leaves the doors open between her room and mine in case I should need anything in the night. Naturally the shot in her room awakened me...Let me see. I must have just fallen to sleep. My back was giving me a great deal of trouble last night; I had suffered all day with it, though I of course didn't tell any of the children about it. Little they care how their paralyzed old mother suffers...And then, just as I had managed to doze off, there came the report, and I was wide-awake again—lying here helpless, unable to move, and wondering what awful thing might be going to happen to me. And no one came to see if I was all right; no one thought of me, alone and defenceless. But then, no one ever thinks of me."

"I'm sure it wasn't any lack of consideration, Mrs. Greene," Markham assured her earnestly. "The situation probably drove everything momentarily from their minds except the two victims of the shooting.— Tell me this: did you hear any other sounds in Miss Ada's room after the shot awakened you?"

"I heard the poor girl fall—at least, it sounded like that."

"But no other noises of any kind? No footsteps, for instance?"

"Footsteps?" She seemed to make an effort to recall her impressions. "No; no footsteps."

"Did you hear the door into the hall open or close, madam?" It was Vance who put the question.

The woman turned her eyes sharply and glared at him. "No, I heard no door open or close."

"That's rather queer, too, don't you think?" pursued Vance. "The intruder must have left the room."

"I suppose he must have, if he's not there now," she replied acidly, turning again to the District Attorney. "Is there anything else you'd care to know?"

Markham evidently had perceived the impossibility of eliciting any vital information from her.

"I think not," he answered; then added: "You of course heard the butler and your son here enter Miss Ada's room?"

"Oh, yes. They made enough noise doing it—they didn't consider my feelings in the least. That fuss-budget, Sproot, actually cried out for Chester like a hysterical woman; and, from the way he raised his voice over the telephone, one would have thought Doctor Von Blon was deaf. Then Chester had to rouse the whole house for some unknown reason. Oh, there was no peace or rest for me last night, I can tell you! And the police tramped around the house for hours like a drove of wild cattle. It was positively disgraceful. And here was I—a helpless old woman—entirely neglected and forgotten, suffering agonies with my spine."

After a few commiserating banalities Markham thanked her for her assistance, and withdrew. As we passed out and walked toward the stairs I could hear her calling out angrily: "Nurse! Nurse! Can't you hear me? Come at once and arrange my pillows. What do you mean by neglecting me this way...?" The voice trailed off mercifully as we descended to the main hall.



#### 4. THE MISSING REVOLVER

(Tuesday, November 9th; 3 p.m.)

"THE Mater's a crabbed old soul," Greene apologized off-handedly when we were again in the drawing-room. "Always grouching about her doting offspring.—Well, where do we go from here?"

Markham seemed lost in thought, and it was Vance who answered.

"Let us take a peep at the servants and hearken to their tale: Sproot for a starter."

Markham roused himself and nodded, and Greene rose and pulled a silken bell-cord near the archway. A minute later the butler appeared and stood at obsequious attention just inside the room. Markham had appeared somewhat at sea and even disinterested during the investigation, and Vance assumed command.

"Sit down, Sproot, and tell us as briefly as possible just what occurred last night."

Sproot came forward slowly, his eyes on the floor, but remained standing before the centre-table.

"I was reading Martial, sir, in my room," he began, lifting his gaze submissively, "when I thought I heard a muffled shot. I wasn't quite sure, for the automobiles in the street back-fire quite loud at times; but at last I said to myself I'd better investigate. I was in *négligé*, if you understand what I mean, sir; so I slipped on my bath-robe and came down. I didn't know just where the noise had come from; but when I was half-way down the steps I heard another shot, and this time it sounded like it came from Miss Ada's room. So I went there at once, and tried the door. It was unlocked, and when I looked in I saw Miss Ada lying on the floor—a very distressing sight, sir. I called to Mr. Chester, and we lifted the poor young lady to the bed. Then I telephoned to Doctor Von Blon."

Vance scrutinized him.

"You were very courageous, Sproot, to brave a dark hall looking for the source of a shot in the middle of the night."

"Thank you, sir," the man answered, with great humility. "I always try to do my duty by the Greene family. I've been with them—"

"We know all that, Sproot." Vance cut him short. "The light was on in Miss Ada's room, I understand, when you opened the door."

"Yes, sir."

"And you saw no one, or heard no noise? No door closing, for instance?"

"No, sir."

"And yet the person who fired the shot must have been somewhere in the hall at the same time you were there."

"I suppose so, sir."

"And he might well have taken a shot at you, too."

"Quite so, sir." Sproot seemed wholly indifferent to the danger he had escaped. "But what will be, will be, sir—if you'll pardon my saying so. And I'm an old man—"

"Tut, tut! You'll probably live a considerable time yet—just how long I can't, of course, say."

"No, sir." Sproot's eyes gazed blankly ahead. "No one understands the mysteries of life and death."

"You're somewhat philosophic, I see," dryly commented Vance. Then: "When you phoned to Doctor Von Blon, was he in?"

"No, sir; but the night nurse told me he'd be back any minute, and that she'd send him over. He arrived in less than half an hour."

Vance nodded. "That will be all, thank you, Sproot.—And now please send me *die gnädige Frau Köchin*."

"Yes, sir." And the old butler shuffled from the room. Vance's eyes followed him thoughtfully.

"An inveiglin' character," he murmured.

Greene snorted. "*You* don't have to live with him. He'd have said 'Yes, sir,' if you'd spoken to him in Walloon or Volapuk. A sweet little playmate to have snooping round the house twenty-four hours a day!"

The cook, a portly, phlegmatic German woman of about forty-five, named Gertrude Mannheim, came in and seated herself on the edge of a chair near the entrance. Vance, after a moment's keen inspection of her, asked:

"Were you born in this country, Frau Mannheim?"

"I was born in Baden," she answered, in flat, rather guttural tones. "I came to America when I was twelve."

"You have not always been a cook, I take it." Vance's voice had a slightly different intonation from that which he had used with Sproot.

At first the woman did not answer.

"No, sir," she said finally. "Only since the death of my husband."

"How did you happen to come to the Greenses?"

Again she hesitated. "I had met Mr. Tobias Greene: he knew my husband. When my husband died there wasn't any money. And I remembered Mr. Greene, and I thought—"

"I understand." Vance paused, his eyes in space. "You heard nothing of what happened here last night?"

"No, sir. Not until Mr. Chester called up the stairs and said for us to get dressed and come down."

Vance rose and turned to the window overlooking the East River.

"That's all, Frau Mannheim. Be as good as to tell the senior maid—Hemming, isn't she?—to come here."

Without a word the cook left us, and her place was presently taken by a tall, slatternly woman, with a sharp, prudish face and severely combed hair. She wore a black, one-piece dress, and heelless vici-kid shoes; and her severity of mien was emphasized by a pair of thick-lensed spectacles.

"I understand, Hemming," began Vance, reseating himself before the fire-place, "that you heard neither shot last night, and learned of the tragedy only when called by Mr. Greene."

The woman nodded with a jerky, emphatic movement.

"I was spared," she said, in a rasping voice. "But the tragedy, as you call it, had to come sooner or later. It was an act of God, if you



ask *me*."

"Well, we're not asking you, Hemming; but we're delighted to have your opinion.—So God had a hand in the shooting, eh?"

"He did that" The woman spoke with religious fervour. "The Greenes are an ungodly, wicked family." She leered defiantly at Chester Greene, who laughed uneasily. "For I shall rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts—the name, the remnant, and son, and daughter, and nephew—only there ain't no nephew—and I will sweep them with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord."

Vance regarded her musingly.

"I see you have misread Isaiah. And have you any celestial information as to who was chosen by the Lord to personify the besom?"

The woman compressed her lips. "Who knows?"

"Ah! Who, indeed? ...But to descend to temporal things: I assume you weren't surprised at what happened last night?"

"I'm never surprised at the mysterious workin's of the Almighty."

Vance sighed. "You may return to your Scriptural perusings, Hemming. Only, I wish you'd pause *en route* and tell Barton we crave her presence here."

The woman rose stiffly and passed from the room like an animated ramrod.

Barton came in, obviously frightened. But her fear was insufficient to banish completely her instinctive coquetry. A certain coyness showed through the alarmed glance she gave us, and one hand automatically smoothed back the chestnut hair over her ear. Vance adjusted his monocle.

"You really should wear Alice blue, Barton," he advised her seriously. "Much more becoming than cerise to your olive complexion."

The girl's apprehensiveness relaxed, and she gave Vance a puzzled, kittenish look.

"But what I particularly wanted you to come here for," he went on, "was to ask you if Mr. Greene has ever kissed you."

"Which—Mr. Greene?" she stammered, completely disconcerted.

Chester had, at Vance's question, jerked himself erect in his chair and started to splutter an irate objection. But articulation failed him, and he turned to Markham with speechless indignation.

The corners of Vance's mouth twitched. "It really doesn't matter, Barton," he said quickly.

"Aren't you going to ask me any questions about—what happened last night?" the girl asked, with obvious disappointment.

"Oh! Do you know anything about what happened?"

"Why, no," she admitted. "I was asleep—"

"Exactly. Therefore, I shan't bother you with questions." He dismissed her good-naturedly.

"Damn it, Markham, I protest!" cried Greene, when Barton had left us. "I call this—this gentleman's levity rotten-bad taste—damme if I don't!"

Markham, too, was annoyed at the frivolous line of interrogation Vance had taken.

"I can't see what's to be gained by such futile inquiries," he said, striving to control his irritation.

"That's because you're still holding to the burglar theory," Vance replied. "But if, as Mr. Greene thinks, there is another explanation of last night's crime, then it's essential to acquaint ourselves with the conditions existing here. And it's equally essential not to rouse the suspicions of the servants. Hence my apparent irrelevancies. I'm trying to size up the various human actors we have to deal with; and I think I've done uncommonly well. Several rather interesting possibilities have developed."

Before Markham could reply Sproot passed the archway and opened the front door to someone whom he greeted respectfully. Greene immediately went into the hall.

"Hallo, doc," we heard him say. "Thought you'd be along pretty soon. The District Attorney and his *entourage* are here, and they'd like to talk to Ada. I told 'em you said it might be all right this afternoon."

"I'll know better when I've seen Ada," the doctor replied. He passed on hurriedly, and we heard him ascending the stairs.

"It's Von Blon," announced Greene, returning to the drawing-room. "He'll let us know anon how Ada's coming along." There was a callous note in his voice, which, at the time, puzzled me.

"How long have you known Doctor Von Blon?" asked Vance.

"How long?" Greene looked surprised. "Why, all my life. Went to the old Beekman Public School with him. His father—old Doctor Veranus Von Blon—brought all the later Greenes into the world; family physician, spiritual adviser, and all that sort of thing, from time immemorial. When Von Blon senior died we embraced the son as a matter of course. And young Arthur's a shrewd lad, too. Knows his pharmacopoeia. Trained by the old man, and topped off his medical education in Germany."

Vance nodded negligently.

"While we're waiting for Doctor Von Blon, suppose we have a chat with Miss Sibella and Mr. Rex. Your brother first, let us say."

Greene looked to Markham for confirmation; then rang for Sproot.

Rex Greene came immediately upon being summoned.

"Well, what do you want now?" he asked, scanning our faces with nervous intensity. His voice was peevish, almost whining, and there were certain overtones in it which recalled the fretful complaining voice of Mrs. Greene.

"We merely want to question you about last night," answered Vance soothingly. "We thought it possible you could help us."

"What help can I give you?" Rex asked sullenly, slumping into a chair. He gave his brother a sneering look. "Chester's the only one round here who seems to have been awake."

Rex Greene was a short, sallow youth with narrow, stooping shoulders and an abnormally large head set on a neck which appeared almost emaciated. A shock of straight hair hung down over his bulging forehead, and he had a habit of tossing it back with a jerky movement of the head. His small, shifty eyes, shielded by enormous tortoise-rimmed glasses, seemed never to be at rest; and his thin lips were constantly twitching as with a *tic douloureux*. His chin was small and pointed, and he held it drawn in, emphasizing its lack of prominence. He was not a pleasant spectacle, and yet there was something in the man—an overdeveloped studiousness, perhaps—that gave the impression of unusual potentialities. I once saw a juvenile chess wizard who had the same cranial formations and general facial cast.

Vance appeared introspective, but I knew he was absorbing every detail of the man's appearance. At length he laid down his

cigarette, and focused his eyes languidly on the desk-lamp.

"You say you slept throughout the tragedy last night. How do you account for that remarkable fact, inasmuch as one of the shots was fired in the room next to yours?"

Rex hitched himself forward to the edge of his chair, and turned his head from side to side, carefully avoiding our eyes.

"I haven't tried to account for it," he returned, with angry resentment; but withal he seemed unstrung and on the defensive. Then he hurried on: "The walls in this house are pretty thick anyway, and there are always noises in the street...Maybe my head was buried under the covers."

"You'd certainly have buried your head under the covers if you'd heard the shot," commented Chester, with no attempt to disguise his contempt for his brother.

Rex swung round, and would have retorted to the accusation had not Vance put his next question immediately.

"What's your theory of the crime, Mr. Greene? You've heard all the details and you know the situation."

"I thought the police had settled on a burglar." The youth's eyes rested shrewdly on Heath. "Wasn't that your conclusion?"

"It was, and it is," declared the Sergeant, who, until now, had preserved a bored silence. "But your brother here seems to think otherwise."

"So Chester thinks otherwise." Rex turned to his brother with an expression of feline dislike. "Maybe Chester knows all about it." There was no mistaking the implication in his words.

Vance once more stepped into the breach.

"Your brother has told us all he knows. Just at present we're concerned with how much you know." The severity of his manner caused Rex to shrink back in his chair. His lips twitched more violently, and he began fidgeting with the braided frog of his smoking-jacket. I noticed then for the first time that he had short rachitic hands with bowed and thickened phalanges.

"You are sure you heard no shot?" continued Vance ominously.

"I've told you a dozen times I didn't!" His voice rose to a falsetto, and he gripped the arms of his chair with both hands.

"Keep calm, Rex," admonished Chester. "You'll be having another of your spells."

"To hell with you," the youth shouted. "How many times have I got to tell them I don't know anything about it?"

"We merely want to make doubly sure on all points," Vance told him pacifyingly. "And you certainly wouldn't want your sister's death to go unavenged through any lack of perseverance on our part."

Rex relaxed slightly, and took a deep inspiration.

"Oh, I'd tell you anything I knew," he said, running his tongue over his dry lips. "But I always get blamed for everything that happens in this house—that is, Ada and I do. And as for avenging Julia's death: that doesn't appeal to me nearly so much as punishing the dog that shot Ada. She has a hard enough time of it here under normal conditions. Mother keeps her in the house waiting on her as if she were a servant."

Vance nodded understandingly. Then he rose and placed his hand sympathetically on Rex's shoulder. This gesture was so unlike him I was completely astonished; for, despite his deep-seated humanism, Vance seemed always ashamed of any outward show of feeling, and sought constantly to repress his emotions.

"Don't let this tragedy upset you too much, Mr. Greene," he said reassuringly. "And you may be certain that we'll do everything in our power to find and punish the person who shot Miss Ada.—We won't bother you any more now."

Rex got up almost eagerly and drew himself together.

"Oh, that's all right." And with a covertly triumphant glance at his brother, he left the room.

"Rex is a queer bird," Chester remarked, after a short silence. "He spends most of his time reading and working out abstruse problems in mathematics and astronomy. Wanted to stick a telescope through the attic roof, but the Mater drew the line. He's an unhealthy beggar, too. I tell him he doesn't get enough fresh air, but you see his attitude toward me. Thinks I'm weak-minded because I play golf."

"What were the spells you spoke about?" asked Vance. "Your brother looks as if he might be epileptic."

"Oh, no; nothing like that; though I've seen him have convulsive seizures when he got in a specially violent tantrum. He gets excited easily and flies off the handle. Von Blon says it's hyperneurasthenia—whatever that is. He goes ghastly pale when he's worked up, and has a kind of trembling fit. Says things he's sorry for afterward. Nothing serious, though. What he needs is exercise—a year on a ranch roughing it, without his infernal books and compasses and T-squares."

"I suppose he's more or less a favourite with your mother." (Vance's remark recalled a curious similarity of temperament between the two I had felt vaguely as Rex talked.)

"More or less." Chester nodded ponderously. "He's the pet in so far as the Mater's capable of petting anyone but herself. Anyway, she's never ragged Rex as much as the rest of us."

Again Vance went to the great window above the East River, and stood looking out. Suddenly he turned.

"By the by, Mr. Greene, did you find your revolver?" His tone had changed; his ruminative mood had gone.

Chester gave a start, and cast a swift glance at Heath, who had now become attentive.

"No, by Gad, I haven't," he admitted, fumbling in his pocket for his cigarette-holder. "Funny thing about that gun, too. Always kept it in my desk drawer—though, as I told this gentleman when he mentioned it"—he pointed his holder at Heath as if the other had been an inanimate object—"I don't remember actually having seen it for years. But, even so, where the devil could it have gone? Damme, it's mysterious. Nobody round here would touch it. The maids don't go in the drawers when they're cleaning the room—I'm lucky if they make the bed and dust the top of the furniture. Damned funny what became of it."

"Did you take a good look for it to-day, like you said?" asked Heath, thrusting his head forward belligerently. Why, since he held to the burglar theory, he should assume a bulldozing manner, I couldn't imagine. But whenever Heath was troubled, he was aggressive; and any loose end in an investigation troubled him deeply.

"Certainly, I looked for it," Chester replied, haughtily indignant. "I went through every room and closet and drawer in the house. But it's completely disappeared...Probably got thrown out by mistake in one of the annual house-cleanings."

"That's possible," agreed Vance. "What sort of a revolver was it?"

"An old Smith and Wesson .32," Chester appeared to be trying to refresh his memory. "Mother-of-pearl handle: some scroll-engraving on the barrel—I don't recall exactly. I bought it fifteen years ago—maybe longer—when I went camping one summer in the Adirondacks. Used it for target practice. Then I got tired of it, and stuck it away in a drawer behind a lot of old cancelled cheques."

"Was it in good working order then?"

"As far as I know. Fact is, it worked stiff when I got it, and had the sear filed down, so it was practically a hair-trigger affair. The slightest touch sent it off. Better for shooting targets that way."

"Do you recall if it was loaded when you put it away?"

"Couldn't say. Might have been. It's been so long—"

"Were there any cartridges for it in your desk?"

"Now, that I can answer you positively. There wasn't a loose cartridge in the place."

Vance reseated himself.

"Well, Mr. Greene, if you happen to run across the revolver you will, of course, let Mr. Markham or Sergeant Heath know."

"Oh, certainly. With pleasure." Chester's assurance was expressed with an air of magnanimity.

Vance glanced at his watch.

"And now, seeing that Doctor Von Blon is still with his patient, I wonder if we could see Miss Sibella for a moment."

Chester got up, obviously relieved that the subject of the revolver had been disposed of, and went to the bell-cord beside the archway. But he arrested his hand in the act of reaching for it.

"I'll fetch her myself," he said, and hurried from the room.

Markham turned to Vance with a smile.

"Your prophecy about the non-reappearance of the gun has, I note, been temporarily verified."

"And I'm afraid that fancy weapon with the hair-trigger never will appear—at least, not until this miserable business is cleaned up." Vance was unwontedly sober; his customary levity had for the moment deserted him. But before long he lifted his eyebrows mockingly, and gave Heath a chaffing look.

"Perchance the sergeant's predacious neophyte made off with the revolver—became fascinated with the scrollwork, or entranced with the pearl handle."

"It's quite possible the revolver disappeared in the way Greene said it did," Markham submitted. "In any event, I think you unduly emphasized the matter."

"Sure he did, Mr. Markham," growled Heath. "And, what's more, I can't see that all this repartee with the family is getting us anywheres. I had 'em all on the carpet last night when the shooting was hot; and I'm telling you they don't know nothing about it. This Ada Greene is the only person round here I want to talk to. There's a chance she can give us a tip. If her lights were on when the burglar got in her room, she maybe got a good look at him."

"Sergeant," said Vance, shaking his head sadly, "you're getting positively morbid on the subject of that mythical burglar."

Markham inspected the end of his cigar thoughtfully.

"No, Vance. I'm inclined to agree with the sergeant. It appears to me that you're the one with the morbid imagination. I let you inveigle me into this inquiry too easily. That's why I've kept in the background and left the floor to you. Ada Greene's our only hope of help here."

"Oh, for your trusting, forthright mind!" Vance sighed and shifted his position restlessly. "I say, our psychic Chester is taking a dashed long time to fetch Sibella."

At that moment there came a sound of footsteps on the marble stairs, and a few seconds later Sibella Greene, accompanied by Chester, appeared in the archway.

## 5. HOMICIDAL POSSIBILITIES

(Tuesday, November 9th; 3.30 p.m.)

SIBELLA entered with a firm, swinging gait, her head held high, her eyes sweeping the assemblage with bold interrogation. She was tall and of slender, athletic build, and, though she was not pretty, there was a cold, chiselled attractiveness in her lineaments that held one's attention. Her face was at once vivid and intense; and there was a hauteur in her expression amounting almost to arrogance. Her dark, crisp hair was bobbed but not waved, and the severity of its lines accentuated the over-decisive cast of her features. Her hazel eyes were wide-spaced beneath heavy, almost horizontal eyebrows; her nose was straight and slightly prominent, and her mouth was large and firm, with a suggestion of cruelty in its thin lips. She was dressed simply, in a dark sport suit cut extremely short, silk-wool stockings of a heather mixture, and low-heeled mannish Oxfords.

Chester presented the District Attorney to her as an old acquaintance, and permitted Markham to make the other introductions.

"I suppose you know, Mr. Markham, why Chet likes you," she said, in a peculiarly plangent voice. "You're one of the few persons at the Marylebone Club that he can beat at golf."

She seated herself before the centre-table, and crossed her knees comfortably.

"I wish you'd get me a cigarette, Chet." Her tone made the request an imperative.

Vance rose at once and held out his case.

"Do try one of these *Régies*, Miss Greene," he urged in his best drawing-room manner. "If you say you don't like them, I shall immediately change my brand."

"Rash man!" Sibella took a cigarette and permitted Vance to light it for her. Then she settled back in her chair and gave Markham a quizzical look. "Quite a wild party we pulled here last night, wasn't it? We've never had so much commotion in the old mansion. And it was just my luck to sleep soundly through it all." She made an aggrieved *moue*. "Chet didn't call me till it was all over. Just like him—he has a nasty disposition."

Somehow her flippancy did not shock me as it might have done in a different type of person. But Sibella struck me as a girl who, though she might feel things keenly, would not permit any misfortune to get the better of her; and I put her apparent callousness down to a dogged, if perverted, courageousness.

Markham, however, resented her attitude.

"One cannot blame Mr. Greene for not taking the matter lightly," he reproved her. "The brutal murder of a defenceless woman and the attempted murder of a young girl hardly come under the head of diversion."

Sibella looked at him reproachfully. "You know, Mr. Markham, you sound exactly like the Mother Superior of the stuffy convent I was confined in for two years." She became suddenly grave. "Why draw a long face over something that's happened and can't be helped? Anyway, Julia never sought to brighten her little corner. She was always crabbed and fault-finding, and her good deeds wouldn't fill a book. It may be unsisterly to say it, but she's not going to be missed so dreadfully. Chet and I are certainly not going to pine away."

"And what about the brutal shooting of your other sister?" Markham was with difficulty controlling his indignation.

Sibella's eyelids narrowed perceptibly, and the lines of her face became set. But she erased the expression almost at once.

"Well, Ada's going to recover, isn't she?" Despite her effort, she was unable to keep a certain hardness out of her voice. "She'll have a nice long rest, and a nurse to wait on her. Am I expected to weep copiously because of baby sister's escape?"

Vance, who had been closely watching this clash between Sibella and Markham, now took a hand in the conversation.

"My dear Markham, I can't see what Miss Greene's sentiments have to do with the matter. Her attitude may not be strictly in accord with the prescribed conduct for young ladies on such occasions, but I feel sure she has excellent reasons for her point of view. Let us give over moralizing, and seek Miss Greene's assistance instead."

The girl darted him an amused, appreciative glance; and Markham made a gesture of indifferent acquiescence. It was plain that he regarded the present inquiry as of little importance.

Vance gave the girl an engaging smile.

"It's really my fault, Miss Greene, that we are intruding here," he apologized. "It was I, d'ye see, that urged Mr. Markham to look into the case after your brother had expressed his disbelief in the burglar theory."

She nodded understandingly. "Oh, Chet sometimes has excellent hunches. It's one of his very few merits."

"You, too, I gather, are sceptical in regard to the burglar?"

"Sceptical?" She gave a short laugh. "I'm downright suspicious. I don't know any burglars, though I'd dearly love to meet one; but I simply can't bring my flighty brain to picture them going about their fascinating occupation the way our little entertainer did last night."

"You positively thrill me," declared Vance. "Y' see, our minority ideas coincide perfectly."

"Did Chet give you any intelligible explanation for his opinion?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not. He was inclined to lay his feelings to metaphysical causes. His conviction was due, I took it, to some kind of psychic visitation. He knew, but could not explain: he was sure, but had no proof. It was most indefinite—a bit esoteric, in fact."

"I'd never suspect Chet of spiritualistic leanings." She shot her brother a tantalizing look. "He's really deadly commonplace, when you get to know him."

"Oh, cut it, Sib," objected Chester irritably. "You yourself had a spasm this morning when I told you the police were hot-footing it after a burglar."

Sibella made no answer. With a slight toss of the head she leaned over and threw her cigarette into the grate.

"By the by, Miss Greene"—Vance spoke casually—"there has been considerable mystery about the disappearance of your brother's

revolver. It has completely vanished from his desk drawer. I wonder if you have seen it about the house anywhere."

At his mention of the gun Sibella stiffened slightly. Her eyes took on an expression of intentness, and the corners of her mouth lifted into a faintly ironical smile.

"Chet's revolver has gone, has it?" She put the question colourlessly, as if her thoughts were elsewhere. "No...I haven't seen it." Then, after a momentary pause: "But it was in Chet's desk last week."

Chester heaved himself forward angrily.

"What were you doing in my desk last week?" he demanded.

"Don't wax apoplectic," the girl said carelessly. "I wasn't looking for love missives. I simply couldn't imagine you in love, Chet..." The idea seemed to amuse her. "I was only looking for that old emerald stick-pin you borrowed and never returned."

"It's at the club," he explained sulkily.

"Is it, really! Well, I didn't find it, anyway; but I did see the revolver.—Are you quite sure it's gone?"

"Don't be absurd," the man growled. "I've searched everywhere for it...Including your room," he added vengefully.

"Oh, you would! But why did you admit having it in the first place?" Her tone was scornful. "Why involve yourself unnecessarily?"

Chester shifted uneasily.

"This gentleman"—he again pointed impersonally to Heath—"asked me if I owned a revolver, and I told him 'yes.' If I hadn't, some of the servants or one of my loving family would have told him. And I thought the truth was best."

Sibella smiled satirically.

"My older brother, you observe, is a model of all the old-fashioned virtues," she remarked to Vance. But she was obviously *distracted*. The revolver episode had somewhat shaken her self-assurance.

"You say, Miss Greene, that the burglar idea does not appeal to you." Vance was smoking languidly with half-closed eyes. "Can you think of any other explanation for the tragedy?"

The girl raised her head and regarded him calculatingly.

"Because I don't happen to believe in burglars that shoot women and sneak away without taking anything, it doesn't mean that I can suggest alternatives. I'm not a policewoman—though I've often thought it would be jolly good sport—and I had a vague idea it was the business of the police to run down criminals. You don't believe in the burglar either, Mr. Vance, or you wouldn't have followed up Chet's hunch. Who do you think ran amuck here last night?"

"My dear girl!" Vance raised a protesting hand. "If I had the foggiest idea I wouldn't be annoying you with impertinent questions. I'm plodding with leaden feet in a veritable bog of ignorance."

He spoke negligently, but Sibella's eyes were clouded with suspicion. Presently, however, she laughed gaily and held out her hand.

"Another *Régie, monsieur*. I was on the verge of becoming serious; and I simply mustn't become serious. It's so frightfully boring. Besides, it gives one wrinkles. And I'm much too young for wrinkles."

"Like Ninon de L'Enclos, you'll always be too young for wrinkles," rejoined Vance, holding a match to her cigarette. "But perhaps you can suggest, without becoming too serious, someone who might have had a reason for wanting to kill your two sisters."

"Oh, as for that, I'd say we'd all come under suspicion. We're not an ideal home circle, by any means. In fact, the Greens are a queer collection. We don't love one another the way a perfectly nice and proper family should. We're always at each other's throats, bickering and fighting about something or other. It's rather a mess—this menage. It's a wonder to me murder hasn't been done long before. And we've all got to live here until 1932, or go it on our own; and, of course, none of us could make a decent living. A sweet paternal heritage"[8]

She smoked moodily for a few moments.

"Yes, any one of us had ample reason to be murderously inclined toward all the others. Chet there would strangle me now if he didn't think the nervous aftermath of the act would spoil his golf—wouldn't you, Chet dear? Rex regards us all as inferiors, and probably considers himself highly indulgent and altruistic not to have murdered us all long ago. And the only reason mother hasn't killed us is that she's paralyzed and can't manage it. Julia, too, for that matter, could have seen us all boiled in oil without turning a hair. And as for Ada"—her brows contracted and an extraordinary ferocity crept into her eyes—"she'd dearly love to see us all exterminated. She's not really one of us, and she hates us. Nor would I myself have any scruples about doing away with the rest of my fond family. I've thought of it often, but I could never decide on a nice thorough method." She flicked her cigarette ash on the floor. "So there you are. If you're looking for possibilities you have them galore. There's no one under this ancestral roof who couldn't qualify."

Though her words were meant to be satirical, I could not help feeling that a sombre, terrible truth underlay them. Vance, though apparently listening with amusement, had, I knew, been absorbing every inflection of her voice and play of expression, in an effort to relate the details of her sweeping indictment to the problem in hand.

"At any rate," he remarked off-handedly, "you are an amazingly frank young woman. However, I shan't recommend your arrest just yet. I haven't a particle of evidence against you, don't y' know. Annoyin', ain't it?"

"Oh, well," sighed the girl, in mock disappointment, "you may pick up a clue later on. There'll probably be another death or two around here before long. I'd hate to think the murderer would give up the job with so little really accomplished."

At this point Doctor Von Blon entered the drawing-room. Chester rose to greet him, and the formalities of introduction were quickly over. Von Blon bowed with reserved cordiality; but I noted that his manner to Sibella, while pleasant, was casual in the extreme. I wondered a little about this, but I recalled that he was an old friend of the family and probably took many of the social amenities for granted.

"What have you to report, doctor?" asked Markham. "Will we be able to question the young lady this afternoon?"

"I hardly think there'd be any harm in it," Von Blon returned, seating himself beside Chester. "Ada has only a little reaction fever now, though she's suffering from shock, and is pretty weak from loss of blood."

Doctor Von Blon was a suave, smooth-faced man of forty, with small, almost feminine features and an air of unwavering amiability. His urbanity struck me as too artificial—"professional" is perhaps the word—and there was something of the ambitious egoist about him. But I was far more attracted than repelled by him.

Vance watched him attentively as he spoke. He was more anxious even than Heath, I think, to question the girl.

"It was not a particularly serious wound, then?" Markham asked.

"No, not serious," the doctor assured him; "though it barely missed being fatal. Had the shot gone an inch deeper it would have torn across the lung. It was a very narrow escape."

"As I understand it," interposed Vance, "the bullet travelled transversely over the left scapular region."

Von Blon inclined his head in agreement.

"The shot was obviously aimed at the heart from the rear," he explained, in his soft, modulated voice. "But Ada must have turned slightly to the right just as the revolver exploded; and the bullet, instead of going directly into her body, ploughed along the shoulder-blade at the level of the third dorsal vertebra, tore the capsular ligament, and lodged in the deltoid." He indicated the location of the deltoid on his own left arm.

"She had," suggested Vance, "apparently turned her back on her assailant and attempted to run away; and he had followed her and placed the revolver almost against her back.—Is that your interpretation of it, doctor?"

"Yes, that would seem to be the situation. And, as I said, at the crucial moment she veered a little, and thus saved her life."

"Would she have fallen immediately to the floor, despite the actual superficiality of the wound?"

"It's not unlikely. Not only would the pain have been considerable, but the shock must be taken into account. Ada—or, for that matter, any woman—might have fainted at once."

"And it's a reasonable presumption," pursued Vance, "that her assailant would have taken it for granted that the shot had been fatal?"

"We may readily assume that to be the case."

Vance smoked a moment, his eyes averted.

"Yes," he agreed, "I think we may assume that.—And another point suggests itself. Since Miss Ada was in front of the dressing-table, a considerable distance from the bed, and since the weapon was held practically against her, the encounter would seem to take on the nature of a deliberate attack, rather than a haphazard shot fired by someone in a panic."

Von Blon looked shrewdly at Vance, and then turned a questioning gaze upon Heath. For a moment he was silent, as if weighing his reply, and when he spoke it was with guarded reserve.

"Of course, one might interpret the situation that way. Indeed, the facts would seem to indicate such a conclusion. But, on the other hand, the intruder might have been very close to Ada; and the fact that the bullet entered her left shoulder at a particularly vital point may have been the purest accident."

"Quite true," conceded Vance. "However, if the idea of premeditation is to be abrogated, we must account for the fact that the lights were on in the room when the butler entered immediately after the shooting."

Von Blon showed the keenest astonishment at this statement.

"The lights were on? That's most remarkable!" His brow crinkled into a perplexed frown, and he appeared to be assimilating Vance's information. "Still," he argued, "that very fact may account for the shooting. If the intruder had entered a lighted room he may have fired at the occupant lest his description be given to the police later."

"Oh, quite!" murmured Vance. "Anyway, let us hope we'll learn the explanation when we've seen and spoken to Miss Ada."

"Well, why don't we get to it?" grumbled Heath, whose ordinarily inexhaustible store of patience had begun to run low.

"You're so hasty, Sergeant," Vance chided him. "Doctor Von Blon has just told us that Miss Ada is very weak; and anything we can learn beforehand will spare her just so many questions."

"All I want to find out," expostulated Heath, "is if she got a look at the bird that shot her and can give me a description of him."

"That being the case, Sergeant, I fear you are doomed to have your ardent hopes dashed to the ground."

Heath chewed viciously on his cigar; and Vance turned again to Von Blon.

"There's one other question I'd like to ask, doctor. How long was it after Miss Ada had been wounded before you examined her?"

"The butler's already told us, Mr. Vance," interposed Heath impatiently. "The doctor got here in half an hour."

"Yes, that's about right." Von Blon's tone was smooth and matter-of-fact. "I was unfortunately out on a call when Sproot phoned, but I returned about fifteen minutes later, and hurried right over. Luckily I live near here in East 48th Street."

"And was Miss Ada still unconscious when you arrived?"

"Yes. She had lost considerable blood. The cook, however, had put a towel-compress on the wound, which of course helped."

Vance thanked him and rose.

"And now, if you'll be good enough to take us to your patient, we'll be very grateful."

"As little excitement as possible, you understand," admonished Von Blon, as he got up and led the way upstairs.

Sibella and Chester seemed undecided about accompanying us; but as I turned into the hall I saw a look of interrogation flash between them, and a moment later they too joined us in the upper hall.

## 6. AN ACCUSATION

(Tuesday, November 9th; 4 p.m.)

ADA GREENE'S room was simply, almost severely, furnished; but there was a neatness about it, combined with little touches of feminine decoration, that reflected the care its occupant had bestowed upon it. To the left, near the door that led into the dressing-room communicating with Mrs. Greene's chamber, was a single mahogany bed of simple design; and beyond it was the door that opened upon the stone balcony. To the right, beside the window, stood the dressing-table; and on the amber-coloured Chinese rug before it there showed a large irregular brown stain where the wounded girl had lain. In the centre of the right wall was an old Tudor fire-place with a high oak-panelled mantel.

As we entered, the girl in the bed looked at us inquisitively, and a slight flush coloured her pale cheeks. She lay on her right side, facing the door, her bandaged shoulder supported by pillows, and her left hand, slim and white, resting upon the blue-figured coverlet. A remnant of her fear of the night before seemed still to linger in her blue eyes.

Doctor Von Blon went to her and, sitting down on the edge of the bed, placed his hand on hers. His manner was at once protective and impersonal.

"These gentlemen want to ask you a few questions, Ada," he explained, with a reassuring smile; "and as you were so much stronger this afternoon I brought them up. Do you feel equal to it?"

She nodded her head wearily, her eyes on the doctor.

Vance, who had paused by the mantel to inspect the hand-carving of the quadrae, now turned and approached the bed.

"Sergeant," he said, "if you don't mind, let me talk to Miss Greene first."

Heath realized, I think, that the situation called for tact and delicacy; and it was typical of the man's fundamental bigness that he at once stepped aside.

"Miss Greene," said Vance, in a quiet, genial voice, drawing up a small chair beside the bed, "we're very anxious to clear up the mystery about last night's tragedy; and, as you are the only person who is in a position to help us, we want you to recall for us, as nearly as you can, just what happened."

The girl took a deep breath.

"It—it was awful," she said weakly, looking straight ahead. "After I had gone to sleep—I don't know just what time—something woke me up. I can't tell you what it was; but all of a sudden I was wide awake, and the strangest feeling came over me..." She closed her eyes, and an involuntary shudder swept her body. "It was as though someone were in the room, threatening me..." Her voice faded away into an awed silence.

"Was the room dark?" Vance asked gently.

"Pitch-dark." Slowly she turned her eyes to him. "That's why I was so frightened. I couldn't see anything, and I imagined there was a ghost—or evil spirit—near me. I tried to call out, but I couldn't make a sound. My throat felt dry and—and stiff."

"Typical constriction due to fright, Ada," explained Von Blon. "Many people can't speak when they're frightened.—Then what happened?"

"I lay trembling for a few minutes, but not a sound came from anywhere in the room. Yet I knew—I *knew*—somebody, or something, that meant to harm me was here...At last I forced myself to get up—very quietly. I wanted to turn on the lights—the darkness frightened me so. And after a while I was standing up beside the bed here. Then, for the first time, I could see the dim light of the windows; and it made things seem more real somehow. So I began to grope my way toward the electric switch there by the door. I had only gone a little way when ...a hand ...touched me..."

Her lips were trembling, and a look of horror came into her wide-open eyes.

"I—I was so stunned," she struggled on, "I hardly know what I did. Again I tried to scream, but I couldn't even open my lips. And then I turned and ran away from the—the thing—toward the window. I had almost reached it when I heard someone coming after me—a queer, shuffling sound—and I knew it was the end...There was an awful noise, and something hot struck the back of my shoulder. I was suddenly nauseated; the light of the window disappeared, and I felt myself sinking down-deep..."

When she ceased speaking a tense silence fell on the room. Her account, for all its simplicity, had been tremendously graphic. Like a great actress she had managed to convey to her listeners the very emotional essence of her story.

Vance waited several moments before speaking.

"It was a frightful experience!" he murmured sympathetically. "I wish it wasn't necessary to worry you about details, but there are several points I'd like to go over with you."

She smiled faintly in appreciation of his considerateness, and waited.

"If you tried hard, do you think you could recall what awakened you?" he asked.

"No—there wasn't any sound that I can remember."

"Did you leave your door unlocked last night?"

"I think so. I don't generally lock it."

"And you heard no door open or close—anywhere?"

"No; none. Everything in the house was perfectly still."

"And yet you knew that someone was in the room. How, was that?" Vance's voice, though gentle, was persistent.

"I—don't know ...and yet there must have been something that told me."

"Exactly! Now try to think." Vance bent a little nearer to the troubled girl. "A soft breathing, perhaps—a slight gust of air as the person moved by your bed—a faint odour of perfume..."

She frowned painfully, as if trying to recall the elusive cause of her dread.

"I can't think—I can't remember." Her voice was scarcely audible. "I was so terribly frightened."

"If only we could trace the source!" Vance glanced at the doctor, who nodded understandingly, and said:

"Obviously some association whose stimulus went unrecognized."

"Did you feel, Miss Greene, that you knew the person who was here?" continued Vance. "That is to say, was it a familiar presence?"

"I don't know exactly. I only know I was afraid of it."

"But you heard it move toward you after you had risen and fled toward the window. Was there any familiarity in the sound?"

"No!" For the first time she spoke with emphasis. "It was just footsteps— soft, sliding footsteps."

"Of course, anyone might have walked that way in the dark, or a person in bedroom slippers..."

"It was only a few steps—and then came the awful noise and burning."

Vance waited a moment.

"Try very hard to recall those steps—or rather your impression of them. Would you say they were the steps of a man or a woman?"

An added pallor overspread the girl's face; and her frightened eyes ran over all the occupants of the room.

Her breathing, I noticed, had quickened; and twice she parted her lips as if to speak, but checked herself each time. At last she said in a low tremulous voice:

"I don't know—I haven't the slightest idea."

A short, high-strung laugh, bitter and sneering, burst from Sibella; and all eyes were turned in amazed attention in her direction. She stood rigidly at the foot of the bed, her face flushed, her hands tightly clenched at her side.

"Why don't you tell them you recognized my footsteps?" she demanded of her sister in biting tones. "You had every intention of doing so. Haven't you got courage enough left to lie—you sobbing little cat?"

Ada caught her breath and seemed to draw herself nearer to the doctor, who gave Sibella a stern, admonitory look.

"Oh, I say, Sib! Hold your tongue." It was Chester who broke the startled silence that followed the outbreak.

Sibella shrugged her shoulders and walked to the window; and Vance again turned his attention to the girl on the bed, continuing his questioning as if nothing had happened.

"There's one more point, Miss Greene." His tone was even gentler than before. "When you groped your way across the room toward the switch, at what point did you come in contact with the unseen person?"

"About half-way to the door—just beyond that centre-table."

"You say a hand touched you. But how did it touch you? Did it shove you, or try to take hold of you?" She shook her head vaguely.

"Not exactly. I don't know how to explain it, but I seemed to walk into the hand, as though it were outstretched—reaching for me."

"Would you say it was a large hand or a small one? Did you, for instance, get the impression of strength?"

There was another silence. Again the girl's respiration quickened, and she cast a frightened glance at Sibella, who stood staring out into the black, swinging branches of the trees in the side yard.

"I don't know—oh, I don't know!" Her words were like a stifled cry of anguish. "I didn't notice. It was all so sudden—so horrible."

"But try to think," urged Vance's low, insistent voice. "Surely you got some impression. Was it a man's hand, or a woman's?"

Sibella now came swiftly to the bed, her cheeks very pale, her eyes blazing. For a moment she glared at the stricken girl; then she turned resolutely to Vance.

"You asked me downstairs if I had any idea as to who might have done the shooting. I didn't answer you then, but I'll answer you now. I'll tell you who's guilty!" She jerked her head toward the bed, and pointed a quivering finger at the still figure lying there. "There's the guilty one—that snivelling little outsider, that sweet angelic little snake in the grass!"

So incredible, so unexpected, was this accusation that for a time no one in the room spoke. A groan burst from Ada's lips, and she clutched at the doctor's hand with a spasmodic movement of despair.

"Oh, Sibella—how could you!" she breathed.

Von Blon had stiffened, and an angry light came into his eyes. But before he could speak Sibella was rushing on with her illogical, astounding indictment.

"Oh, she's the one who did it! And she's deceiving you just as she's always tried to deceive the rest of us. She hates us—she's hated us ever since father brought her into this house. She resents us—the things we have, the very blood in our veins. Heaven knows what blood's in hers. She hates us because she isn't our equal. She'd gladly see us all murdered. She killed Julia first, because Julia ran the house and saw to it that she did something to earn her livelihood. She despises us; and she planned to get rid of us."

The girl on the bed looked piteously from one to the other of us. There was no resentment in her eyes; she appeared stunned and unbelieving, as if she doubted the reality of what she had heard.

"Most interestin'," drawled Vance. It was his ironic tone, more than the words themselves, that focused all eyes on him. He had been watching Sibella during her tirade, and his gaze was still on her.

"You seriously accuse your sister of doing the shooting?" He spoke now in a pleasant, almost friendly, voice.

"I do!" she declared brazenly. "She hates us all."

"As far as that goes," smiled Vance, "I haven't noticed a superabundance of love and affection in any of the Greene family." His tone was without offence. "And do you base your accusation on anything specific, Miss Greene?"

Isn't it specific enough that she wants us all out of the way, that she thinks she would have everything—ease, luxury, freedom—if there wasn't anyone else to inherit the Greene money?"

"Hardly specific enough to warrant a direct accusation of so heinous a character.—And by the by, Miss Greene, just how would you explain the method of the crime if called as a witness in a court of law? You couldn't altogether ignore the fact that Miss Ada herself was shot in the back, don't y' know?"

For the first time the sheer impossibility of the accusation seemed to strike Sibella. She became sullen; and her mouth settled into a contour of angry bafflement.

"As I told you once before, I'm not a policewoman," she retorted. "Crime isn't *my* speciality."

"Nor logic either apparently." A whimsical note crept into Vance's voice. "But perhaps I misinterpret your accusation. Did you mean



to imply that Miss Ada shot your sister Julia, and that someone else—party or parties unknown, I believe the phrase is—shot Miss Ada immediately afterward—in a spirit of vengeance, perhaps? A crime *à quatre mains*, so to speak?"

Sibella's confusion was obvious, but her stubborn wrath had in no wise abated.

"Well, if that was the way it happened," she countered malevolently, "it's a rotten shame they didn't do the job better."

"The blunder may at least prove unfortunate for somebody," suggested Vance pointedly. "Still, I hardly think we can seriously entertain the double-culprit theory. Both of your sisters, d'ye see, were shot with the same gun—a .32 revolver—within a few minutes of each other. I'm afraid that we'll have to be content with one guilty person."

Sibella's manner suddenly became sly and calculating. "What kind of a gun was yours, Chet?" she asked her brother.

"Oh, it was a .32, all right—an old Smith and Wesson revolver." Chester was painfully ill at ease.

"Was it, indeed? Well, that's that." She turned her back on us and went again to the window.

The tension in the room slackened, and Von Blon leaned solicitously over the wounded girl and rearranged the pillows.

"Everyone's upset, Ada," he said soothingly. "You mustn't worry about what's happened. Sibella'll be sorry to-morrow and make amends. This affair has got on everybody's nerves."

The girl gave him a grateful glance, and seemed to relax under his ministrations.

After a moment he straightened up and looked at Markham.

"I hope you gentlemen are through—for to-day, at least."

Both Vance and Markham had risen, and Heath and I had followed suit; but at that moment Sibella strode toward us again.

"Wait!" she commanded imperiously. "I've just thought of something. Chet's revolver! I know where it went.—*She* took it." Again she pointed accusingly at Ada. "I saw her in Chet's room the other day, and I wondered then why she was snooping about there." She gave Vance a triumphant leer. That's specific, isn't it?"

"What day was this, Miss Greene?" As before, his calmness seemed to counteract the effect of her venom.

"What day? I don't remember exactly. Last week some time."

"The day you were looking for your emerald pin, perhaps?"

Sibella hesitated; then said angrily: "I don't recall. Why should I remember the exact time? All I know is that, as I was passing down the hall, I glanced into Chet's room—the door was half open—and I saw her in there ...by the desk."

"And was it unusual to see Miss Ada in your brother's room?" Vance spoke without any particular interest.

"She never goes into any of our rooms," declared Sibella. "Except Rex's, sometimes. Julia told her long ago to keep out of them."

Ada gave her sister a look of infinite entreaty.

"Oh, Sibella," she moaned; "what have I ever done to make you dislike me so?"

"What have you done!" The other's voice was harsh and strident, and a look almost demoniacal smouldered in her levelled eyes. "Everything! Nothing! Oh, you're clever—with your quiet, sneaky ways, and your patient, hang-dog look, and your goody-goody manner. But you don't pull the wool over *my* eyes. You've been hating all of us ever since you came here. And you've been waiting for the chance to kill us, planning and scheming—you vile little—"

"Sibella!" It was Von Blon's voice that, like the lash of a whip, cut in on this unreasoned tirade. "That will be enough!" He moved forward, and glanced menacingly into the girl's eyes. I was almost as astonished at his attitude as I had been at her wild words. There was a curious intimacy in his manner—an implication of familiarity which struck me as unusual even for a family physician of his long and friendly standing. Vance noticed it too, for his eyebrows went up slightly and he watched the scene with intense interest.

"You've become hysterical," Von Blon said, without lowering his minatory gaze. "You don't realize what you've been saying."

I felt he would have expressed himself far more forcibly if strangers had not been present. But his words had their effect. Sibella dropped her eyes, and a sudden change came over her. She covered her face with her hands, and her whole body shook with sobs.

"I'm—sorry. I was mad—and silly—to say such things."

"You'd better take Sibella to her room, Chester." Von Blon had resumed his professional tone. "This business has been too much for her."

The girl turned without another word and went out, followed by Chester.

"These modern women—all nerves," Von Blon commented laconically. Then he placed his hand on Ada's forehead. "Now, young lady, I'm going to give you something to make you sleep after all this excitement."

He had scarcely opened his medicine-case to prepare the draught when a shrill, complaining voice drifted clearly to us from the next room; and for the first time I noticed that the door of the little dressing-room which communicated with Mrs. Greene's quarters was slightly ajar.

"What's all the trouble now? Hasn't there been enough disturbance already without these noisy scenes in my very ear? But it doesn't matter, of course, how much *I* suffer...Nurse! Shut those doors into Ada's room. You had no business to leave them open when you knew I was trying to get a little rest. You did it on purpose to annoy me...And, nurse! Tell the doctor I must see him before he goes. I have those stabbing pains in my spine again. But who thinks about me, lying here paralyzed—?"

The doors were closed softly, and the fretful voice was cut off from us.

"She could have had the doors closed a long time ago if she'd really wanted them closed," said Ada wearily, a look of distress on her drawn white face. "Why, Doctor Von, does she always pretend that everyone deliberately makes her suffer?"

Von Blon sighed. "I've told you, Ada, that you mustn't take your mother's tantrums too seriously. Her irritability and complaining are part of her disease."

We bade the girl good-bye, and the doctor walked with us into the hall.

"I'm afraid you didn't learn much," he remarked, almost apologetically. "It's most unfortunate Ada didn't get a look at her assailant." He addressed himself to Heath. "Did you, by the way, look in the dining-room wall-safe to make sure nothing was missing? You know, there's one there behind the big niello over the mantel."

"One of the first places we inspected." The sergeant's voice was a bit disdainful. "And that reminds me, doc: I want to send a man up in the morning to look for finger-prints in Miss Ada's room."

Von Blon agreed amiably, and held out his hand to Markham.

"And if there's any way I can be of service to you or the police," he added pleasantly, "please call on me. I'll be only too glad to help. I don't see just what I can do, but one never knows."

Markham thanked him, and we descended to the lower hall. Sproot was waiting to help us with our coats, and a moment later we were in the District Attorney's car ploughing our way through the snowdrifts.

## 7. VANCE ARGUES THE CASE

(Tuesday, November 9th; 5 p.m.)

IT was nearly five o'clock when we reached the Criminal Courts Building. Swacker had lit the old bronze-and-china chandelier of Markham's private office, and an atmosphere of eerie gloom pervaded the room.

"Not a nice family, Markham, old dear," sighed Vance, lying back in one of the deep leather-upholstered chairs. "Decidedly not a nice family. A family run to seed, its old vigour vitiated. If the heredit'ry sires of the contempor'ry Greenes could rise from their sepulchres and look in upon their present progeny, my word! what a jolly good shock they'd have!...Funny thing how these old families degenerate under the environment of ease and idleness. There are the Wittelsbachs, and the Romanoffs, and the Julian-Claudian house, and the Abbasside dynasty—all examples of phyletic disintegration...And it's the same with nations, don't y' know. Luxury and unrestrained indulgence are corruptin' influences. Look at Rome under the soldier emperors, and Assyria under Sardanapalus, and Egypt under the later Ramessids, and the Vandal African empire under Gelimer. It's very distressin'."

"Your erudite observations might be highly absorbing to the social historian," grumbled Markham, with an undisguised show of irritability; "but I can't say they're particularly edifying, or even relevant, in the present circumstances."

"I wouldn't be too positive on that point," Vance returned easily. "In fact, I submit, for your earnest and profound consideration, the temperaments and internal relationships of the Greene clan, as pointers upon the dark road of the present investigation...Really, y' know"—he assumed a humoursome tone—"it's most unfortunate that you and the sergeant are so obsessed with the idea of social justice and that sort of thing; for society would be much better off if such families as the Greenes were exterminated. Still, it's a fascinat' problem—most fascinat'."

"I regret I can't share your enthusiasm for it," Markham spoke with asperity. "The crime strikes me as sordid and commonplace. And if it hadn't been for your interference I'd have sent Chester Greene on his way this morning with some tactful platitudes. But you had to intercede, with your cryptic innuendoes and mysterious head-waggings; and I foolishly let myself be drawn into it. Well, I trust you had an enjoyable afternoon. As for myself, I have three hours' accumulated work before me."

His complaint was an obvious suggestion that we take ourselves off; but Vance showed no intention of going.

"Oh, I shan't depart just yet," he announced, with a bantering smile. "I couldn't bring myself to leave you in your present state of grievous error. You need guidance, Markham; and I've quite made up my mind to pour out my flutterin' heart to you and the sergeant."

Markham frowned. He understood Vance so well that he knew the other's levity was only superficial—that, indeed, it cloaked some particularly serious purpose. And the experience of a long, intimate friendship had taught him that Vance's actions—however unreasonable they might appear—were never the result of an idle whim.

"Very well," he acquiesced. "But I'd be grateful for an economy of words."

Vance sighed mournfully.

"Your attitude is so typical of the spirit of breathless speed existing in this restless day." He fixed an inquisitive gaze on Heath. "Tell me, Sergeant: you saw the body of Julia Greene, didn't you?"

"Sure, I saw it."

"Was her position in the bed a natural one?"

"How do I know how she generally laid in bed?" Heath was restive and in bad humour. "She was half sitting up, with a couple pillows under her shoulders, and the covers pulled up."

"Nothing unusual about her attitude?"

"Not that I could see. There hadn't been a struggle, if that's what you mean."

"And her hands: were they outside or under the covers?"

Heath looked up, mildly astonished.

"They were outside. And, now that you mention it, they had a tight hold on the spread."

Clutching it, in fact?"

"Well, yes."

Vance leaned forward quickly.

"And her face, Sergeant? Had she been shot in her sleep?"

"It didn't look that way. Her eyes were wide open, staring straight ahead."

"Her eyes were open and staring," repeated Vance, a note of eagerness coming into his voice. "What would you say her expression indicated? Fear? Horror? Surprise?"

Heath regarded Vance shrewdly. "Well, it mighta been any one of 'em. Her mouth was open, like as if she was surprised at something."

"And she was clutching the spread with both hands." Vance's look drifted into space. Then slowly he rose and walked the length of the office and back, his head down. He halted in front of the District Attorney's desk, and leaned over, resting both hands on the back of a chair.

"Listen, Markham. There's something terrible and unthinkable going on in that house. No haphazard unknown assassin came in by the front door last night and shot down those two women. The crime was planned—thought out. Someone lay in wait—someone who knew his way about, knew where the light-switches were, knew when everyone was asleep, knew when the servants had retired—knew just when and how to strike the blow. Some deep, awful motive lies behind that crime. There are depths beneath depths in what happened last night—obscure fetid chambers of the human soul. Black hatreds, unnatural desires, hideous impulses, obscene ambitions are at the bottom of it; and you are only playing into the murderer's hands when you sit back and refuse to see its significance."

His voice had a curious hushed quality, and it was difficult to believe that this was the habitually debonair and cynical Vance.

"That house is polluted, Markham. It's crumbling in decay—not material decay, perhaps, but a putrefaction far more terrible. The very heart and essence of that old house is rotting away. And all the inmates are rotting with it, disintegrating in spirit and mind and character. They've been polluted by the very atmosphere they've created. This crime, which you take so lightly, was inevitable in such a setting. I only wonder it was not more terrible, more vile. It marked one of the tertiary stages of the general dissolution of that abnormal establishment."

He paused, and extended his hand in a hopeless gesture.

"Think of the situation. That old, lonely, spacious house, exuding the musty atmosphere of dead generations, faded inside and out, run down, dingy, filled with ghosts of another day, standing there in its ill-kept grounds, lapped by the dirty waters of the river...And then think of those six ill-sorted, restless, unhealthy beings compelled to live there in daily contact for a quarter of a century—such was old Tobias Greene's perverted idealism. And they've lived there, day in and day out, in that mouldy miasma of antiquity-unfit to meet the conditions of any alternative, too weak or too cowardly to strike out alone; held by an undermining security and a corrupting ease; growing to hate the very sight of one another, becoming bitter, spiteful, jealous, vicious; wearing down each other's nerves to the raw; consumed with resentment, aflame with hate, thinking evil—complaining, fighting, snarling. ...Then, at last, the breaking point—the logical, ineluctable figuration of all this self-feeding, ingrowing hatred."

"All of that is easy to understand," agreed Markham. "But, after all, your conclusion is wholly theoretic, not to say literary.—By what tangible links do you connect last night's shooting with the admittedly abnormal situation at the Greene mansion?"

"There are no tangible links—that's the horror of it. But the joinders are there, however shadowy. I began to sense them the minute I entered the house; and all this afternoon I was reaching for them blindly. But they eluded me at every turn. It was like a house of mazes and false passages and trap-doors and reeking oubliettes: nothing normal, nothing sane—a house in a nightmare, peopled by strange, abnormal creatures, each reflecting the subtle, monstrous horror that broke forth last night and went prowling about the old hallways. Didn't you sense it? Didn't you see the vague shape of this abomination continually flash out and disappear as we talked to these people and watched them battling against their own hideous thoughts and suspicions?"

Markham moved uneasily and straightened a pile of papers before him. Vance's unwonted gravity had affected him.

"I understand perfectly what you mean," he said. "But I don't see that your impressions bring us any nearer to a new theory of the crime. The Greene mansion is unhealthy—that's granted—and so, no doubt, are the people in it. But I'm afraid you've been oversusceptible to its atmosphere. You talk as if last night's crime were comparable to the poisoning orgies of the Borgias, or the Marquise de Brinvilliers affair, or the murder of Drusus and Germanicus, or the suffocation of the York princes in the Tower. I'll admit the setting is consonant with that sort of stealthy, romantic crime; but, after all, housebreakers and bandits are shooting people senselessly every week throughout the country, in very much the same way the two Greene women were shot."

"You're shutting your eyes to the facts, Markham," Vance declared earnestly. "You're overlooking several strange features of last night's crime—the horrified, astounded attitude of Julia at the moment of death; the illogical interval between the two shots; the fact that the lights were on in both rooms; Ada's story of that hand reaching for her; the absence of any signs of a forced entry—"

"What about those footprints in the snow?" interrupted Heath's matter-of-fact voice.

"What about them, indeed?" Vance wheeled about. "They're as incomprehensible as the rest of this hideous business. Someone walked to and from the house within a half-hour of the crime; but it was someone who knew he could get in quietly and without disturbing anyone."

"There's nothing mysterious about that," asserted the practical sergeant. "There are four servants in the house, and any one of 'em could've been in on the job."

Vance smiled ironically.

"And this accomplice in the house, who so generously opened the front door at a specified hour, failed to inform the intruder where the loot was, and omitted to acquaint him with the arrangement of the house; with the result that, once he was inside, he went astray, overlooked the dining-room, wandered upstairs, went groping about the hall, got lost in the various bedrooms, had a seizure of panic, shot two women, turned on the lights by switches hidden behind the furniture, made his way downstairs without a sound when Sproot was within a few feet of him, and walked out the front door to freedom!...A strange burglar, Sergeant. And an even stranger inside accomplice.—No; your explanation won't do—decidedly it won't do." He turned back to Markham.

"And the only way you'll ever find the true explanation for those shootings is by understanding the unnatural situation that exists in the house itself."

"But we know the situation, Vance," Markham argued patiently. "I'll admit it's an unusual one. But it's not necessarily criminal. Antagonistic human elements are often thrown together; and a mutual hate is generated as a result. But mere hate is rarely a motive for murder; and it certainly does not constitute evidence of criminal activity."

"Perhaps not. But hatred and enforced propinquity may breed all manner of abnormalities—outrageous passions, abominable evils, devilish intrigues. And in the present case there are any number of curious and sinister facts that need explaining—"

"Ah! Now you're becoming more tangible. Just what are these facts that call for explanation?"

Vance lit a cigarette and sat down on the edge of the table.

"For instance, why did Chester Greene come here in the first place and solicit your help? Because of the disappearance of the gun? Maybe; but I doubt if it is the whole explanation. And what about the gun itself? Did it disappear? Or did Chester secrete it? Deuced queer about the gun. And Sibella said she saw it last week. But did she see it? We'll know a lot more about the case when we can trace the peregrinations of that revolver.—And why did Chester hear the first shot so readily, when Rex, in the next room to Ada's, says he failed to hear the second shot?—And that long interval between the two reports will need some explaining.—And there's Sproot—the multilingual butler who happened to be reading Martial—Martial, by all that's holy!—when the grim business took place, and came directly to the scene without meeting or hearing anyone.—And just what significance attaches to the pious Hemming's oracular pronouncements about the Lord of hosts smiting the Greenes as He did the children of Babylon? She has some obscure religious notion in her head—which, after all, may not be so obscure.—And the German cook: there's a woman with, as we euphemistically say, a past. Despite her phlegmatic appearance, she's not of the servant class; yet she's been feeding the Greenes dutifully for over a dozen years.

You recall her explanation of how she came to the Greenes? Her husband was a friend of old Tobias's; and Tobias gave orders she was to remain as cook as long as she desired. She needs explaining, Markham—and a dashed lot of it.—And Rex, with his projecting parietals and his wambly body and his periodic fits. Why did he get so excited when we questioned him? He certainly didn't act like an innocent and uncomprehending spectator of an attempted burglary.—And again I mention the lights. Who turned them on, and why? And in both rooms! In Julia's room *before* the shot was fired, for she evidently saw the assassin and understood his purpose; and in Ada's room, *after* the shooting! Those are facts which fairly shriek for explanation; for without an explanation they're mad, irrational, utterly incredible.—And why wasn't Von Blon at home in the middle of the night when Sproot phoned him? And how did it happen he nevertheless arrived so promptly? Coincidence? ...And, by the by, Sergeant: was that double set of footprints like the single spoor of the doctor's?"

"There wasn't any way of telling. The snow was too flaky."

"They probably don't matter particularly, anyhow." Vance again faced Markham and resumed his recapitulation. "And then there are the points of difference in these two attacks. Julia was shot from the front when she was in bed, whereas Ada was shot in the back after she had risen from bed, although the murderer had ample time to go to her and take aim while she was still lying down. Why did he wait silently until the girl got up and approached him? How did he dare wait at all after he had killed Julia and alarmed the house? Does that strike you as panic? Or as cool-headedness?—And how did Julia's door come to be unlocked at that particular time? That's something I especially want clarified.—And perhaps you noticed, Markham, that Chester himself went to summon Sibella to the interview in the drawing-room, and that he remained with her a considerable time. Why, now, did he send Sproot for Rex, and fetch Sibella personally? And why the delay? I yearn for an explanation of what passed between them before they eventually appeared.—And why was Sibella so definite that there wasn't a burglar, and yet so evasive when we asked her to suggest a counter-theory? What underlay her satirical frankness when she held up each member of the Greene household, including herself, as a possible suspect?—And then there are the details of Ada's story. Some of them are amazing, incomprehensible, almost fabulous. There was no apparent sound in the room; yet she was conscious of a menacing presence. And that outstretched hand and the shuffling footsteps—we simply must have an explanation of those things. And her hesitancy about saying whether she thought it was a man or a woman; and Sibella's evident belief that the girl thought it was she. That wants explaining, Markham.—And Sibella's hysterical accusation against Ada. What lay behind that?—And don't forget that curious scene between Sibella and Von Blon when he reproached her for her outburst. That was devilish odd. There's some intimacy there—*ca saute aux yeux*. You noticed how she obeyed him. And you doubtless observed, too, that Ada is rather fond of the doctor: snuggled up to him figuratively during the performance, opened her eyes on him wistfully, looked to him for protection. Oh, our little Ada has flutterings in his direction. And yet he adopts the hovering professional bedside manner of a high-priced medico toward her, whereas he treats Sibella very much as Chester might if he had the courage."

Vance inhaled deeply on his cigarette.

"Yes, Markham, there are many things that must be satisfactorily accounted for before I can believe in your hypothetical burglar."

Markham sat for a while, engrossed in his thoughts.

"I've listened to your Homeric catalogue, Vance," he said at length, "but I can't say that it inflames me. You've suggested a number of interesting possibilities, and raised several points that might bear looking into. However, the only potential weight of your argument lies in an accumulation of items which, taken separately, are not particularly impressive. A plausible answer might be found for each one of them. The trouble is, the integers of your summary are without a connecting thread, and consequently must be regarded as separate units."

"That legal mind of yours!" Vance rose and paced up and down. "An accumulation of queer and unexplained facts centring about a crime is no more impressive than each separate item in the total! Well, well! I give up. I renounce all reason. I fold up my tent like the Arabs and as silently steal away." He took up his coat. "I leave you to your fantastic, delirious burglar, who walks without keys into a house and steals nothing, who knows where electric switches are hidden but can't find a staircase, who shoots women and then turns up the lights. When you find him, my dear Lycurgus, you should, in all humaneness, send him to the psychopathic ward. He's quite unaccountable, I assure you."

Markham, despite his opposition, had not been unimpressed. Vance unquestionably had undermined to some extent his belief in a housebreaker. But I could readily understand why he was reluctant to abandon this theory until it had been thoroughly tested. His next words, in fact, explained his attitude.

"I'm not denying the remote possibility that this affair may go deeper than appears. But there's too little to go on at present to warrant an investigation along other than routine lines. We can't very well stir up an ungodly scandal by raking the members of a prominent family over the coals, when there's not a scintilla of evidence against any one of them. It's too unjust and dangerous a proceeding. We must at least wait until the police have finished their investigation. Then, if nothing develops, we can again take inventory and decide how to proceed...How long, Sergeant, do you figure on being busy?"

Heath took his cigar from his mouth and regarded it thoughtfully.

"That's hard to say, sir. Dubois'll finish up his fingerprinting to-morrow, and we're checking up on the regulars as fast as we can. Also, I've got two men digging up the records of the Greene servants. It may take a lot of time, and it may go quick. Depends on the breaks we get."

Vance sighed.

"And it was such a neat, fascinatin' crime! I've rather been looking forward to it, don't y' know, and now you talk of prying into the early amours of serving-maids and that sort of thing. It's most disheartenin'."

He buttoned his ulster about him and walked to the door.

"Ah, well, there's nothing for me to do while you Jasons are launched on your quaint quest. I think I'll retire and resume my translation of Delacroix's 'Journal.'"

But Vance was not destined then to finish his task he had had in mind so long. Three days later the front pages of the country's press carried glaring headlines telling of a second grim and unaccountable tragedy at the old Greene mansion, which altered the entire character of the case and immediately lifted it into the realm of the foremost *causes célèbres* of modern times. After this second blow had fallen all ideas of a casual burglar were banished. There could no longer be any doubt that a hidden death-dealing horror stalked through the dim corridors of that fated house.

## 8. THE SECOND TRAGEDY

(Friday, November 12th; 8 a.m.)

THE day after we had taken leave of Markham at his office the rigour of the weather suddenly relaxed. The sun came out, and the thermometer rose nearly thirty degrees. Toward night of the second day, however, a fine, damp snow began to fall, spreading a thin white blanket over the city; but around eleven the skies were again clear.

I mention these facts because they had a curious bearing on the second crime at the Greene mansion. Footprints again appeared on the front walk; and, as a result of the clinging softness of the snow, the police also found tracks in the lower hall and on the marble stairs.

Vance had spent Wednesday and Thursday in his library reading desultorily and checking Vollard's catalogue of Cezanne's water-colours. The three-volume edition of the "Journal de Eugène Delacroix"[9] lay on his writing-table; but I noticed that he did not so much as open it. He was restless and distracted, and his long silences at dinner (which we ate together in the living-room before the great log fire) told me only too clearly that something was perturbing him. Moreover, he had sent notes cancelling several social engagements, and had given orders to Currie, his valet and domestic factotum, that he was "out" to callers.

As he sat sipping his cognac at the end of dinner on Thursday night, his eyes idly tracing the forms in the Renoir *Beigneuse* above the mantel, he gave voice to his thoughts.

"Pon my word, Van, I can't shake the atmosphere of that damnable house. Markham is probably right in refusing to take the matter seriously—one can't very well chivvy a bereaved family simply because I'm oversensitive. And yet"—he shook himself slightly—"it's most annoyin'. Maybe I'm becoming weak and emotional. What if I should suddenly go in for Whistlers and Bocklins! Could you endure it? *Miserere nostri!* ...No, it won't come to that. But—dash it all!—that Greene murder is haunting my slumbers like a lamia. And the business isn't over yet. There's a horrible incompleteness about what's already occurred..."

It was scarcely eight o'clock on the following morning when Markham brought us the news of the second Greene tragedy. I had risen early, and was having my coffee in the library when Markham came in, brushing past the astonished Currie with only a curt nod.

"Get Vance out right away—will you, Van Dine?" he began, without even a word of greeting. "Something serious has happened."

I hastened to fetch Vance, who grumblingly slipped into a camel's-hair dressing-gown and came leisurely into the library.

"My dear Markham!" he reproached the District Attorney. "Why pay your social calls in the middle of the night?"

"This isn't a social call," Markham told him tartly. "Chester Greene has been murdered."

"Ah!" Vance rang for Currie and lighted a cigarette. "Coffee for two and clothes for one," he ordered, when the man appeared. Then he sank into a chair before the fire and gave Markham a waggish look. "That same unique burglar, I suppose. A perseverin' lad. Did the family plate disappear this time?"

Markham gave a mirthless laugh.

"No, the plate's intact; and I think we can now eliminate the burglar theory. I'm afraid your premonitions were correct—damn your uncanny faculty!"

"Pour out your heart-breakin' story." Vance, for all his levity, was extraordinarily interested. His moodiness of the past two days had given way to an almost eager alertness.

"It was Sproot who phoned the news to Head-quarters a little before midnight. The operator in the Homicide Bureau caught Heath at home, and the sergeant was at the Greene house inside of half an hour. He's there now—phoned me at seven this morning. I told him I'd hurry out, so I didn't get many details over the wire. All I know is that Chester Greene was fatally shot last night at almost the exact hour that the former shootings occurred—a little after half-past eleven."

"Was he in his own room at the time?" Vance was pouring the coffee which Currie had brought in.

"I believe Heath did mention he was found in his bedroom."

"Shot from the front?"

"Yes, through the heart, at very close range."

"Very interestin'. A duplication of Julia's death, as it were." Vance became reflective. "So the old house has claimed another victim. But why Chester? ...Who found him, incidentally?"

"Sibella, I think Heath said. Her room, you remember, is next to Chester's, and the shot probably roused her. But we'd better be going."

"Am I invited?"

"I wish you would come." Markham made no effort to hide his desire to have the other accompany him.

"Oh, I had every intention of doing so, don't y' know." And Vance left the room abruptly to get dressed.

It took the District Attorney's car but a few minutes to reach the Greene mansion from Vance's house in East 38th Street. A patrolman stood guard outside the great iron gates, and a plain-clothes man lounged on the front steps beneath the arched doorway.

Heath was in the drawing-room talking earnestly to Inspector Moran, who had just arrived; and two men from the Homicide Bureau stood by the window awaiting orders. The house was peculiarly silent: no member of the family was to be seen.

The sergeant came forward at once. His usual ruddiness of complexion was gone and his eyes were troubled. He shook hands with Markham, and then gave Vance a look of friendly welcome.

"You had the right dope, Mr. Vance. Somebody's ripping things wide open here; and it isn't swag they're after."

Inspector Moran joined us, and again the handshaking ceremony took place.

"This case is going to stir things up considerably," he said. "And we're in for an unholy scandal if we don't clean it up quickly."

The worried look in Markham's face deepened.

"The sooner we get to work, then, the better. Are you going to lend a hand, Inspector?"

"There's no need, I think," Moran answered quietly. "I'll leave the police end entirely with Sergeant Heath; and now that you—and Mr. Vance—are here, I'd be of no use." He gave Vance a pleasant smile, and made his adieux. "Keep in touch with me, Sergeant, and use all the men you want."<sup>[10]</sup>

When he had gone Heath gave us the details of the crime.

At about half-past eleven, after the family and the servants had retired, the shot was fired. Sibella was reading in bed at the time and heard it distinctly. She rose immediately and, after listening for several moments, stole up the servants' stairs—the entrance to which was but a few feet from her door. She wakened the butler, and the two of them then went to Chester's room. The door was unlocked and the lights in the room were burning. Chester Greene was sitting, slightly huddled, in a chair near the desk. Sproot went to him, but saw that he was dead, and immediately left the room, locking the door. He then telephoned to the police and to Doctor Von Blon.

"I got here before Von Blon did," Heath explained. "The doctor was out again when the butler phoned, and didn't get the message till nearly one o'clock. I was damn glad of it, because it gave me a chance to check up on the footprints outside. The minute I turned in at the gate I could see that somebody had come and gone, the same as last time; and I whistled for the man on the beat to guard the entrance until Snitkin arrived. Then I came on in, keeping along the edge of the walk; and the first thing I noticed when the butler opened the door was a little puddle of water on the rug in the hall. Somebody had recently tracked the soft snow in. I found a couple other puddles in the hall, and there were some wet imprints on the steps leading upstairs. Five minutes later Snitkin gave me the signal from the street, and I put him to work on the footprints outside. The tracks were plain, and Snitkin was able to get some pretty accurate measurements."

After Snitkin had been put to work on the footprints, the sergeant, it seemed, went upstairs to Chester's room and made an examination. But he found nothing unusual, aside from the murdered man in the chair, and after half an hour descended again to the dining-room, where Sibella and Sproot were waiting. He had just begun his questioning of them when Doctor Von Blon arrived.

"I took him upstairs," said Heath, "and he looked at the body. He seemed to want to stick around, but I told him he'd be in the way. So he talked to Miss Greene out in the hall for five or ten minutes, and then left."

Shortly after Doctor Von Blon's departure two other Men from the Homicide Bureau arrived, and the next two hours were spent in interrogating the members of the household. But nobody, except Sibella, admitted even hearing the shot. Mrs. Greene was not questioned. When Miss Craven, the nurse, who slept on the third floor, was sent in to her, she reported that the old lady was sleeping soundly; and the sergeant decided not to disturb her. Nor was Ada awakened: according to the nurse, the girl had been asleep since nine o'clock.

Rex Greene, however, when interviewed, contributed one vague and, as it seemed, contradictory bit of evidence. He had been lying awake, he said, at the time the snowfall ceased, which was a little after eleven. Then, about ten minutes later, he had imagined he heard a faint shuffling noise in the hall and the sound of a door closing softly. He had thought nothing of it, and only recalled it when pressed by Heath. A quarter of an hour afterward he had looked at his watch. It was then twenty-five minutes past eleven; and very soon after that he had fallen asleep.

"The only queer thing about his story," commented Heath, "is the time. If he's telling the tale straight, he heard this noise and the door shutting twenty minutes or so before the shot was fired. And nobody in the house was up at the time. I tried to shake him on the question of the exact hour, but he stuck to it like a leech. I compared his watch with mine, and it was O.K. Anyhow, there's nothing much to the story. The wind mighta blown a door shut, or he mighta heard a noise out in the street and thought it was in the hall."

"Nevertheless, Sergeant," put in Vance, "if I were you I'd file Rex's story away for future meditation. Somehow it appeals to me."

Heath looked up sharply and was about to ask a question; but he changed his mind and said merely:

"It's filed." Then he finished his report to Markham.

After interrogating the occupants of the house he had gone back to the Bureau, leaving his men on guard, and set the machinery of his office in operation. He had returned to the Greene mansion early that morning, and was now waiting for the Medical Examiner, the finger-print experts, and the official photographer. He had given orders for the servants to remain in their quarters, and had instructed Sproot to serve breakfast to all the members of the family in their own rooms.

"This thing's going to take work, sir," he concluded. "And it's going to be touchy going, too."

Markham nodded gravely, and glanced toward Vance, whose eyes were resting moodily on an old oil-painting of Tobias Greene.

"Does this new development help co-ordinate any of your former impressions?" he asked.

"It at least substantiates the feeling I had that this old house reeks with a deadly poison," Vance replied. "This thing is like a witches' sabbath." He gave Markham a humorous smile. "I'm beginning to think your task is going to take on the nature of exorcising devils."

Markham grunted.

"I'll leave the magic potions to you...Sergeant, suppose we take a look at the body before the Medical Examiner gets here."

Heath led the way without a word. When we reached the head of the stairs he took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door of Chester's room. The electric lights were still burning—sickly yellow disks in the grey daylight which filtered in from the windows above the river.

The room, long and narrow, contained an anachronistic assortment of furniture. It was a typical man's apartment, with an air of comfortable untidiness. Newspapers and sports magazines cluttered the table and desk; ash-trays were everywhere; an open cellaret stood in one corner; and a collection of golf-clubs lay on the tapestried Chesterfield. The bed, I noticed, had not been slept in.

In the centre of the room, beneath an old-fashioned cut-glass chandelier, was a Chippendale "knee-hole" desk, beside which stood a sleepy-hollow chair. It was in this chair that the body of Chester Greene, clad in dressing-gown and slippers, reclined. He was slumped a little forward, the head turned slightly back and resting against the tufted upholstery. The light from the chandelier cast a spectral illumination on his face; and the sight of it laid a spell of horror on me. The eyes, normally prominent, now seemed to be protruding from their sockets in a stare of unutterable amazement; and the sagging chin and flabby parted lips intensified this look of terrified wonder.

Vance was studying the dead man's features intently.

"Would you say, Sergeant," he asked, without looking up, "that Chester and Julia saw the same thing as they passed from this



world?"

Heath coughed uneasily.

"Well," he admitted, "something surprised them, and that's a fact."

"Surprised them! Sergeant, you should thank your Maker that you are not cursed with an imagination. The whole truth of this fiendish business lies in those bulbous eyes and that gaping mouth. Unlike Ada, both Julia and Chester saw the thing that menaced them; and it left them stunned and aghast."

"Well, we can't get any information outa *them*." Heath's practicality as usual was uppermost.

"Not oral information, certainly. But, as Hamlet put it, murder, though it have no tongue, will speak with most miraculous organ."

"Come, come, Vance. Be tangible." Markham spoke with acerbity. "What's in your mind?"

"Pon my word, I don't know. It's too vague." He leaned over and picked up a small book from the floor just beneath where the dead man's hand hung over the arm of the chair. "Chester apparently was immersed in literature at the time of his taking off." He opened the book casually. "Hydrotherapy and Constipation.' Yes, Chester was just the kind to worry about his colon. Someone probably told him that intestinal stasis interfered with the proper stance. He's no doubt clearing the asphodel from the Elysian fields at the present moment preparat'ry to laying out a golf-course."

He became suddenly serious.

"You see what this book means, Markham? Chester was sitting here reading when the murderer came in. Yet he did not so much as rise or call out. Furthermore, he let the intruder stand directly in front of him. He did not even lay down his book, but sat back in his chair relaxed. Why? Because the murderer was someone Chester knew—and trusted! And when the gun was suddenly brought forth and pointed at his heart, he was too astounded to move. And in that second of bewilderment and unbelief the trigger was pulled and the bullet entered his heart."

Markham nodded slowly, in deep perplexity, and Heath studied the attitude of the dead man more closely.

"That's a good theory," the sergeant conceded finally. "Yes, he musta let the bird get right on top of him without suspecting anything. Same like Julia did."

"Exactly, Sergeant. The two murders constitute a most suggestive parallel."

"Still and all, there's one point you're overlooking." Heath's brow was roughened in a troubled frown. "Chester's door mighta been unlocked last night, seeing as he hadn't gone to bed, and so this person coulda walked in without any trouble. But Julia, now, was already undressed and in bed; and she always locked her door at night. Now, how would you say this person with the gun got into Julia's room, Mr. Vance?"

"There's no difficulty about that. Let us say, as a tentative hypothesis, that Julia had disrobed, switched off the lights, and climbed into her queenly bed. Then came a tap on the door—perhaps a tap she recognized. She rose, put on the lights, opened the door, and again repaired to her bed for warmth while she held parley with her visitor. Maybe—who knows?—the visitor sat on the edge of the bed during the call. Then suddenly the visitor produced the revolver and fired, and made a hurried exit, forgetting to switch the lights off. Such a theory—though I don't insist on the details—would square neatly with my idea regarding Chester's caller."

"It may've been like you say," admitted Heath dubiously. "But why all the hocus-pocus when it came to shooting Ada? That job was done in the dark."

"The rationalistic philosophers tell us, Sergeant"—Vance became puckishly pedantic—"that there's a reason for everything, but that the finite mind is woefully restricted. The altered technique of our elusive culprit when dealing with Ada is one of the things that is obscure. But you've touched a vital point. If we could discover the reason for this reversal of our *inconnu's* homicidal tactics, I believe we'd be a lot forrader in our investigation."

Heath made no reply. He stood in the centre of the room running his eye over the various objects and pieces of furniture. Presently he stepped to the clothes-closet, pulled open the door, and turned on a pendent electric light just inside. As he stood gloomily peering at the closet's contents there was a sound of heavy footsteps in the hall and Snitkin appeared in the open door. Heath turned and, without giving his assistant time to speak, asked gruffly:

"How did you make out with those footprints?"

"Got all the dope here." Snitkin crossed to the sergeant, and held out a long manila envelope. "There wasn't no trouble in checking the measurements and cutting the patterns. But they're not going to be a hell of a lot of good, I'm thinking. There's ten million guys more or less in this country who coulda made 'em."

Heath had opened the envelope and drawn forth a thin white cardboard pattern which looked like an inner sole of a shoe.

"It wasn't no pygmy who made this print," he remarked.

"That's the catch in it," explained Snitkin. "The size don't mean nothing much, for it ain't a shoe-track. Those footprints were made by galoshes, and there's no telling how much bigger they were than the guy's foot. They mighta been worn over a shoe anywheres from a size eight to a size ten, and with a width anywheres from an A to a D."

Heath nodded with obvious disappointment.

"You're sure about 'em being galoshes?" He was reluctant to let what promised to be a valuable clue slip away.

"You can't get around it. The rubber tread was distinct in several places, and the shallow, scooped heel stood out as plain as day. Anyhow, I got Jerym[11] to check up on my findings."

Snitkin's gaze wandered idly to the floor of the clothes-closet.

"Those are the kind of things that made the tracks."

He pointed to a pair of high arctics which had been thrown carelessly under a boot-shelf. Then he leaned over and picked up one of them. As his eye rested on it he gave a grunt. "This looks like the size, too." He took the pattern from the sergeant's hand and laid it on the sole of the overshoe. It fitted as perfectly as if the two had been cut simultaneously.

Heath was startled out of his depression.

"Now, what in hell does that mean!"

Markham had drawn near.



"It might indicate, of course, that Chester went out somewhere late last night."

"But that don't make sense, sir," objected Heath. "If he'd wanted anything at that hour of the night he'd have sent the butler. And, anyway, the shops in this neighbourhood were all closed by that time, for the tracks weren't made till after it had stopped snowing at eleven."

"And," supplemented Snitkin, "you can't tell by the tracks whether the guy that made 'em left the house and came back, or came to the house and went away, for there wasn't a single print on top of the other."

Vance was standing at the window looking out.

"That, now, is a most interestin' point, Sergeant," he commented. "I'd file it away along with Rex's story for prayerful consideration." He sauntered back to the desk and looked at the dead man thoughtfully. "No, Sergeant," he continued; "I can't picture Chester donning gum-shoes and sneaking out into the night on a mysterious errand. I'm afraid we'll have to find another explanation for those footprints."

It's damn funny, just the same, that they should be the exact size of these galoshes."

"If," submitted Markham, "the footprints were not Chester's, then we're driven to the assumption that the murderer made them."

Vance slowly took out his cigarette case.

"Yes," he agreed, "I think we may safely assume that."

## 9. THE THREE BULLETS

(Friday, November 12th; 9 a.m.)

AT this moment Doctor Doremus, the Medical Examiner, a brisk, nervous man with a jaunty air, was ushered in by one of the detectives I had seen in the drawing-room. He blinked at the company, threw his hat and coat on a chair, and shook hands with everyone.

"What are your friends trying to do, Sergeant?" he asked, eyeing the inert body in the chair. "Wipe out the whole family?" Without waiting for an answer to his grim pleasantry he went to the windows and threw up the shades with a clatter. "You gentlemen all through viewing the remains? If so, I'll get to work."

"Go to it," said Heath. Chester Greene's body was lifted to the bed and straightened out. "And how about the bullet, doc? Any chance of getting it before the autopsy?"

"How'm I going to get it without a probe and forceps? I ask you!" Doctor Doremus drew back the matted dressing-gown and inspected the wound. "But I'll see what I can do." Then he straightened up and cocked his eye facetiously at the sergeant. "Well, I'm waiting for your usual query about the time of death."

"We know it."

"Hah! Wish you always did. This fixing the exact time by looking over a body is all poppycock anyway. The best we fellows can do is to approximate it. Rigor mortis works differently in different people. Don't ever take me too seriously, Sergeant, when I set an exact hour for you. However, let's see..."

He ran his hands over the body on the bed, unflexed the fingers, moved the head, and put his eye close to the coagulated blood about the wound. Then he teetered on his toes, and squinted at the ceiling.

"How about ten hours? Say, between eleven-thirty, and midnight. How's that?"

Heath laughed good-naturedly.

"You hit it, doc—right on the head."

"Well, well! Always was a good guesser." Doctor Doremus seemed wholly indifferent.

Vance had followed Markham into the hall.

"An honest fellow, that archiater of yours. And to think he's a public servant of our beneficent government!"

"There are many honest men in public office," Markham reproved him.

"I know," sighed Vance. "Our democracy is still young. Give it time."

Heath joined us, and at the same moment the nurse appeared at Mrs. Greene's door. A querulous dictatorial voice issued from the depths of the room behind her.

"...And you tell whoever's in charge that I want to see him—right away, do you understand! It's an outrage, all this commotion and excitement, with me lying here in pain trying to get a little rest. Nobody shows me any consideration."

Heath made a grimace and looked toward the stairs; but Vance took Markham's arm.

"Come, let's cheer up the old lady."

As we entered the room, Mrs. Greene, propped up as usual in bed with a prismatic assortment of pillows, drew her shawl primly about her.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she greeted us, her expression moderating. "I thought it was those abominable policemen making free of my house again... What's the meaning of all this disturbance, Mr. Markham? Nurse tells me that Chester has been shot. Dear, dear! If people must do such things, why do they have to come to my house and annoy a poor helpless old woman like me? There are plenty of other places they could do their shooting in." She appeared deeply resentful at the fact that the murderer should have been so inconsiderate as to choose the Greene mansion for his depredations. "But I've come to expect this sort of thing. Nobody thinks of my feelings. And if my own children see fit to do everything they can to annoy me, why should I expect total strangers to show me any consideration?"

"When one is bent on murder, Mrs. Greene," rejoined Markham, stung by her callousness, "one doesn't stop to think of the mere inconvenience his crime may cause others."

"I suppose not," she murmured self-pityingly. "But it's all the fault of my children. If they were what children ought to be, people wouldn't be breaking in here trying to murder them."

"And unfortunately succeeding," added Markham coldly.

"Well, that can't be helped." She suddenly became bitter. "It's their punishment for the way they've treated their poor old mother, lying here for ten long years, hopelessly paralysed. And do you think they try to make it easy for me? No! Here I must stay, day after day, suffering agonies with my spine; and they never give me a thought." A sly look came into her fierce old eyes. "But they think about me sometimes. Oh, yes! They think how nice it would be if I were out of the way. Then they'd get all my money..."

"I understand, madam," Markham put in abruptly, "that you were asleep last night at the time your son met his death."

"Was I? Well, maybe I was. It's a wonder, though, that some one didn't leave my door open just so I'd be disturbed."

"And you know no one who would have any reason to kill your son?"

"How should I know? Nobody tells me anything. I'm a poor neglected, lonely old cripple..."

"Well, we won't bother you any further, Mrs. Greene." Markham's tone held something both of sympathy and consternation.

As we descended the stairs the nurse reopened the door we had just closed after us, and left it ajar, no doubt in response to an order from her patient.

"Not at all a nice old lady," chuckled Vance, as we entered the drawing-room. "For a moment, Markham, I thought you were going to box her ears."

"I admit I felt like it. And yet I couldn't help pitying her. However, such utter self-concentration as hers saves one a lot of mental anguish. She seems to regard this whole damnable business as a plot to upset her."

Sproot appeared obsequiously at the door.

"May I bring you gentlemen some coffee?" No emotion of any kind showed on his graven wrinkled face. The events of the past few days seemed not to have affected him in any degree.

"No, we don't want coffee, Sproot," Markham told him brusquely. "But please be good enough to ask Miss Sibella if she will come here."

"Very good, sir."

The old man shuffled away, and a few minutes later Sibella strolled in, smoking a cigarette, one hand in the pocket of her vivid-green sweater-jacket. Despite her air of nonchalance her face was pale, its whiteness contrasting strongly with the deep crimson rouge on her lips. Her eyes, too, were slightly haggard; and when she spoke her voice sounded forced, as if she were playing a role against which her spirit was at odds. She greeted us blithely enough, however.

"Good morning, one and all. Beastly auspices for a social call." She sat down on the arm of a chair and swung one leg restlessly. "Someone certainly has a grudge against us Greenes. Poor old Chet! He didn't even die with his boots on. Felt bedroom slippers! What an end for an outdoor enthusiast! Well, I suppose I'm invited here to tell my story. Where do I begin?"

She rose, and throwing her half-burned cigarette into the grate, seated herself in a straight-backed chair facing Markham, folding her sinewy, tapering hands on the table before her.

Markham studied her for several moments.

"You were awake last night, reading in bed, I understand, when the shot was fired in your brother's room."

"Zola's 'Nana,' to be explicit. Mother told me I shouldn't read it; so I got it at once. It was frightfully disappointing, though."

"And just what did you do after you heard the report?" continued Markham, striving to control his annoyance at the girl's flippancy.

"I put my book down, got up, donned a kimono, and listened for several minutes at the door. Not hearing anything further, I peeked out. The hall was dark, and the silence felt a bit spooky. I knew I ought to go to Chet's room and inquire, in a sisterly fashion, about the explosion; but, to tell you the truth, Mr. Markham, I was rather cowardly. So I went—oh, well, let the truth prevail: I *ran* up the servants' stairs and routed out our Admirable Crichton; and together we investigated. Chet's door was unlocked, and the fearless Sproot opened it. There sat Chet, looking as if he'd seen a ghost; and somehow I knew he was dead. Sproot went in and touched him, while I waited; and then we went down to the dining-room. Sproot did some phoning, and afterward made me some atrocious coffee. A half-hour or so later this gentleman"—she indicated her head toward Heath—"arrived, looking distressingly glum, and very sensibly refused a cup of Sproot's coffee."

"And you heard no sound of any kind before the shot?"

"Not a thing. Everybody had gone to bed early. The last sound I heard in this house was mother's gentle and affectionate voice telling the nurse she was as neglectful as the rest of us, and to bring her morning tea at nine sharp, and not to slam the door the way she always did."

"Then peace and quiet reigned until half-past eleven, when I heard the shot in Chet's room."

"How long was this interregnum of quietude?" asked Vance.

"Well, mother generally ends her daily criticism of the family around ten-thirty; so I'd say the quietude lasted about an hour."

"And during that time you do not recall hearing a slight shuffling sound in the hall? Or a door closing softly?"

The girl shook her head indifferently, and took another cigarette from a small amber case she carried in her sweater-pocket.

"Sorry, but I didn't. That doesn't mean, though, that people couldn't have been shuffling and shutting doors all over the place. My room's at the rear, and the noises on the river and in 52nd Street drown out almost anything that's going on in the front of the house."

Vance had gone to her and held a match to her cigarette. "I say, you don't seem in the least worried."

"Oh, why worry?" She made a gesture of resignation. "If anything is to happen to me, it'll happen, whatever I do. But I don't anticipate an immediate demise. No one has the slightest reason for killing me—unless, of course, it's some of my former bridge partners. But they're all harmless persons who wouldn't be apt to take extreme measures."

"Still"—Vance kept his tone inconsequential—"no one apparently had any reason for harming your two sisters or your brother."

"On that point I couldn't be altogether lucid. We Greenes don't confide in one another. There's a beastly spirit of distrust in this ancestral domain. We all lie to each other on general principles. And as for secrets! Each member of the family is a kind of Masonic Order in himself. Surely there's some reason for all these shootings. I simply can't imagine anyone indulging himself in this fashion for the mere purpose of pistol practice."

She smoked a moment pensively, and went on:

"Yes, there must be a motive back of it all—though for the life of me I can't suggest one. Of course Julia was a vinegary, unpleasant person, but she went out very little, and worked off her various complexes on the family. And yet, she may have been leading a double life for all I know. When these sour old maids break loose from their inhibitions I understand they do the most utterly utter things. But I just can't bring my mind to picture Julia with a bevy of jealous Romeos." She made a comical grimace at the thought. "Ada, on the other hand, is what we used to call in algebra an unknown quantity. No one but dad knew where she came from, and he would never tell. To be sure, she doesn't get much time to run around—mother keeps her too busy. But she's young and good-looking in a common sort of way"—there was a tinge of venom in this remark—"and you can't tell what connections she may have formed outside the sacred portals of the Greene mansion. As for Chet, no one seemed to love him passionately. I never heard anybody say a good word for him but the golf pro at the club, and that was only because Chet tipped him like a parvenu. He had a genius for antagonizing people. Several motives for the shooting might be found in his past."

"I note that you've changed your ideas considerably in regard to the culpability of Miss Ada." Vance spoke incuriously.

Sibella looked a little shamefaced.

"I did get a bit excited, didn't I?" Then a defiance came into her voice. "But just the same, she doesn't belong here. And she's a sneaky little cat. She'd dearly love to see us all nicely murdered. The only person that seems to like her is cook; but then, Gertrude's a

sentimental German who likes everybody. She feeds half the stray cats and dogs in the neighbourhood. Our rear yard is a regular pound in summer."

Vance was silent for a while. Suddenly he looked up.

"I gather from your remarks, Miss Greene, that you now regard the shootings as the acts of someone from the outside."

"Does anyone think anything else?" she asked, with startled anxiety. "I understand there were footprints in the snow both times we were visited. Surely they would indicate an outsider."

"Quite true," Vance assured her, a bit over-emphatically, obviously striving to allay whatever fears his queries may have aroused in her. "Those footprints undeniably indicate that the intruder entered each time by the front door."

"And you are not to have any uneasiness about the future, Miss Greene," added Markham. "I shall give orders to-day to have a strict guard placed over the house, front and rear, until there is no longer the slightest danger of a recurrence of what has taken place here."

Heath nodded his unqualified approbation.

"I'll arrange for that, sir. There'll be two men guarding this place day and night from now on."

"How positively thrilling!" exclaimed Sibella; but I noticed a strange reservation of apprehension in her eyes.

"We won't detain you any longer, Miss Greene," said Markham, rising. "But I'd greatly appreciate it if you would remain in your room until our inquiries here are over. You may, of course, visit your mother."

"Thanks awf'ly, but I think I'll indulge in a little lost beauty sleep." And she left us with a friendly wave of the hand.

"Who do you want to see next, Mr. Markham?" Heath was on his feet, vigorously relighting his cigar.

But before Markham could answer Vance lifted his hand for silence, and leaned forward in a listening attitude.

"Oh, Sproot!" he called. "Step in here a moment." The old butler appeared at once, calm and subservient, and waited with a vacuously expectant expression.

"Really, y' know," said Vance, "there's not the slightest need for you to hover solicitously amid the draperies of the hallway while we're busy in here. Most considerate and loyal of you; but if we want you for anything we'll ring."

"As you desire, sir."

Sproot started to go, but Vance halted him.

"Now that you're here you might answer one or two questions."

"Very good, sir."

"First, I want you to think back very carefully, and tell me if you observed anything unusual when you locked up the house last night."

"Nothing, sir," the man answered promptly. "If I had, I would have mentioned it to the police this morning."

"And did you hear any noise or movement of any kind after you had gone to your room? A door closing, for instance?"

"No, sir. Everything was very quiet."

"And what time did you actually go to sleep?"

"I couldn't say exactly, sir. Perhaps about twenty minutes past eleven, if I may venture to make a guess."

"And were you greatly surprised when Miss Sibella woke you up and told you a shot had been fired in Mr. Chester's room?"

"Well, sir," Sproot admitted, "I was somewhat astonished, though I endeavoured to conceal my emotions."

"And doubtless succeeded admirably," said Vance dryly. "But what I meant was this: did you not anticipate something of the kind happening again in this house, after the other shootings?"

He watched the old butler sharply, but the man's lineaments were as arid as a desert and as indecipherable as an expanse of sea.

"If you will pardon me, sir, for saying so, I don't know precisely what you mean," came the colourless answer. "Had I anticipated that Mr. Chester was to be done in, so to speak, I most certainly would have warned him. It would have been my duty, sir."

"Don't evade my question, Sproot." Vance spoke sternly. "I asked you if you had any idea that a second tragedy might follow the first."

"Tragedies very seldom come singly, sir, if I may be permitted to say so. One never knows what will happen next. I try not to anticipate the workings of fate, but I strive to hold myself in readiness—"

"Oh, go away, Sproot—go quite away," said Vance. "When I crave vague rhetoric I'll read Thomas Aquinas."

"Yes, sir." The man bowed with wooden courtesy, and left us.

His footsteps had scarcely died away when Doctor Doremus strode in jauntily.

"There's your bullet, Sergeant." He tossed a tiny cylinder of discoloured lead on the drawing-room table. "Nothing but dumb luck. It entered the fifth intercostal space and travelled diagonally across the heart, coming out in the post-axillary fold at the anterior border of the trapezius muscle, where I could feel it under the skin; and I picked it out with my pen-knife."

"All that fancy language don't worry me," grinned Heath, "so long's I got the bullet."

He picked it up and held it in the palm of his hand, his eyes narrowed, his mouth drawn into a straight line. Then, reaching into his waistcoat pocket, he took out two other bullets, and laid them beside the first. Slowly he nodded, and extended the sinister exhibits to Markham.

"There's the three shots that were fired in this house," he said. "They're all .32-revolver bullets—just alike. You can't get away from it, sir: all three people here were shot with the same gun."

## 10. THE CLOSING OF A DOOR

(Friday, November 12th; 9.30 a.m.)

AS Heath spoke Sproot passed down the hall and opened the front door, admitting Doctor Von Blon.

"Good morning, Sproot," we heard him say in his habitually pleasant voice. "Anything new?"

"No, sir, I think not." The reply was expressionless. "The District Attorney and the police are here. Let me take your coat, sir."

Von Blon glanced into the drawing-room, and, on seeing us, halted and bowed. Then he caught sight of Doctor Doremus, whom he had met on the night of the first tragedy.

"Ah, good morning, doctor," he said, coming forward. "I'm afraid I didn't thank you for the assistance you gave me with the young lady the other night. Permit me to make amends."

"No thanks needed," Doremus assured him. "How's the patient getting on?"

"The wound's filling in nicely. No sepsis. I'm going up now to have a look at her." He turned inquiringly to the District Attorney. "No objection, I suppose."

"None whatever, doctor," said Markham. Then he rose quickly. "We'll come along, if you don't mind. There are a few questions I'd like to ask Miss Ada, and it might be as well to do it while you're present."

Von Blon gave his consent without hesitation.

"Well, I'll be on my way—work to do," announced Doremus breezily. He lingered long enough, however, to shake hands with all of us; and then the front door closed on him.

"We'd better ascertain if Miss Ada has been told of her brother's death," suggested Vance, as we went up the stairs. "If not, I think that task logically devolves on you, doctor."

The nurse, whom Sproot had no doubt apprised of Von Blon's arrival, met us in the upper hall and informed us that, as far as she knew, Ada was still ignorant of Chester's murder.

We found the girl sitting up in bed, a magazine lying across her knees. Her face was still pale, but a youthful vitality shone from her eyes, which attested to the fact that she was much stronger. She seemed alarmed at our sudden appearance, but the sight of the doctor tended to reassure her.

"How do you feel this morning, Ada?" he asked with professional geniality. "You remember these gentlemen, don't you?"

She gave us an apprehensive look; then smiled faintly and bowed.

"Yes, I remember them...Have they found out anything about—Julia's death?"

"I'm afraid not." Von Blon sat down beside her and took her hand. "Something else has happened that you will have to know, Ada." His voice was studiously sympathetic. "Last night Chester met with an accident—"

"An accident—oh!" Her eyes opened wide, and a slight tremor passed over her. "You mean..." Her voice quavered and broke. "I know what you mean! ...Chester's dead!"

Von Blon cleared his throat and looked away.

"Yes, Ada. You must be brave and not let it—ah—upset you too much. You see—"

"He was shot!" The words burst from her lips, and a look of terror overspread her face. "Just like Julia and me." Her eyes stared straight ahead, as if fascinated by some horror which she alone could see.

Von Blon was silent, and Vance stepped to the bed.

"We're not going to lie to you, Miss Greene," he said softly. "You have guessed the truth."

"And what about Rex—and Sibella?"

"They're all right," Vance assured her. "But why did you think your brother had met the same fate as Miss Julia and yourself?"

She turned her gaze slowly to him.

"I don't know—I just felt it. Ever since I was a little girl I've imagined horrible things happening in this house. And the other night I felt that the time had come—oh, I don't know how to explain it; but it was like having something happen that you'd been expecting."

Vance nodded understandingly.

"It's an unhealthy old house; it puts all sorts of weird notions in one's head. But, of course," he added lightly, "there's nothing supernatural about it. It's only a coincidence that you should have felt that way and that these disasters should actually have occurred. The police, y' know, think it was a burglar."

The girl did not answer, and Markham leaned forward with a reassuring smile.

"And we are going to have two men guarding the house all the time from now on," he said, "so that no one can get in who hasn't a perfect right to be here."

"So you see, Ada," put in Von Blon, "you have nothing to worry about any more. All you have to do now is to get well."

But her eyes did not leave Markham's face.

"How do you know," she asked, in a tense anxious voice, "that the—the person came in from the outside?"

"We found his footprints both times on the front walk."

"Footprints—are you sure?" She put the question eagerly.

"No doubt about them. They were perfectly plain, and they belonged to the person who came here and tried to shoot you. Here, Sergeant"—he beckoned to Heath—"show the young lady that pattern."

Heath took the manila envelope from his pocket and extracted the cardboard impression Snitkin had made. Ada took it in her hand and studied it, and a little sigh of relief parted from her lips.

"And you notice," smiled Vance, "he didn't have very dainty feet."

The girl returned the pattern to the sergeant. Her fear had left her, and her eyes cleared of the vision that had been haunting them.

"And now, Miss Greene," went on Vance, in a matter-of-fact voice, "we want to ask a few questions. First of all: the nurse said you went to sleep at nine o'clock last night. Is that correct?"

"I pretended to, because nurse was tired and mother was complaining a lot. But I really didn't go to sleep until hours later."

"But you didn't hear the shot in your brother's room?"

"No. I must have been asleep by then."

"Did you hear anything before that?"

"Not after the family had gone to bed and Sproot had locked up."

"Were you awake very long after Sproot retired?"

The girl pondered a moment, frowning.

"Maybe an hour," she ventured finally. "But I don't know."

"It couldn't have been much over an hour," Vance pointed out; "for the shot was fired shortly after half past eleven. And you heard nothing—no sound of any kind in the hall?"

"Why, no." The look of fright was creeping back into her face. "Why do you ask?"

"Your brother Rex," explained Vance, "said he heard a faint shuffling sound and a door closing a little after eleven."

Her eyelids drooped, and her free hand tightened over the edge of the magazine she was holding.

"A door closing..." She repeated the words in a voice scarcely audible. "Oh! And Rex heard it?" Suddenly she opened her eyes and her lips fell apart. A startled memory had taken possession of her—a memory which quickened her breathing and filled her with alarm. "I heard that door close, too! I remember it now..."

"What door was it?" asked Vance, with subdued animation. "Could you tell where the sound came from?"

The girl shook her head.

"No—it was so soft. I'd even forgotten it until now. But I heard it! ...Oh, what did it mean?"

"Nothing probably." Vance assumed an air of inconsequentiality calculated to alleviate her fears. "The wind doubtless."

But when we left her, after a few more questions, I noticed that her face still held an expression of deep anxiety.

Vance was unusually thoughtful as we returned to the drawing-room.

"I'd give a good deal to know what that child knows or suspects," he murmured.

"She's been through a trying experience," returned Markham. "She's frightened, and she sees new dangers in everything. But she couldn't suspect anything, or she'd be only too eager to tell us."

"I wish I were sure of that."

The next hour or so was occupied with interrogating the two maids and the cook. Markham cross-examined them thoroughly not only concerning the immediate events touching upon the two tragedies, but in regard to the general conditions in the Greene household. Numerous family episodes in the past were gone over; and when his inquiries were finished he had obtained a fairly good idea of the domestic atmosphere. But nothing that could be even remotely connected with the murders came to light. There had always been, it transpired, an abundance of hatred and ill-feeling and vicious irritability in the Greene mansion. The story that was unfolded by the servants was not a pleasant one; it was a record—scrappy and desultory, but none the less appalling—of daily clashes, complainings, bitter words, sullen silences, jealousies and threats.

Most of the details of this unnatural situation were supplied by Hemming, the older maid. She was less ecstatic than during the first interview, although she interspersed her remarks with Biblical quotations and references to the dire fate which the Lord had seen fit to visit upon her sinful employers. Nevertheless, she painted an arresting, if overcoloured and prejudiced, picture of the life that had gone on about her during the past ten years. But when it came to explaining the methods employed by the Almighty in visiting his vengeance upon the unholy Greenses, she became indefinite and obscure. At length Markham let her go after she had assured him that she intended to remain at her post of duty—to be, as she expressed it, "a witness for the Lord" when his work of righteous devastation was complete.

Barton, the younger maid, on the other hand, announced, in no uncertain terms, that she was through with the Greenses for ever. The girl was genuinely frightened, and, after Sibella and Sproot had been consulted, she was paid her wages and told she could pack her things. In less than half an hour she had turned in her key and departed with her luggage. Such information as she left behind her was largely a substantiation of Hemming's outpourings. She, though, did not regard the two murders as the acts of an outraged God. Hers was a more practical and mundane view.

"There's something awful funny going on here," she had said, forgetting for the moment the urge of her coquettish spirits. "The Greenses are queer people. And the servants are queer, too—what with Mr. Sproot reading books in foreign languages, and Hemming preaching about fire and brimstone, and cook going around in a sort of trance muttering to herself and never answering a civil question. And such a family!" She rolled her eyes. "Mrs. Greene hasn't got any heart. She's a regular old witch, and she looks at you sometimes as though she'd like to strangle you. If I was Miss Ada I'd have gone crazy long ago. But then, Miss Ada's no better than the rest. She acts nice and gentle like, but I've seen her stamping up and down in her room looking like a very devil; and once she used language to me what was that bad I put my fingers in my ears. And Miss Sibella's a regular icicle—except when she gets mad, and then she'd kill you if she dared, and laugh about it. And there's been something funny about her and Mr. Chester. Ever since Miss Julia and Miss Ada were shot they've been talking to each other in the sneakiest way when they thought no one was looking. And this Doctor Von Blon what comes here so much: he's a deep one. He's been in Miss Sibella's room with the door shut lots of times when she wasn't any more sick than you are. And Mr. Rex, now. He's a queer man, too. I get the creeps every time he comes near me." She shuddered by way of demonstration. "Miss Julia wasn't as queer as the rest. She just hated everybody and was mean."

Barton had rambled on loquaciously with all the thoughtless exaggeration of a gossip who felt herself outraged; and Markham had not interrupted her. He was trying to dredge up some nugget from the mass of her verbal silt; but when at last he sifted it all down there remained nothing but a few shining grains of scandal.

The cook was even less enlightening. Taciturn by nature, she became almost inarticulate when approached on the subject of the crime. Her stolid exterior seemed to cloak a sullen resentment at the fact that she should be questioned at all. In fact, as Markham

patiently pressed his examination, the impression grew on me that her lack of responsiveness was deliberately defensive, as if she had steeled herself to reticency. Vance, too, sensed this attitude in her, for, during a pause in the interview, he moved his chair about until he faced her directly.

"Frau Mannheim," he said, "the last time we were here you mentioned the fact that Mr. Tobias Greene knew your husband, and that, because of their acquaintance, you applied for a position here when your husband died."

"And why shouldn't I?" she asked stubbornly. "I was poor, and I didn't have any other friends."

"Ah, friends!" Vance caught up the word. "And since you were once on friendly terms with Mr. Greene, you doubtless know certain things about his past, which may have some bearing on the present situation; for it is not at all impossible, d' ye see, that the crimes committed here during the past few days are connected with matters that took place years ago. We don't know this, of course, but we'd be very much gratified if you would try to help us in this regard."

As he was speaking the woman had drawn herself up. Her hands had tightened as they lay folded in her lap, and the muscles about her mouth had stiffened.

"I don't know anything," was her only answer.

"How," asked Vance evenly, "do you account for the rather remarkable fact that Mr. Greene gave orders that you were to remain here as long as you cared to?"

"Mr. Greene was a very kind and generous man," she asserted, in a flat, combative voice. "Some there were that thought him hard, and accused him of being unjust; but he was always good to me and mine."

"How well did he know Mr. Mannheim?"

There was a pause, and the woman's eyes looked blankly ahead.

"He helped my husband once, when he was in trouble."

"How did he happen to do this?"

There was another pause, and then:

"They were in some deal together—in the old country." She frowned and appeared uneasy.

"When was this?"

"I don't remember. It was before I was married."

"And where did you first meet Mr. Greene?"

"At my home in New Orleans. He was there on business—with my husband."

"And, I take it, he befriended you also."

The woman maintained a stubborn silence.

"A moment ago," pursued Vance, "you used the phrase 'me and mine.'—Have you any children, Mrs. Mannheim?"

For the first time during the interview her face radically changed expression. An angry gleam shone in her eyes. "No!" The denial was like an ejaculation.

Vance smoked lethargically for several moments.

"You lived in New Orleans until the time of your employment in this house?" he finally asked.

"Yes."

"And your husband died there?"

"Yes."

"That was thirteen years ago, I understand.—How long before that had it been since you had seen Mr. Greene?"

"About a year."

"So that would be fourteen years ago?"

An apprehension, bordering on fear, showed through the woman's morose calmness.

"And you came all the way to New York to seek Mr. Greene's help," mused Vance. "Why were you so confident that he would give you employment after your husband's death?"

"Mr. Greene was a very good man," was all she would say.

"He had perhaps," suggested Vance, "done some other favour for you which made you think you could count on his generosity—eh, what?"

"That's neither here nor there." Her mouth closed tightly.

Vance changed the subject.

"What do you think about the crimes that have been committed in this house?"

"I don't think about them," she mumbled; but the anxiety in her voice belied the assertion.

"You surely must hold some opinion, Mrs. Mannheim, having been here so long." Vance's intent gaze did not leave the woman.

"Who, do you think, would have had any reason for wanting to harm these people?"

Suddenly her self-control gave way.

"*Du Lieber Herr Jesus!* I don't know—I don't know!" It was like a cry of anguish. "Miss Julia and Mr. Chester maybe—*gewiss*, one could understand. They hated everybody; they were hard, unloving. But little Ada—*der susse Engel!* Why should they want to harm her!" She set her face grimly, and slowly her expression of stolidity returned.

"Why, indeed?" A note of sympathy was evident in Vance's voice. After a pause he rose and went to the window. "You may return to your room now, Frau Mannheim," he said, without turning. "We shan't let anything further happen to little Ada."

The woman got up heavily and, with an uneasy glance in Vance's direction, left the room.

As soon as she was out of hearing, Markham swung about.

"What's the use of raking up all this ancient history?" he demanded irritably. "We're dealing with things that have taken place within the past few days; and you waste valuable time trying to find out why Tobias Greene hired a cook thirteen years ago."

"There's such a thing as cause and effect," offered Vance mildly. "And frequently there's a dashed long interval between the two."

"Granted. But what possible connection can this German cook have with the present murders?"

"Perhaps none." Vance strode back across the room, his eyes on the floor. "But, Markham old dear, nothing appears to have any connection with this débâcle. And, on the other hand, everything seems to have a possible relationship. The whole house is steeped in vague meaning. A hundred shadowy hands are pointing to the culprit, and the moment you try to determine the direction the hands disappear. It's a nightmare. Nothing means anything, therefore, anything may have a meaning."

"My dear Vance! You're not yourself." Markham's tone was one of annoyance and reproach. "Your remarks are worse than the obscure ramblings of the sibyls. What if Tobias Greene did have dealings with one Mannheim in the past? Old Tobias indulged in numerous shady transactions, if the gossip of twenty-five or thirty years ago can be credited.<sup>[12]</sup> He was for ever scurrying to the ends of the earth on some mysterious mission, and coming home with his pockets lined. And it's common knowledge that he spent considerable time in Germany. If you try to dig up his past for possible explanations for the present business, you'll have your hands full."

"You misconstrue my vagaries," returned Vance, pausing before the old oil-painting of Tobias Greene over the fire-place. "I repudiate all ambition to become the family historian of the Greenes...Not a bad head on Tobias," he commented, adjusting his monocle and inspecting the portrait. "An interestin' character. Dynamic forehead, with more than a suggestion of the scholar. A rugged, prying nose. Yes, Tobias no doubt fared forth on many an adventurous quest. A cruel mouth, though—rather sinister, in fact. I wish the whiskers permitted one a view of the chin. It was round, with a deep cleft, I'd say—the substance of which Chester's chin was but the simulacrum."

"Very edifying," sneered Markham. "But phrenology leaves me cold this morning.—Tell me, Vance: are you labouring under some melodramatic notion that old Mannheim may have been resurrected and returned to wreak vengeance on the Greene progeny for wrongs done him by Tobias in the dim past? I can't see any other reason for the questions you put to Mrs. Mannheim. Don't overlook the fact, however, that Mannheim's dead."

"I didn't attend the funeral." Vance sank lazily again in his chair.

"Don't be so unutterably futile," slapped Markham. "What's going through your head?"

"An excellent figure of speech! It expresses my mental state perfectly. Numberless things are 'going through my head.' But nothing remains there. My brain's a veritable sieve."

Heath projected himself into the discussion.

"My opinion is, sir, that the Mannheim angle of this affair is a washout. We're dealing with the present, and the bird that did this shooting is somewheres around here right now."

"You're probably right, Sergeant," conceded Vance. "But—my word!—it strikes me that every angle of the case—and, for that matter, every cusp, arc, tangent, parabola, sine, radius, and hyperbole—is hopelessly inundated."



## 11. A PAINFUL INTERVIEW

(Friday, November 12th; 11 a.m.)

MARKHAM glanced impatiently at his watch.

"It's getting late," he complained, "and I have an important appointment at noon. I think I'll have a go at Rex Greene, and then leave matters in your hands for the time being, Sergeant. There's nothing much to be done here now, and your routine work must be gone through with."

Heath got up gloomily.

"Yes; and one of the first things to be done is to go over this house with a fine-tooth comb for that revolver. If we could find that gun we'd be on our way."

"I don't want to damp your ardour, Sergeant," drawled Vance, "but something whispers in my ear that the weapon you yearn for is going to prove dashed elusive."

Heath looked depressed; he was obviously of Vance's opinion.

"A hell of a case, this is! Not a lead—nothing to get your teeth in."

He went to the archway and yanked the bell-cord viciously. When Sproot appeared he almost barked his demand that Mr. Rex Greene be produced at once; and he stood looking truculently after the retreating butler as if longing for an excuse to follow up his order with violence.

Rex came in nervously, a half-smoked cigarette hanging from his lips. His eyes were sunken; his cheeks sagged, and his short splay fingers fidgeted with the hem of his smoking jacket, like those of a man under the influence of hyoscine. He gave us a resentful, half-frightened gaze, and planted himself aggressively before us, refusing to take the seat Markham indicated. Suddenly he demanded fiercely:

"Have you found out yet who killed Julia and Chester?"

"No," Markham admitted; "but we've taken every precaution against any recurrence..."

"Precaution? What have you done?"

"We've stationed a man both front and rear—" A cackling laugh cut him short.

"A lot of good that'll do! The person who's after us Greenes has a key. He has a key, I tell you! And he can get in whenever he wants to, and nobody can stop him."

"I think you exaggerate a little," returned Markham mildly. "In any case, we hope to put our hands on him very soon. And that's why I've asked you here again—it's quite possible that you can help us."

"What do I know?" The man's words were defiant, and he took several long inhalations on his cigarette, the ashes of which fell upon his jacket unnoticed.

"You were asleep, I understand, when the shot was fired last night," went on Markham's quiet voice; "but Sergeant Heath tells me you were awake until after eleven and heard noises in the hall. Suppose you tell us just what happened."

"Nothing happened!" Rex blurted. "I went to bed at half-past ten, but I was too nervous to sleep. Then, some time later, the moon came out and fell across the foot of the bed; and I got up and pulled down the shade. About ten minutes later I heard a scraping sound in the hall, and directly afterward a door closed softly—"

"Just a moment, Mr. Greene," interrupted Vance. "Can you be a little more definite about that noise? What did it sound like?"

"I didn't pay any attention to it," was the whining reply. "It might have been almost anything. It was like someone laying down a bundle, or dragging something across the floor; or it might have been old Sproot in his bedroom slippers, though it didn't sound like him—that is, I didn't associate him with the sound when I heard it."

"And after that?"

"After that? I lay awake in bed ten or fifteen minutes longer. I was restless and-and expectant; so I turned on the lights to see what time it was, and smoked half a cigarette—"

"It was twenty-five minutes past eleven, I understand."

"That's right. Then a few minutes later I put out the light, and must have gone right to sleep."

There was a pause, and Heath drew himself up aggressively.

"Say, Greene: know anything about fire-arms?" He shot the question out brutally.

Rex stiffened. His lips sagged open, and his cigarette fell to the floor. The muscles of his thin jowls twitched, and he glanced menacingly at the sergeant.

"What do you mean?" The words were like a snarl; and I noticed that his whole body was quivering.

"Know what became of your brother's revolver?" pursued Heath relentlessly, thrusting out his jaw.

Rex's mouth was working in a paroxysm of fury and fear, but he seemed unable to articulate.

"Where have you got it hidden?" Again Heath's voice sounded harshly.

"Revolver?... Hidden?..." At last Rex had succeeded in formulating his words. "You—filthy rotter! If you've got any idea that I have the revolver, go up and tear my room apart and look for it—and be damned to you!" His eyes flashed, and his upper lip lifted over his teeth. But there was fright in his attitude as well as rage.

Heath had leaned forward and was about to say something further, when Vance quickly rose and laid a restraining hand on the sergeant's arm. He was too late, however, to avoid the thing he evidently hoped to forestall. What Heath had already said had sufficient stimulus to bring about a terrible reaction in his victim.

"What do I care what that unspeakable swine says?" he shouted, pointing a palsied finger at the sergeant. Oaths and vituperation welled shrilly from the twitching lips. His insensate wrath seemed to pass all ordinary bounds. His enormous head was thrust forward

like a python's; and his face was cyanosed and contorted.

Vance stood poised, watching him alertly; and Markham had instinctively moved back his chair. Even Heath was startled by Rex's inordinate malignity.

What might have happened I don't know, had not Von Blon at that moment stepped swiftly into the room and placed a restraining hand on the youth's shoulder.

"Rex!" he said, in a calm, authoritative voice. "Get a grip on yourself. You're disturbing Ada."

The other ceased speaking abruptly; but his ferocity of manner did not wholly abate. He shook off the doctor's hand angrily and swung round, facing Von Blon.

"What are you interfering for?" he cried. "You're always meddling in this house, coming here when you're not sent for, and nosing into our affairs. Mother's paralysis is only an excuse. You've said yourself she'll never get well, and yet you keep coming, bringing her medicine and sending bills." He gave the doctor a crafty leer. "Oh, you don't deceive me. I know why you come here! It's Sibella!" Again he thrust out his head and grinned shrewdly. "She'd be a good catch for a doctor, too—wouldn't she? Plenty of money—"

Suddenly he halted. His eyes did not leave Von Blon, but he shrank back and the twitching of his face began once more. A quivering finger went up; and as he spoke his voice rose excitedly.

"But Sibella's money isn't enough. You want ours along with hers. So you're arranging for her to inherit all of it. That's it—that's it! You're the one who's been doing all this... Oh, my God! You've got Chester's gun—you took it! And you've got a key to the house—easy enough for you to have one made. That's how you got in."

Von Blon shook his head sadly and smiled with rueful tolerance. It was an embarrassing moment, but he carried it off well.

"Come, Rex," he said quietly, like a person speaking to a refractory child. "You've said enough—"

"Have I!" cried the youth, his eyes gleaming unnaturally. "You knew Chester had the revolver. You went camping with him the summer he got it—he told me so the other day, after Julia was killed." His beady little eyes seemed to stare from his head; a spasm shook his emaciated body; and his fingers again began worrying the hem of his jacket.

Von Blon stepped swiftly forward and, putting a hand on each of his shoulders, shook him.

"That'll do, Rex!" The words were a sharp command. "If you carry on this way, we'll have to lock you up in an institution."

The threat was uttered in what I considered an unnecessarily brutal tone; but it had the desired effect. A haunting fear showed in Rex's eyes. He seemed suddenly to go limp, and he docilely permitted Von Blon to lead him from the room.

"A sweet specimen, that Rex," commented Vance. "Not a person one would choose for a boon companion. Aggravated macrocephalia—cortical irritation. But I say, Sergeant; really, y' know, you shouldn't have prodded the lad so."

Heath grunted.

"You can't tell me that guy don't know something. And you can bet your sweet life I'm going to search his room damn' good for that gun."

"It appears to me," rejoined Vance, "he's too flighty to have planned the massacre in this house. He might blow up under pressure and hit somebody with a handy missile; but I doubt if he'd lay any deep schemes and bide his time."

"He's good and scared about something," persisted Heath morosely.

"Hasn't he cause to be? Maybe he thinks the elusive gunman hereabouts will choose him as the next target."

"If there *is* another gunman, he showed damn bad taste not picking Rex out first." It was evident the sergeant was still smarting under the epithets that had so recently been directed at him.

Von Blon returned to the drawing-room at this moment, looking troubled.

"I've got Rex quieted," he said. "Gave him five grains of luminal. He'll sleep for a few hours and wake up penitent. I've rarely seen him quite so violent as he was to-day. He's supersensitive—cerebral neurasthenia; and he's apt to fly off the handle. But he's never dangerous." He scanned our faces swiftly. "One of you gentlemen must have said something pretty severe."

Heath looked sheepish. "I asked him where he'd hid the gun."

"Ah!" The doctor gave the sergeant a look of questioning reproach. "Too bad! We have to be careful with Rex. He's all right so long as he isn't opposed too strongly. But I don't just see, sir, what your object could have been in questioning him about the revolver. You surely don't suspect him of having had a hand in these terrible shootings."

"You tell me who did the shootings, doc," retorted Heath pugnaciously, "and then I'll tell you who I *don't* suspect."

"I regret that I am unable to enlighten you." Von Blon's tone exuded its habitual pleasantness. "But I assure you Rex had no part in them. They're quite out of keeping with his pathologic state."

"That's the defence of half the high-class killers we get the goods on," countered Heath.

"I see I can't argue with you." Von Blon sighed regretfully, and turned an engaging countenance in Markham's direction. "Rex's absurd accusations puzzled me deeply, but, since this officer admits he practically accused the boy of having the revolver, the situation becomes perfectly clear. A common form of instinctive self-protection, this attempting to shift blame on others. You can see, of course, that Rex was merely trying to turn suspicion upon me so as to free himself. It's unfortunate, for he and I were always good friends. Poor Rex!"

"By the by, doctor," came Vance's indolent voice; "that point about your being with Mr. Chester Greene on the camping-trip when he first secured the gun: was that correct? Or was it merely a fancy engendered by Rex's self-protective instinct?"

Von Blon smiled with faultless urbanity and, putting his head a little on one side, appeared to recall the past.

"It may be correct," he admitted. "I was once with Chester on a camping- trip. Yes, it's quite likely—though I shouldn't like to state it definitely. It was so long ago."

"Fifteen years, I think, Mr. Greene said. Ah, yes—a long time ago. *Eheu! fugaces, Postume, Postume, labuntur anni*. It's very depressin'. And do you recall, doctor, if Mr. Greene had a revolver along on that particular outing?"

"Since you mention it, I believe I do recall his having one, though again I should choose not to be definite on the subject."

"Perhaps you may recollect if he used it for target practice." Vance's tone was dulcet and uneager. "Popping away at tree-boles and tin cans and what not, don't y' know."

Von Blon nodded reminiscently.

"Ye—es. It's quite possible..."

"And you yourself may have done a bit of desult'ry popping, what?"

"To be sure, I may have." Von Blon spoke musingly, like one recalling childish pranks. "Yes, it's wholly possible."

Vance lapsed into a disinterested silence, and the doctor, after a moment's hesitation, rose.

"I must be going, I'm afraid." And with a gracious bow he started toward the door. "Oh, by the way," he said, pausing, "I almost forgot that Mrs. Greene told me she desired to see you gentlemen before you went. Forgive me if I suggest that it might be wise to humour her. She's something of a dowager, and her invalidism has made her rather irritable and exacting."

"I'm glad you mentioned Mrs. Greene, doctor." It was Vance who spoke. "I've been intending to ask you about her. What is the nature of her paralysis?"

Von Blon appeared surprised.

"Why, a sort of paraplegia dolorosa—that is, a paralysis of the legs and lower part of the body, accompanied by severe pains due to pressure of the indurations on the spinal cord and nerves. No spasticity of the limbs has supervened, however. Came on very suddenly without any premonitory symptoms about ten years ago—probably the result of transverse myelitis. There's nothing really to be done but to keep her as comfortable as possible with symptomatic treatment, and to tone up the heart action. A sixtieth of strychnine three times a day takes care of the circulation."

"Couldn't by any chance be a hysterical akinesia?"

"Good Lord, no! There's no hysteria." Then his eyes widened in amazement. "Oh, I see! No; there's no possibility of recovery, even partial. It's organic paralysis."

"And atrophy?"

"Oh, yes. Muscular atrophy is now pronounced."

"Thank you very much." Vance lay back with half closed eyes.

"Oh, not at all.—And remember, Mr. Markham, that I always stand ready to help in any way I can. Please don't hesitate to call on me." He bowed again, and went out.

Markham got up and stretched his legs.

"Come; we've been summoned to appear." His facetiousness was a patent effort to shake off the depressing gloom of the case.

Mrs. Greene received us with almost unctuous cordiality.

"I knew you'd grant the request of a poor old useless cripple," she said, with an appealing smile; "though I'm used to being ignored. No one pays any attention to my wishes."

The nurse stood at the head of the bed arranging the pillows beneath the old lady's shoulders.

"Is that comfortable now?" she asked.

Mrs. Greene made a gesture of annoyance.

"A lot you care whether I'm comfortable or not! Why can't you let me alone, nurse? You're always disturbing me. There was nothing wrong with the pillows. And I don't want you in here now anyway. Go and sit with Ada."

The nurse drew a long, patient breath, and went silently from the room, closing the door behind her.

Mrs. Greene reverted to her former ingratiating manner.

"No one understands my needs the way Ada does, Mr. Markham. What a relief it will be when the dear child gets well enough to care for me again! But I mustn't complain. The nurse does the best she knows how, I suppose. Please sit down, gentlemen ...yet what wouldn't I give if I could only stand up the way you can. No one realizes what it means to be a helpless paralytic."

Markham did not avail himself of the invitation, but waited until she had finished speaking and then said "Please believe that you have my deepest sympathy, madam...You sent for me, Doctor Von Blon said."

"Yes!" She looked at him calculatingly. "I wanted to ask you a favour."

She paused, and Markham bowed but did not answer.

"I wanted to request you to drop this investigation. I've had enough worry and disturbance as it is. But I don't count. It's the family I'm thinking of—the good name of the Greenses." A note of pride came into her voice. "What need is there to drag us through the mire and make us an object of scandalous gossip for the *canaille*? I want peace and quiet, Mr. Markham. I won't be here much longer; and why should my house be overrun with policemen just because Julia and Chester have—suffered their just deserts for neglecting me and letting me suffer here alone? I'm an old woman and a cripple, and I'm deserving of a little consideration."

Her face clouded, and her voice became harsh.

"You haven't any right to come here and upset my house and annoy me in this outrageous fashion! I haven't had a minute's rest since all this excitement began, and my spine is paining me so I can hardly breathe." She took several stertorous breaths, and her eyes flashed indignantly. "I don't expect any better treatment from my children—they're hard and thoughtless. But you, Mr. Markham—an outsider, a stranger: why should you want to torture me with all this commotion? It's outrageous—inhuman!"

"I am sorry if the presence of the officers of the law in your house disturbs you," Markham told her gravely; "but I have no alternative. When a crime has been committed it is my duty to investigate, and to use every means at my disposal to bring the guilty person to justice."

"Justice!" The old lady repeated the word scornfully. "Justice has already been done. I've been avenged for the treatment I've received these many years, lying here helpless."

There was something almost terrifying in the woman's cruel and unrelenting hatred of her children, and in the cold-blooded satisfaction she seemed to take that two of them had been punished by death. Markham, naturally sympathetic, revolted against her attitude.

"However much gratification you may feel at the murder of your son and daughter, madam," he said coldly, "it does not release me from my duty to find the murderer. Was there anything else you wished to speak to me about?"

For a while she sat silent, her face working with impotent passion. The gaze she bent on Markham was almost ferocious. But

presently the vindictive vigilance of her eyes relaxed, and she drew a deep sigh.

"No; you may go now. I have nothing more to say. And, anyway, who cares about an helpless woman like me? I should have learned by this time that nobody thinks of my comfort, lying here all alone, unable to help myself—a nuisance to everyone..."

Her whining, self-pitying voice followed us as we made our escape.

"Y' know, Markham," said Vance, as we came into the lower hall, "the Empress Dowager is not entirely devoid of reason. Her suggestion is deserving of consideration. The clarion voice of duty may summon you to this quest, but—my word!—whither shall one quest? There's nothing sane in this house—nothing that lends itself to ordin'ry normal reason. Why not take her advice and chuck it? Even if you learn the truth, it's likely to prove a sort of Pyrrhic vict'ry. I'm afraid it'll be more terrible than the crimes themselves."

Markham did not deign to answer; he was familiar with Vance's heresies, and he also knew that Vance himself would be the last person to throw over an unsolved problem.

"We've got something to go on, Mr. Vance," submitted Heath solemnly, but without enthusiasm. "There's those foot-tracks, for instance; and we've got the missing' gun to find. Dubois is upstairs now taking finger- prints. And the reports on the servants'll be coming along soon. There's no telling what'll turn up in a few days. I'll have a dozen men working on this case before night."

"Such zeal, Sergeant! But it's in the atmosphere of this old house—not in tangible clues—that the truth lies hidden. It's somewhere in these old jumbled rooms; it's peering out from dark corners and from behind doors. It's here—in this very hall, perhaps."

His tone was fraught with troubled concern, and Markham looked at him sharply.

"I think you're right, Vance," he muttered. "But how is one to get at it?"

"Pon my soul, I don't know. How does one get at spectres, anyway? I've never had much intimate intercourse with ghosts, don't y' know."

"You're talking rubbish!" Markham jerked on his overcoat, and turned to Heath. "You go ahead, Sergeant; and keep in touch with me. If nothing develops from your inquiries, we'll discuss the next step."

And he and Vance and I went out to the waiting car.

## 12. A MOTOR RIDE

(November 12th-November 25th.)

THE inquiry was pushed according to the best traditions of the Police Department. Captain Carl Hagedorn, the fire-arms expert, made a minute scientific examination of the bullets.<sup>[13]</sup> The same revolver, he found, had fired all three shots: the peculiar rifling told him this; and he was able to state that the revolver was an old Smith & Wesson of a style whose manufacture had been discontinued. But, while these findings offered substantiation to the theory that Chester Greene's missing gun was the one used by the murderer, they added nothing to the facts already established or suspected. Deputy Inspector Conrad Brenner, the burglar-tools expert, had conducted an exhaustive examination of the scene for evidential signs of a forced entrance, but had found no traces whatever of a housebreaker.<sup>[14]</sup>

Dubois and his assistant Bellamy—the two leading finger-print authorities of the New York Police Department—went so far as to take finger-prints of every member of the Greene household, including Doctor Von Blon; and these were compared with the impressions found in the hallways and in the rooms where the shootings had occurred. But when this tedious process was over not an unidentified-print remained; and all those that had been found and photographed were logically accounted for.

Chester Greene's galoshes were taken to Head-quarters and turned over to Captain Jerym, who carefully compared them with the measurements and the patterns made by Snitkin. No new fact concerning them, however, was discovered. The tracks in the snow, Captain Jerym reported, had been made either by the galoshes given him or by another pair of the exact size and last. Beyond this statement he could not, he said, conscientiously go.

It was established that no one in the Greene mansion, with the exception of Chester and Rex, owned galoshes; and Rex's were number seven—three sizes smaller than those found in Chester's clothes-closet. Sproot used only storm-rubbers, size eight; and Doctor Von Blon, who affected gaiters in winter, always wore rubber sandals during stormy weather.

The search for the missing revolver occupied several days. Heath turned the task over to men trained especially in this branch of work, and supplied them with a search-warrant in case they should meet with any opposition. But no obstacle was put in their way. The house was systematically ransacked from basement to attic. Even Mrs. Greene's quarters were subjected to a search. The old lady had at first objected, but finally gave her consent, and even seemed a bit disappointed when the men had finished. The only room that was not gone over was Tobias Greene's library. Owing to the fact that Mrs. Greene never let the key go out of her possession, and had permitted no one to enter the room since her husband's death, Heath decided not to force the issue when she refused point-blank to deliver the key. Every other nook and corner of the house, however, was combed by the sergeant's men. But no sign of the revolver rewarded their efforts.

The autopsies revealed nothing at variance with Doctor Doremus's preliminary findings. Julia and Chester had each died instantaneously from the effects of a bullet entering the heart, shot from a revolver held at close range. No other possible cause of death was present in either body; and there were no indications of a struggle.

No unknown or suspicious person had been seen near the Greene mansion on the night of either murder, although several people were found who had been in the neighbourhood at the time; and a bootmaker, who lived on the second floor of the Narcoss Flats in 53rd Street, opposite to the house, stated that he had been sitting at his window, smoking his bedtime pipe, during the time of both shootings, and could swear that no one had passed down that end of the street.

However, the guard which had been placed over the Greene mansion was not relaxed. Men were on duty day and night at both entrances to the estate, and everyone entering or leaving the premises was closely scrutinized. So close a watch was kept that strange tradesmen found it inconvenient and at times difficult to make ordinary deliveries.

The reports that were turned in concerning the servants were unsatisfactory from the standpoint of detail; but all the facts unearthed tended to eliminate each subject from any possible connection with the crimes. Barton, the younger maid, who had quitted the Greene establishment the morning after the second tragedy, proved to be the daughter of respectable working people living in Jersey City. Her record was good, and her companions all appeared to be harmless members of her own class.

Hemming, it turned out, was a widow who, up to the time of her employment with the Greenes, had kept house for her husband, an iron-worker, in Altoona, Pa. She was remembered even there among her former neighbours as a religious fanatic who had led her husband sternly and exultantly in the narrow path of enforced rectitude. When he was killed by a furnace explosion she declared it was the hand of God striking him down for some secret sin. Her associates were few; they were in the main members of a small congregation of East Side Anabaptists.

The summer gardener of the Greenes—a middle-aged Pole named Krinski—was discovered in a private saloon in Harlem, well under the benumbing influence of synthetic whisky—a state of beatific lassitude he had maintained, with greater or lesser steadfastness, since the end of summer. He was at once eliminated from police consideration.

The investigation into the habits and associates of Mrs. Mannheim and Sproot brought nothing whatever to light. Indeed, the habits of these two were exemplary, and their contacts with the outside world so meagre as to be regarded as almost non-existent. Sproot had no visible friends, and his acquaintances were limited to an English valet in Park Avenue and the trades-people of the neighbourhood. He was solitary by nature, and what few recreations he permitted himself were indulged in unaccompanied. Mrs. Mannheim had rarely left the premises of the Greene house since she had taken up her duties there at the time of her husband's death, and apparently knew no one in New York outside of the household.

These reports dashed whatever hopes Sergeant Heath may have harboured of finding a solution to the Greene mystery by way of a possible accomplice in the house itself.

"I guess we'll have to give up the idea of an inside job," he lamented one morning in Markham's office a few days after the shooting of Chester Greene.

Vance, who was present, eyed him lazily.

"I shouldn't say that, don't y' know, Sergeant. On the contrary, it was indubitably an inside job, though not just the variety you have in mind."

"You mean you think some member of the family did it?"

"Well—perhaps: something rather along that line."

Vance drew on his cigarette thoughtfully. "But that's not exactly what I meant. It's a situation, a set of conditions—an atmosphere, let us say—that's guilty. A subtle and deadly poison is responsible for the crimes. And that poison is generated in the Greene mansion."

"A swell time I'd have trying to arrest an atmosphere—or a poison either, for the matter of that," snorted Heath.

"Oh, there's a flesh-and-blood victim awaiting your manacles somewhere, Sergeant—the agent, so to speak, of the atmosphere."

Markham, who had been conning the various reports of the case, sighed heavily, and settled back in his chair.

"Well, I wish to Heaven," he interposed bitterly, "that he'd give us some hint as to his identity. The papers are at it hammer and tongs. There's been another delegation of reporters here this morning."

The fact was that rarely had there been in New York's journalistic history a case which had so tenaciously seized upon the public imagination. The shooting of Julia and Ada Greene had been treated sensationally but perfunctorily; but after Chester Greene's murder an entirely different spirit animated the newspaper stories. Here was something romantically sinister—something which brought back forgotten pages of criminal history.<sup>[15]</sup> Columns were devoted to accounts of the Greene family history. Genealogical archives were delved into for remote tit-bits. Old Tobias Greene's record was raked over, and stories of his early life became the common property of the man in the street. Pictures of all the members of the Greene family accompanied these spectacular tales; and the Greene mansion itself, photographed from every possible angle, was used regularly to illustrate the flamboyant accounts of the crimes so recently perpetrated there.

The story of the Greene murders spread over the entire country, and even the press of Europe found space for it. The tragedy, taken in connection with the social prominence of the family and the romantic history of its progenitors, appealed irresistibly to the morbidity and the snobbery of the public.

It was natural that the police and the District Attorney's office should be hounded by the representatives of the press; and it was also natural that both Heath and Markham should be sorely troubled by the fact that all their efforts to lay hands on the criminal had come to naught. Several conferences had been called in Markham's office, at each of which the ground had been carefully reploughed; but not one helpful suggestion had been turned up. Two weeks after the murder of Chester Greene the case began to take on the aspect of a stalemate.

During that fortnight, however, Vance had not been idle. The situation had caught and held his interest, and not once had he dismissed it from his mind since that first morning when Chester Greene had applied to Markham for help. He said little about the case, but he had attended each of the conferences; and from his casual comments I knew he was both fascinated and perplexed by the problem it presented.

So convinced was he that the Greene mansion itself held the secret to the crimes enacted there that he had made it a point to call at the house several times without Markham. Markham, in fact, had been there but once since the second crime. It was not that he was shirking his task. There was, in reality, little for him to do; and the routine duties of his office were particularly heavy at that time.<sup>[16]</sup>

Sibella had insisted that the funerals of Julia and Chester be combined in one service, which was held in the private chapel of Malcomb's Undertaking Parlours. Only a few intimate acquaintances were notified (though a curious crowd gathered outside the building, attracted by the sensational associations of the obsequies); and the interment at Woodlawn Cemetery was strictly private. Doctor Von Blon accompanied Sibella and Rex to the chapel, and sat with them during the services. Ada, though improving rapidly, was still confined to the house; and Mrs. Greene's paralysis of course made her attendance impossible, although I doubt if she would have gone in any case, for when the suggestion was made that the services be held at home she had vetoed it emphatically.

It was on the day after the funeral that Vance paid his first unofficial visit to the Greene mansion. Sibella received him without any show of surprise.

"I'm so glad you've come," she greeted him, almost gaily. "I knew you weren't a policeman the first time I saw you. Imagine a policeman smoking Régie cigarettes! And I'm dying for someone to talk to. Of course, all the people I know avoid me now as they would a pestilence. I haven't had an invitation since Julia passed from this silly life. Respect for the dead, I believe they call it. And just when I most need diversion!"

She rang for the butler and ordered tea.

"Sproul makes much better tea than he does coffee, thank Heaven!" she ran on, with a kind of nervous detachment. "What a sweet day we had yesterday! Funerals are hideous farces. I could hardly keep a straight face when the officiating reverend doctor began extolling the glories of the departed. And all the time—poor man—he was eaten up with morbid curiosity. I'm sure he enjoyed it so much that he wouldn't complain if I entirely forgot to send him a cheque for his kind words..."

The tea was served, but before Sproul had withdrawn Sibella turned to him pettishly.

"I simply can't stand any more tea. I want a Scotch high-ball." She lifted her eyes to Vance inquiringly, but he insisted that he preferred tea; and the girl drank her high-ball alone.

"I crave stimulation these days," she explained airily. "This moated grange, so to speak, is getting on my young and fretful nerves. And the burden of being a celebrity is quite overwhelming. I really have become a celebrity, you know. In fact, all the Greenes are quite famous now. I never imagined a mere murder or two could give a family such positively irrational prominence. I'll probably be in Hollywood yet."

She gave a laugh which struck me as a trifle strained. "It's just too jolly! Even mother is enjoying it. She gets all the papers and reads every word that's written about us—which is a blessing, let me tell you. She's almost forgotten to find fault; and I haven't heard a word about her spine for days. The Lord tempers the wind—or is it something about an ill wind I'm trying to quote? I always get my classical references confused..."

She ran on in this flippant vein for half an hour or so. But whether her callousness was genuine or merely a brave attempt to

counteract the pall of tragedy that hung over her I couldn't make out. Vance listened, interested and amused. He seemed to sense a certain emotional necessity in the girl to relieve her mind; but long before we went away he had led the conversation round to commonplace matters. When we rose to go Sibella insisted that we come again.

"You're so comforting, Mr. Vance," she said. "I'm sure you're not a moralist; and you haven't once condoled with me over my bereavements. Thank Heaven, we Greenes have no relatives to swoop down on us and bathe us in tears. I'm sure I'd commit suicide if we had."

Vance and I called twice more within the week, and were received cordially. Sibella's high spirits were always the same. If she felt the horror that had descended so suddenly and unexpectedly upon her home, she managed to hide it well. Only in her eagerness to talk freely and in her exaggerated efforts to avoid all sign of mourning did I sense any effects on her of the terrible experience she had been through.

Vance on none of his visits referred directly to the crimes; and I became deeply puzzled by his attitude. He was trying to learn something—that I was positive. But I failed to see what possible progress he could make by the casual methods he was pursuing. Had I not known him better I might have suspected him of being personally interested in Sibella; but such a notion I dismissed simultaneously with its formulation. I noticed, however, that after each call he became unaccountably pensive; and one evening, after we had had tea with Sibella, he sat for an hour before the fire in his living-room without turning a page of the volume of da Vinci's "Trattato della Pittura" which lay open before him.

On one of his visits to the Greene mansion he had met and talked with Rex. At first the youth had been surly and resentful of our presence; but before we went away he and Vance were discussing such subjects as Einstein's general-relativity theory, the Moulton-Chamberlin planetesimal hypothesis, and Poincaré's science of numbers, on a plane quite beyond the grasp of a mere layman like myself. Rex had warmed up to the discussion in an almost friendly manner, and at parting had even offered his hand for Vance to shake.

On another occasion Vance had asked Sibella to be permitted to pay his respects to Mrs. Greene. His apologies to her—which he gave a semi-official flavour—for all the annoyance caused by the police immediately ingratiated him in the old lady's good graces. He was most solicitous about her health, and asked her numerous questions regarding her paralysis—the nature of her spinal pains and the symptoms of her restlessness. His air of sympathetic concern drew from her an elaborate and detailed jeremiad.

Twice Vance talked to Ada, who was now up and about, but with her arm still in a sling. For some reason, however, the girl appeared almost *farouche* when approached by him. One day when we were at the house Von Blon called, and Vance seemed to go out of his way to hold him in conversation.

As I have said, I could not fathom his motive in all this apparently desultory social give-and-take. He never broached the subject of the tragedies except in the most indirect way; he appeared, rather, to avoid the topic deliberately. But I did notice that, however casual his manner, he was closely studying everyone in the house. No nuance of tone, no subtlety of reaction, escaped him. He was, I knew, storing away impressions, analyzing minute phases of conduct, and probing delicately into the psychological mainsprings of each person he talked to.

We had called perhaps four or five times at the Greene mansion when an episode occurred which must be recounted here in order to clarify a later development of the case. I thought little of it at the time, but, though seemingly trivial, it was to prove of the most sinister significance before many days had passed. In fact, had it not been for this episode there is no telling to what awful lengths the gruesome tragedy of the Greenes might have gone; for Vance—in one of those strange mental flashes of his which always seemed wholly intuitive but were, in reality, the result of long, subtle reasoning—remembered the incident at a crucial moment, and related it swiftly to other incidents which in themselves appeared trifling, but which, when co-ordinated, took on a tremendous and terrible importance.

During the second week following Chester Greene's death the weather moderated markedly. We had several beautiful clear days, crisp, sunshiny, and invigorating. The snow had almost entirely disappeared, and the ground was firm, without any of the slush that usually follows a winter thaw. On Thursday Vance and I called at the Greene mansion earlier than on any previous visit, and we saw Doctor Von Blon's car parked before the gate.

"Ah!" Vance observed. "I do hope the family Paracelsus is not departing immediately. The man lures me; and his exact relationship to the Greene family irks my curiosity."

Von Blon, as a matter of fact, was preparing to go as we entered the hallway. Sibella and Ada, bundled in their furs, stood just behind him; and it was evident that they were accompanying him.

"It was such a pleasant day," explained Von Blon, somewhat disconcertedly, "I thought I'd take the girls for a drive."

"And you and Mr. Van Dine must come with us," chimed in Sibella, smiling hospitably at Vance. "If the doctor's temperamental driving affects your heart action, I promise to take the wheel myself. I'm really an expert chauffeur."

I surprised a look of displeasure on Von Blon's face; but Vance accepted the invitation without demur; and in a few moments we were riding across town, comfortably installed in the doctor's big Daimler, with Sibella in front, next to the driver's seat, and Ada between Vance and me in the tonneau.

We went north on Fifth Avenue, entered Central Park, and, emerging at the 72nd Street entrance, headed for Riverside Drive. The Hudson River lay like a sheet of blue-grass below us, and the Jersey palisades in the still clear air of early afternoon were as plainly etched as a Degas drawing. At Dyckman Street we went up Broadway, and turned west on the Spuyten Duyvil Road to Palisade Avenue overlooking the old wooded estates along the water. We passed through a private roadway lined with hedges, turned inland again to Sycamore Avenue, and came out on the Riverdale Road. We drove through Yonkers, up North Broadway into Hastings, and then skirted the Longue Vue Hill. Beyond Dobbs Ferry we entered the Hudson Road, and at Ardsley again turned west beside the Country Club golf-links, and came out on the river level. Beyond the Ardsley Station a narrow dirt road ran up the hill along the water; and, instead of following the main highway to the east, we continued up this little-used road, emerging on a kind of plateau of wild pasture-land.

A mile or so farther on—about midway between Ardsley and Tarrytown—a small dun hill, like a boulder, loomed directly in our

path. When we came to the foot of it, the road swung sharply to the west along a curved promontory. The turn was narrow and dangerous, with the steep upward slope of the hill on one side and the precipitous, rocky descent into the river on the other. A flimsy wooden fence had been built along the edge of the drop, though what possible protection it could be to a reckless or even careless driver I could not see.

As we came to the outermost arc of the little detour Von Blon brought the car to a stop, the front wheels pointing directly toward the precipice. A magnificent vista stretched before us. We could look up and down the Hudson for miles. And there was a sense of isolation about the spot, for the hill behind us completely shut off the country inland.

We sat for several moments taking in the unusual view. Then Sibella spoke. Her voice was whimsical, but a curious note of defiance informed it.

"What a perfectly ripping spot for a murder!" she exclaimed, leaning over and looking down the steep slope of the bluff. "Why run the risk of shooting people when all you have to do is to take them for a ride to this snug little shelf, jump from the car, and let them topple—machine and all—over the precipice? Just another unfortunate auto accident—and no one the wiser! ...Really, I think I'll take up crime in a serious way."

I felt a shudder pass over Ada's body, and I noticed that her face paled. Sibella's comments struck me as particularly heartless and unthinking in view of the terrible experience through which her sister had so recently passed. The cruelty of her words evidently struck the doctor also, for he turned toward her with a look of consternation.

Vance glanced quickly at Ada, and then attempted to banish the embarrassment of the tense silence by remarking lightly:

"We refuse to take alarm, however, Miss Greene; for no one, d'ye see, could seriously consider a criminal career on a day as perfect as this. Taine's theory of climatic influences is most comfortin' in moments like this."

Von Blon said nothing, but his reproachful eyes did not leave Sibella's face.

"Oh, let us go back!" cried Ada pitifully, nestling closer under the lap-robe, as if the air had suddenly become chill.

Without a word Von Blon reversed the machine; and a moment later we were on our way back to the city.



### 13. THE THIRD TRAGEDY

(November 28th and November 30th)

THE following Sunday evening, November 28th, Markham invited Inspector Moran and Heath to the Stuyvesant Club for an informal conference. Vance and I had dined with him and were present when the two police officials arrived. We retired to Markham's favourite corner of the club's lounge-room; and soon a general discussion of the Greene murders was under way.

"I'm rather amazed," said the inspector, his voice even quieter than usual, "that nothing has turned up to focus the inquiry. In the average murder case there are numerous lines to be explored, even if the right one is not hit upon immediately. But in this affair there appears to be nothing whatever on which to concentrate."

"That fact in itself, I should say," rejoined Vance, "constitutes a distinguishing characteristic of the case which shouldn't be overlooked, don't y' know. It's a clue of vital importance, and if only we could probe its significance I think we'd be on our way toward a solution."

"A fine clue that is!" grumbled Heath. "What clue have you got, Sergeant?" asks the inspector. 'Oh, a bully clue,' says I. 'And what is it?' asks the inspector. 'The fact that there ain't *nothing* to go on!' says I."

Vance smiled.

"You're so literal, Sergeant! What I was endeavouring to express, in my purely laic capacity, was this: when there are no clues in a case—no *points de départ*, no telltale indications—one is justified in regarding everything as a clue—or, rather, as a factor in the puzzle. To be sure, the great difficulty lies in fitting together these apparently inconsequential pieces. I rather think we've at least a hundred clues in our possession; but none of them has any meaning so long as it's unrelated to the others. This affair is like one of those silly word-puzzles where all the letters are redistributed into a meaningless jumble. The task for the solver is to rearrange them into an intelligible word or sentence."

"Could you name just eight or ten of those hundred clues for me?" Heath requested ironically. "I sure would like to get busy on something definite."

"You know 'em all, Sergeant." Vance refused to fall in with the other's bantering manner. "I'd say that practically everything that has happened since the first alarm reached you might be regarded as a clue."

"Sure!" The sergeant had lapsed again into sullen gloom. "The footprints, the disappearance of the revolver, that noise Rex heard in the hall. But we've run all those leads up against a blank wall."

"Oh, those things!" Vance sent a ribbon of blue smoke upward. "Yes, they're clues of a kind. But I was referring more specifically to the conditions existing at the Greene mansion—the organisms of the environment there—the psychological elements of the situation."

"Don't get off again on your metaphysical theories and esoteric hypotheses," Markham interjected tartly. "We've either got to find a practical *modus operandi*, or admit ourselves beaten."

"But, Markham old man, you're beaten on the face of it unless you can put your chaotic facts into some kind of order. And the only way you'll be able to do that is by a process of prayerful analysis."

"You give me some facts that've got some sense to 'em," challenged Heath, "and I'll put 'em together soon enough."

"The sergeant's right," was Markham's comment. "You'll admit that as yet we haven't any significant facts to work with."

"Oh, there'll be more."

Inspector Moran sat up, and his eyes narrowed. "What do you mean by that, Mr. Vance?" It was obvious that the remark had struck some chord of agreement in him.

"The thing isn't over yet." Vance spoke with unwonted sombreness. "The picture's unfinished. There's more tragedy to come before the monstrous canvas is rounded out. And the hideous thing about it is that there's no way of stopping it. Nothing now can halt the horror that's at work. It's got to go on."

"You feel that, too!" The inspector's voice was off its normal pitch. "By God! This is the first case I've ever had that frightened me."

"Don't forget, sir," argued Heath, but without conviction, "that we got men watching the house day and night."

"There's no security in that, Sergeant," asserted Vance. "The killer is already in the house. He's part of the deadly atmosphere of the place. He's been there for years, nourished by the toxins that seep from the very stones of the walls."

Heath looked up.

"A member of the family? You said that once before."

"Not necessarily. But someone who has been tainted by the perverted situation that grew out of old Tobias's patriarchal ideas."

"We might manage to put some one in the house to keep an eye on things," suggested the Inspector. "Or, there's a possibility of prevailing upon the members of the family to separate and move to other quarters."

Vance shook his head slowly.

"A spy in the house would be useless. Isn't everyone there a spy now, watching all the others, and watching them with fear and suspicion? And as for dispersing the family: not only would you find old Mrs. Greene, who holds the purse-strings, an adamant obstacle, but you'd meet all manner of legal complications as a result of Tobias's will. No one gets a dollar. I understand, who doesn't remain in the mansion until the worms have ravaged his carcass for a full quarter of a century. And even if you succeeded in scattering the remnants of the Greene line, and locked up the house, you wouldn't have stamped out the killer. And there'll be no end of this thing until a purifying stake has been driven through his heart."

"Are you going in now for vampirism, Vance?" The case had exacerbated Markham's nerves. "Shall we draw an enchanted ring around the house and hang garlic on the door?"

Markham's extravagant comment of harassed discouragement seemed to express the hopeless state of mind of all of us, and there was a long silence. It was Heath who first came back to a practical consideration of the matter in hand.

"You spoke, Mr. Vance, about old man Greene's will. And I've been thinking that, if we knew all the terms of that will, we might find something to help us. There's millions in the estate, all of it left, I hear, to the old lady. What I'd like to know is, has she a full right to dispose of it any way she likes? And I'd also like to know what kind of a will the old lady herself has made. With all that money at stake, we might get on to a motive of some kind."

"Quite—quite!" Vance looked at Heath with undisguised admiration. "That's the most sensible suggestion that's been made thus far. I salute you, Sergeant. Yes, old Tobias's money may have some bearing on the case. Not a direct bearing, perhaps; but the influence of that money—the subterranean power it exerts—is undoubtedly tangled up in these crimes.— How about it, Markham? How does one go about finding out about other people's wills?"

Markham pondered the point.

"I don't believe there'd be any great difficulty in the present instance. Tobias Greene's will is a matter of record, of course, though it might take some little time to look it up in the Surrogate's files; and I happen to know old Buckway, the senior partner of Buckway & Aldine, the Greene solicitors. I see him here at the club occasionally, and I've done one or two small favours for him. I think I could induce him to tell me confidentially the terms of Mrs. Greene's will. I'll see what can be done to-morrow."

Half an hour later the conference broke up and we went home.

"I fear those wills are not going to help much," Vance remarked, as he sipped his high-ball before the fire late that night. "Like everything else in this harrowin' case, they'll possess some significance that can't be grasped until they're fitted into the final picture."

He rose and, going to the bookshelves, took down a small volume.

"And now I think I'll erase the Greenes from my mind *pro tempore*, and dip into the 'Satyricon.' The fusty historians pother frightfully about the reasons for the fall of Rome, whereas the eternal answer is contained in Petronius's imperishable classic of that city's decadence."

He settled himself and turned the pages of his book. But there was no concentration in his attitude, and his eyes wandered constantly from the text.

Two days later—on Tuesday, November 30th—Markham telephoned Vance shortly after ten o'clock in the morning, and asked him to come at once to the office. Vance was preparing to attend an exhibition of negro sculpture at the Modern Gallery, but this indulgence was postponed in view of the District Attorney's urgent call; and in less than half an hour we were at the Criminal Courts Building. [17]

"Ada Greene called up this morning, and asked to see me without delay," explained Markham. "I offered to send Heath out and, if necessary, to come myself later on. But she seemed particularly anxious that I shouldn't do that, and insisted on coming here: said it was a matter she could speak of more freely away from the house. She seemed somewhat upset, so I told her to come ahead. Then I phoned you and notified Heath."

Vance settled himself and lit a cigarette.

"I don't wonder she'd grasp at any chance to shake the atmosphere of her surroundings. And, Markham, I've come to the conclusion that girl knows something that would be highly valuable to our inquiry. It's quite possible, don't y' know, that she's now reached a point where she'll tell us what's on her mind."

As he spoke the sergeant was announced, and Markham briefly explained the situation to him.

"It looks to me," said Heath gloomily, but with interest, "like it was our only chance of getting a lead. We haven't learned anything ourselves that's worth a damn, and unless somebody spills a few suggestions we're up against it."

Ten minutes later Ada Greene was ushered into the office. Though her pallor had gone and her arm was no longer in a sling, she still gave one the impression of weakness. But there was none of the tremulousness or shrinking in her bearing that had heretofore characterized her.

She sat down before Markham's desk, and for a while frowned up at the sunlight, as if debating how to begin.

"It's about Rex, Mr. Markham," she said finally. "I really don't know whether I should have come here or not—it may be very disloyal of me..." She gave him a look of appealing indecision. "Oh, tell me: if a person knows something—something bad and dangerous—about someone very close and very dear, should that person tell, when it might make terrible trouble?"

"That all depends," Markham answered gravely. "In the present circumstances, if you know anything that might be helpful to a solution of the murder of your brother and sister, it's your duty to speak."

"Even if the thing were told me in confidence?" she persisted. "And the person were a member of my family?"

"Even under those conditions, I think," Markham spoke paternally. "Two terrible crimes have been committed, and nothing should be held back that might bring the murderer to justice—whoever he may be."

The girl averted her troubled face for a moment. Then she lifted her head with sudden resolution.

"I'll tell you... You know you asked Rex about the shot in my room, and he told you he didn't hear it. Well, he confided in me, Mr. Markham; and he *did* hear the shot. But he was afraid to admit it lest you might think it funny he didn't get up and give the alarm."

"Why do you think he remained in bed silent, and pretended to everyone he was asleep?" Markham attempted to suppress the keen interest the girl's information had roused in him.

"That's what I don't understand. He wouldn't tell me. But he had some reason—I know he did!—some reason that terrified him. I begged him to tell me, but the only explanation he gave was that the shot was not all he heard..."

"Not all!" Markham spoke with ill-concealed excitement. "He heard something else that, you say, terrified him? But why shouldn't he have told us about it?"

"That's the strange part of it. He got angry when I asked him. But there's something he knows—some awful secret; I feel sure of it... Oh, maybe I shouldn't have told you. Maybe it will get Rex into trouble. But I felt that you ought to know because of the frightful things that have happened. I thought perhaps you could talk to Rex and make him tell you what's on his mind."

Again she looked beseechingly at Markham, and there was the anxiety of a vague fear in her eyes.

"Oh, I do wish you'd ask him—and try to find out," she went on, in a pleading tone. "I'd feel—safer if—if..."

Markham nodded and patted her hand.

"We'll try to make him talk."

"But don't try at the house," she said quickly. "There are people— things—around; and Rex would be too frightened. Ask him to come here, Mr. Markham. Get him away from that awful place, where he can talk without being afraid that someone's listening. Rex is home now. Ask him to come here. Tell him I'm here, too. Maybe I can help you reason with him... Oh, do this for me, Mr. Markham!"

Markham glanced at the clock and ran his eye over his appointment-pad. He was, I knew, as anxious as Ada to have Rex on the carpet for a questioning; and, after a momentary hesitation, he picked up the telephone-receiver and had Swacker put him through to the Greene mansion. From what I heard of the conversation that ensued, it was plain that he experienced considerable difficulty in urging Rex to come to the office, for he had to resort to a veiled threat of summary legal action before he finally succeeded.

"He evidently fears some trap," commented Markham thoughtfully, replacing the receiver. "But he has promised to get dressed immediately and come."

A look of relief passed over the girl's face.

"There's one other thing I ought to tell you," she said hurriedly: "though it may not mean anything. The other night, in the rear of the lower hall by the stairs, I picked up a piece of paper—like a leaf torn from a notebook. And there was a drawing on it of all our bedrooms upstairs with four little crosses marked in ink—one at Julia's room, one at Chester's, one at Rex's, and one at mine. And down in the corner were several of the queerest signs, or pictures. One was a heart with three nails in it; and one looked like a parrot. Then there was a picture of what seemed to be three little stones with a line under them..."

Heath suddenly jerked himself forward, his cigar halfway to his lips.

"A parrot, and three stones! ...And say, Miss Greene, was there an arrow with numbers on it?"

"Yes!" she answered eagerly. "That was there, too."

Heath put the cigar in his mouth and chewed on it with vicious satisfaction.

"That means something, Mr. Markham," he proclaimed, trying to keep the agitation out of his voice. "Those are all symbols—graphic signs, they're called—of Continental crooks, German or Austrian mostly."

"The stones, I happen to know," put in Vance, represent the idea of the martyrdom of Saint Stephen, who was stoned to death. They're the emblem of Saint Stephen, according to the calendar of the Styrian peasantry."

"I don't know anything about that, sir," answered Heath. "But I know that European crooks use those signs."

"Oh, doubtless. I ran across a number of 'em when I was looking up the emblematic language of the gipsies. A fascinatin' study." Vance seemed uninterested in Ada's discovery.

"Have you this paper with you, Miss Greene?" asked Markham.

The girl was embarrassed and shook her head.

"I'm so sorry," she apologized. "I didn't think it was important. Should I have brought it?"

"Did you destroy it?" Heath put the question excitedly.

"Oh, I have it safely. I put it away..."

"We gotta have that paper, Mr. Markham." The sergeant had risen and come toward the district attorney's desk. "It may be just the lead we're looking for."

"If you really want it so badly," said Ada, "I can 'phone Rex to bring it with him. He'll know where to find it if I explain."

"Right That'll save me a trip." Heath nodded to Markham. "Try to catch him before he leaves, sir."

Taking up the telephone, Markham again directed Swacker to get Rex on the wire. After a brief delay the connection was made and he handed the instrument to Ada.

"Hallo, Rex dear," she said. "Don't scold me, for there's nothing to worry about... What I wanted of you is this: in our private mail-box you'll find a sealed envelope of my personal blue stationery. Please get it and bring it with you to Mr. Markham's office. And don't let anyone see you take it... That's all, Rex. Now, hurry, and we'll have lunch together downtown."

"It will be at least half an hour before Mr. Greene can get here," said Markham, turning to Vance; "and as I've a waiting-room full of people, why don't you and Van Dine take the young lady to the Stock Exchange and show her how the mad brokers disport themselves. How would you like that, Miss Greene?"

"I'd love it!" exclaimed the girl.

"Why not go along too, Sergeant?"

"Me!" Heath snorted. "I get excitement enough. I'll run over and talk to the Colonel for a while."[\[18\]](#)

Vance and Ada and I motored the few blocks to 18, Broad Street, and, taking the elevator, passed through the reception-room (where uniformed attendants peremptorily relieved us of our wraps), and came out upon the visitors' gallery overlooking the floor of the Exchange. There was an unusually active market that day. The pandemonium was almost deafening, and the feverish activity about the trading-posts resembled the riots of an excited mob. I was too familiar with the sight to be particularly impressed; and Vance, who detested noise and disorder, looked on with an air of bored annoyance. But Ada's face lighted up at once. Her eyes sparkled and the blood rushed to her cheeks. She gazed over the railing in a thrall of fascination.

"And now you see, Miss Greene, how foolish men can be," said Vance.

"Oh, but it's wonderful!" she answered. "They're alive. They feel things. They have something to fight for."

"You think you'd like it?" smiled Vance.

"I'd adore it. I've always longed for something exciting—something... like that..." She extended her hand toward the milling crowds below.

It was easy to understand her reaction after her years of monotonous service to an invalid in the dreary Greene mansion.

At the moment I happened to look up, and, to my surprise, Heath was standing in the doorway scanning the group of visitors. He appeared troubled and unusually grim, and there was a nervous intentness in the way he moved his head. I raised my hand to attract his attention, and he immediately came to where we stood.

"The Chief wants you at the office right away, Mr. Vance." There was an ominousness in his tone. "He sent me over to get you."

Ada looked at him steadily, and a pallor of fear overspread her face.

"Well, well!" Vance shrugged in mock resignation.

"Just when we were getting interested in the sights. But we must obey the Chief—eh, what, Miss Greene?"

But, despite his attempt to make light of Markham's unexpected summons, Ada was strangely silent; and as we rode back to the office she did not speak but sat tensely, her unseeing eyes staring straight ahead.

It seemed an interminable time before we reached the Criminal Courts Building. The traffic was congested; and there was even a long delay at the elevator. Vance appeared to take the situation calmly; but Heath's lips were compressed, and he breathed heavily through his nose, like a man labouring under tense excitement.

As we entered the District Attorney's office Markham rose and looked at the girl with a great tenderness.

"You must be brave, Miss Greene," he said, in a quiet, sympathetic voice. "Something tragic and unforeseen has happened. And as you will have to be told it sooner or later—"

"It's Rex!" She sank limply into a chair facing Markham's desk.

"Yes," he said softly; "it's Rex. Sproot called up a few minutes after you had gone..."

"And he's been shot—like Julia and Chester!" Her words were scarcely audible, but they brought a sense of horror into the dingy old office.

Markham inclined his head.

"Not five minutes after you telephoned to him someone entered his room and shot him."

A dry sob shook the girl, and she buried her face in her arms.

Markham stepped round the desk and placed his hand gently on her shoulder.

"We've got to face it, my child," he said. "We're going to the house at once to see what can be done; and you'd better come in the car with us."

"Oh, I don't want to go back," she moaned. "I'm afraid—I'm afraid! ..."

## 14. FOOTPRINTS ON THE CARPET

(Tuesday, November 30th; noon)

MARKHAM had considerable difficulty in persuading Ada to accompany us. The girl seemed almost in a panic of fright. Moreover, she held herself indirectly responsible for Rex's death. But at last she permitted us to lead her down to the car.

Heath had already telephoned to the Homicide Bureau, and his arrangements for the investigation were complete when we started up Centre Street. At Police Headquarters Snitkin and another Central Office man named Burke were waiting for us, and crowded into the tonneau of Markham's car. We made excellent time to the Greene mansion, arriving there in less than twenty minutes.

A plain-clothes man lounged against the iron railing at the end of the street a few yards beyond the gate of the Greene grounds, and at a sign from Heath came forward at once.

"What about it, Santos?" the sergeant demanded gruffly. "Who's been in and out of here this morning?"

"What's the big idea?" the man retorted indignantly. "That old bimbo of a butler came out about nine and returned in less than half an hour with a package. Said he'd been to Third Avenue to get some dog-biscuits. The family sawbones drove up at quarter past ten—that's his car across the street." He pointed to Von Blon's Daimler, which was parked diagonally opposite. "He's still inside. Then, about ten minutes after the doc arrived, this young lady"—he indicated Ada—"came out and walked toward Avenue A, where she hopped a taxi. And that's every man, woman, or child that's passed in or out of these gates since I relieved Cameron at eight o'clock this morning."

"And Cameron's report?"

"Nobody all night."

"Well, someone got in some way," growled Heath. "Run along the west wall there and tell Donnelly to come here *pronto*."

Santos disappeared through the gate, and a moment later we could see him hurrying through the side yard toward the garage. In a few minutes Donnelly—the man set to watch the postern gate—came hurrying up.

"Who got in the backway this morning?" barked Heath.

"Nobody, Sergeant. The cook went marketing about ten o'clock, and two regular deliverymen left packages. That's every one who's been through the rear gate since yesterday."

"Is that so!" Heath was viciously sarcastic. "I'm telling you—"

"Oh, all right, all right." The sergeant turned to Burke. "You get up on this wall and make the rounds. See if you can find where anyone has climbed over. And you, Snitkin, look over the yard for footprints. When you guys finish, report to me. I'm going inside."

We went up the front walk, which had been swept clean, and Sproot admitted us to the house. His face was as blank as ever, and he took our coats with his usual obsequious formality.

"You'd better go to your room now, Miss Greene," said Markham, placing his hand kindly on Ada's arm. "Lie down, and try to get a little rest. You look tired. I'll be in to see you before I go."

The girl obeyed submissively without a word.

"And you, Sproot," he ordered; "come in the living-room."

The old butler followed us and stood humbly before the centre-table, where Markham seated himself.

"Now, let's hear your story."

Sproot cleared his throat and stared out of the window.

"There's very little to tell, sir. I was in the butler's pantry, polishing the glass-ware, when I heard the shot—"

"Go back a little further," interrupted Markham. "I understand you made a trip to Third Avenue at nine this morning."

"Yes, sir: Miss Sibella bought a Pomeranian yesterday, and she asked me to get some dog-biscuits after breakfast."

"Who called at the house this morning?"

"No one, sir—that is, no one but Doctor Von Blon."

"All right. Now tell us everything that happened."

"Nothing happened, sir—nothing unusual, that is—until poor Mr. Rex was shot. Miss Ada went out a few minutes after Doctor Von Blon arrived; and a little past eleven o'clock you telephoned to Mr. Rex. Then shortly afterward you telephoned a second time to Mr. Rex; and I returned to the pantry. I had only been there a few minutes when I heard the shot—"

"What time would you say that was?"

"About twenty minutes after eleven, sir."

"Then what?"

"I dried my hands on my apron and stepped into the dining-room to listen. I was not quite sure that the shot had been fired inside the house, but I thought I'd better investigate. So I went upstairs and, as Mr. Rex's door was open, I looked in his room first. There I saw the poor young man lying on the floor with the blood running from a small wound in his forehead. I called Doctor Von Blon—"

"Where was the doctor?" Vance put the question. Sproot hesitated, and appeared to think.

"He was upstairs, sir; and he came at once—"

"Oh—upstairs! Roaming about vaguely, I presume—a little here, a little there, what?" Vance's eyes bored into the butler. "Come, come, Sproot. Where was the doctor?"

"I think, sir, he was in Miss Sibella's room."

"*Cogito, cogito...* Well, drum your encephalon a bit and try to reach a conclusion. From what sector of space did the corporeal body of Doctor Von Blon emerge after you had called him?"

"The fact is, sir, he came out of Miss Sibella's door."

"Well, well. Fancy that! And, such being the case, one might conclude— without too great a curfuffling of one's brains—that,

preceding his issuing from that particular door, he was actually in Miss Sibella's room?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Dash it all, Sproot! You know deuced well he was there."

"Well—yes, sir."

"And now suppose you continue with your odyssey."

"It was more like the *Iliad*, if I may say so. More tragic-like, if you understand what I mean; although Mr. Rex was not exactly a Hector. However that may be sir, Doctor Von Blon came immediately—"

"He had not heard the shot, then?"

"Apparently not, for he seemed very much startled when he saw Mr. Rex. And Miss Sibella, who followed him into Mr. Rex's room, was startled, too."

"Did they make any comment?"

"As to that I couldn't say. I came downstairs at once and telephoned to Mr. Markham."

As he spoke Ada appeared at the archway, her eyes wide.

"Someone's been in my room," she announced, in a frightened voice. "The French doors to the balcony were partly open when I went upstairs just now, and there were dirty snow-tracks across the floor... Oh, what does it mean? Do you think—?"

Markham had jerked himself forward.

"You left the French doors shut when you went out?"

"Yes, of course," she answered. "I rarely open them in winter."

"And were they locked?"

"I'm not sure, but I think so. They must have been locked—though how could anyone have got in unless I'd forgotten to turn the key?"

Heath had risen and stood listening to the girl's story with grim bewilderment.

"Probably the bird with those galoshes again," he mumbled. "I'll get Jerym himself up here this time." Markham nodded and turned back to Ada.

"Thank you for telling us, Miss Greene. Suppose you go to some other room and wait for us. We want your room left just as you found it until we've had time to examine it."

"I'll go to the kitchen and stay with cook. I—I don't want to be alone." And with a catch of her breath she left us.

"Where's Doctor Von Blon now?" Markham asked Sproot.

"With Mrs. Greene, sir."

"Tell him we're here and would like to see him at once."

The butler bowed and went out.

Vance was pacing up and down, his eyes almost closed.

"It grows madder every minute," he said. "It was insane enough without those foot-tracks and that open door. There's something devilish going on here, Markham. There's demonology and witchcraft afoot, or something strangely close to it. I say, is there anything in the Pandects or the Justinian Code relating to the proper legal procedure against diabolic possession or spiritism?"

Before Markham could rebuke him Von Blon entered. His usual suavity had disappeared. He bowed jerkily without speaking, and smoothed his moustache nervously with an unsteady hand.

"Sproot tells me, doctor," said Markham, "that you did not hear the shot fired in Rex's room."

"No!" The fact seemed both to puzzle and disturb him. "I can't make it out either, for Rex's door into the hall was open."

"You were in Miss Sibella's room, were you not?" Vance had halted, and stood studying the doctor. Von Blon lifted his eyebrows.

"I was. Sibella had been complaining about—"

"A sore throat or something of the kind, no doubt," finished Vance. "But that's immaterial. The fact is that neither you nor Miss Sibella heard the shot. Is that correct?"

The doctor inclined his head. "I knew nothing of it till Sproot knocked on the door and beckoned me across the hall."

"And Miss Sibella accompanied you into Rex's room?"

"She came in just behind me, I believe. But I told her not to touch anything, and sent her immediately back to her room. When I came out into the hall again I heard Sproot phoning the District Attorney's office, and thought I'd better wait till the police arrived. After talking over the situation with Sibella I informed Mrs. Greene of the tragedy, and remained with her until Sproot told me of your arrival."

"You saw no one else upstairs, or heard no suspicious noise?"

"No one—nothing. The house, in fact, was unusually quiet."

"Do you recall if Miss Ada's door was open?"

The doctor pondered a moment. "I don't recall—which means it was probably closed. Otherwise I would have noticed it."

"And how is Mrs. Greene this morning?" Vance's question, put negligently, sounded curiously irrelevant. Von Blon gave a start.

"She seemed somewhat more comfortable when I first saw her, but the news of Rex's death disturbed her considerably. When I left her just now she was complaining about the shooting pains in her spine."

Markham had got up and now moved restlessly toward the archway.

"The Medical Examiner will be here any minute," he said; "and I want to look over Rex's room before he arrives. You might come with us, doctor.— And you, Sproot, had better remain at the front door."

We went upstairs quietly: I think it was in all our minds that we should not advertise our presence to Mrs. Greene. Rex's room, like all those in the Greene mansion, was spacious. It had a large window at the front and another at the side. There were no draperies to shut out the light, and the slanting midday sun of winter poured in. The walls, as Chester had once told us, were lined with books; and pamphlets and papers were piled in every available nook. The chamber resembled a student's workshop more than a bedroom.

In front of the Tudor fire-place in the centre of the left wall—a duplication of the fire-place in Ada's room—sprawled the body of

Rex Greene. His left arm was extended, but his right arm was crooked, and the fingers were tightened, as if holding some object. His domelike head was turned a little to one side; and a thin stream of blood ran down his temple to the floor from a tiny aperture over the right eye.

Heath studied the body for several minutes.

"He was shot standing still, Mr. Markham. He collapsed in a heap and then straightened out a little after he'd hit the floor."

Vance was bending over the dead man with a puzzled expression.

"Markham, there's something curious and inconsistent here," he said. "It was broad daylight when this thing happened, and the lad was shot from the front—there are even powder marks on the face. But his expression is perfectly natural. No sign of fear or astonishment—rather peaceful and unconcerned, in fact... It's incredible. The murderer and the pistol certainly weren't invisible."

Heath nodded slowly.

"I noticed that too, sir. It's damn' peculiar." He bent more closely over the body. "That wound looks to me like a thirty-two," he commented, turning to the doctor for confirmation.

"Yes," said Von Blon. "It appears to have been made with the same weapon that was used against the others."

"It was the same weapon," Vance pronounced sombrely, taking out his cigarette-case with thoughtful deliberation. "And it was the same killer who used it." He smoked a moment, his troubled gaze resting on Rex's face. "But why was it done at just this time—in the daylight, with the door open, and when there were people close at hand? Why didn't the murderer wait until night? Why did he run such a needless risk?"

"Don't forget," Markham reminded him, "that Rex was on the point of coming to my office to tell me something."

"But who knew he was about to indulge in revelations? He was shot within ten minutes of your call—" He broke off and turned quickly to the doctor. "What telephone extensions are there in the house?"

"There are three, I believe," Von Blon spoke easily. "There's one in Mrs. Greene's room, one in Sibella's room, and, I think, one in the kitchen. The main phone is, of course, in the lower front hall."

"A regular central office," growled Heath. "Almost anybody coulda listened in." Suddenly he fell on his knees beside the body and unflexed the fingers of the right hand.

"I'm afraid you won't find that cryptic drawing, Sergeant," murmured Vance. "If the murderer shot Rex in order to seal his mouth the paper will surely be gone. Anyone overhearing the phone calls, d'ye see, would have learned of the envelope he was to fetch along."

"I guess you're right, sir. But I'm going to have a look."

He felt under the body and then systematically went through the dead man's pockets. But he found nothing even resembling the blue envelope mentioned by Ada. At last he rose to his feet.

"It's gone, all right."

Then another idea occurred to him. Going hurriedly into the hall, he called down the stairs to Sproot. When the butler appeared Heath swung on him savagely.

"Where's the private mail-box?"

"I don't know that I exactly understand you," Sproot's answer was placid and unruffled. "There is a mail-box just inside the front door. Do you refer to that, sir?"

"No! You know damn' well I don't. I want to know where the private—get me?—*private* mail-box is, *in the house*."

"Perhaps you are alluding to the little silver pyx for outgoing mail on the table in the lower hall."

"Pyx, is it!" The sergeant's sarcasm was stupendous. "Well, go down and bring me everything that's in this here pyx.—No! Wait a minute—I'll keep you company... Pyx!" He took Sproot by the arm and fairly dragged him from the room.

A few moments later he returned, crestfallen. "Empty!" was his laconic announcement.

"But don't give up hope entirely just because your cabalistic diagram has disappeared," Vance exhorted him. "I doubt if it would have helped you much. This case isn't a rebus. It's a complex mathematical formula, filled with moduli, infinitesimals, quantics, faciends, derivatives, and coefficients. Rex himself might have solved it if he hadn't been shoved off the earth so soon." His eyes wandered over the room. "And I'm not at all sure he hadn't solved it."

Markham was growing impatient.

"We'd better go down to the drawing-room and wait for Doctor Doremus and the men from Head-quarters," he suggested. "We can't learn anything here."

We went out into the hall, and as we passed Ada's door Heath threw it open and stood on the threshold surveying the room. The French doors leading to the balcony were slightly ajar, and the wind from the west was flapping their green chintz curtains. On the light beige rug were several damp discoloured cracks leading round the foot of the bed to the hall door where we stood. Heath studied the marks for a moment, and then drew the door shut again.

"They're footprints, all right," he remarked. "Someone tracked in the dirty snow from the balcony and forgot to shut the glass doors."

We were scarcely seated in the drawing-room when there came a knocking on the front door; and Sproot admitted Snitkin and Burke.

"You first, Burke," ordered the sergeant, as the two officers appeared.

"Any signs of an entry over the wall?"

"Not a one." The man's overcoat and trousers were smudged from top to bottom. "I crawled all round the top of the wall, and I'm here to tell you that nobody left any traces anywheres. If any guy got over that wall, he vaulted."

"Fair enough.—And now you, Snitkin."

"I got news for you." The detective spoke with overt triumph. "Somebody's walked up those outside steps to the stone balcony on the west side of the house. And he walked up 'em this morning after the snowfall at nine o'clock, for the tracks are fresh. Furthermore, they're the same size as the ones we found last time on the front walk."

"Where do these new tracks come from?" Heath leaned forward eagerly.

"That's the hell of it, Sergeant. They come from the front walk right below the steps to the front door; and there's no tracing 'em

farther back because the front walk's been swept clean."

"I mighta known it," grumbled Heath. "And the tracks are only going one way?"

"That's all. They leave the walk a few feet below the front door, swing round the corner of the house, and go up the steps to the balcony. The guy who made 'em didn't come down that way."

The sergeant puffed disappointedly on his cigar.

"So he went up the balcony steps, entered the French doors, crossed Ada's room to the hall, did his dirty work, and then—disappeared! A sweet case this is!" He clicked his tongue with disgust.

"The man may have gone out by the front door," suggested Markham.

The sergeant made a wry face and bellowed for Sproot, who entered immediately.

"Say, which way did you go upstairs when you heard the shot?"

"I went up the servants' stairs, sir."

"Then someone mighta gone down the front stairs at the same time without your seeing him?"

"Yes, sir; it's quite possible."

"That's all."

Sproot bowed and again took up his post at the front door.

"Well, it looks like that's what happened, sir," Heath commented to Markham. "Only how did he get in and out of the grounds without being seen? That's what I want to know."

Vance was standing by the window gazing out upon the river.

"There's something dashed unconvincing about those recurrent spoor in the snow. Our eccentric culprit is altogether too careless with his feet and too careful with his hands. He doesn't leave a finger-print or any other sign of his presence except those foot-tracks—all nice and tidy and staring us in the face. But they don't square with the rest of this fantastic business."

Heath stared hopelessly at the floor. He was patently of Vance's opinion; but the dogged thoroughness of his nature asserted itself, and presently he looked up with a forced show of energy.

"Go and phone Captain Jerym, Snitkin, and tell him I wish he'd hustle out here to look at some carpet-tracks. Then make measurements of those footprints on the balcony steps.—And you, Burke, take up a post in the upper hall, and don't let anyone go into the two front west rooms."



## 15. THE MURDERER IN THE HOUSE

(Tuesday, November 30th; 12.30 p.m.)

WHEN Snitkin and Burke had gone Vance turned from the window and strolled to where the doctor was sitting.

"I think it might be well," he said quietly, "if the exact whereabouts of everyone in the house preceding and during the shooting was determined.— We know, doctor, that you arrived here at about quarter past ten. How long were you with Mrs. Greene?"

Von Blon drew himself up and gave Vance a resentful stare. But quickly his manner changed and he answered courteously:

"I sat with her for perhaps half an hour; then I went to Sibella's room— a little before eleven, I should say—and remained there until Sprout called me."

"And was Miss Sibella with you in the room all the time?"

"Yes—the entire time."

"Thank you."

Vance returned to the window, and Heath, who had been watching the doctor belligerently, took his cigar from his mouth and cocked his head at Markham.

"You know, sir, I was just thinking over the inspector's suggestion about planting someone in the house to keep an eye on things. How would it be if we got rid of this nurse that's here now, and put in one of our own women from Head-quarters?"

Von Blon looked up with eager approval.

"An excellent plan!" he exclaimed.

"Very well, Sergeant," agreed Markham. "You attend to it."

"Your woman can begin to-night," Von Blon told Heath. "I'll meet you here whenever you say, and give her instructions. There's nothing very technical for her to do."

Heath made a notation in a battered notebook.

"I'll meet you here, say, at six o'clock. How's that?"

"That will suit me perfectly," Von Blon rose. "And now, if I can be of no more service..."

"That's quite all right, doctor," said Markham. "Go right ahead."

But instead of immediately leaving the house Von Blon went upstairs, and we heard him knock on Sibella's door. A few minutes later he came down again and passed on to the front door without a glance in our direction.

In the meantime Snitkin had come in and informed the sergeant that Captain Jerym was leaving Police Headquarters at once and would arrive within half an hour. He had then gone outside to make his measurements of the footprints on the balcony steps.

"And now," suggested Markham, "I think we might see Mrs. Greene. It's possible she heard something..."

Vance roused himself from apparent lethargy.

"By all means. But first let us get a few facts in hand. I long to hear where the nurse was during the half-hour preceding Rex's demise. And I could bear to know if the old lady was alone immediately following the firing of the revolver.—Why not have our Miss Nightingale on the tapis before we brave the invalid's imprecations?"

Markham concurred, and Heath sent Sprout to summon her.

The nurse came in with an air of professional detachment; but her roseate cheeks had paled perceptibly since we last saw her.

"Miss Craven"—Vance's manner was easy and businesslike—"will you please tell us exactly what you were doing between half-past ten and half-past eleven this morning?"

"I was in my room on the third floor," she answered. "I went there when the doctor arrived a little after ten, and remained until he called me to bring Mrs. Greene's *bouillon*. Then I returned to my room and stayed until the doctor again summoned me to sit with Mrs. Greene while he was with you gentlemen."

"When you were in your room, was the door open?"

"Oh, yes. I always leave it open in the daytime in case Mrs. Greene calls."

"And her door was open, too, I take it."

"Yes."

"Did you hear the shot?"

"No, I didn't."

"That will be all, Miss Craven." Vance accompanied her to the hall. "You'd better return to your room now, for we're going to pay a visit to your patient."

Mrs. Greene eyed us vindictively when we entered after having knocked and been imperiously ordered to come in.

"More trouble," she complained. "Am I never to have any peace in my own house? The first day in weeks I've felt even moderately comfortable—and then all this had to happen to upset me!"

"We regret, madam—more than you do apparently—that your son is dead," said Markham. "And we are sorry for the annoyance the tragedy is causing you. But that does not relieve me from the necessity of investigating the affair. As you were awake at the time the shot was fired, it is essential that we seek what information you may be able to give us."

"What information can I give you—a helpless paralytic, lying here alone?" A smouldering anger flickered in her eyes. "It strikes me that you are the one to give me information."

Markham ignored her barbed retort.

"The nurse tells me your door was open this morning..."

"And why shouldn't it have been? Am I expected to be entirely excommunicated from the rest of the household?"

"Certainly not. I was merely trying to find out if, by any chance, you were in a position to hear anything that went on in the hall."

"Well, I heard nothing—if that's all you want to know."

Markham persisted patiently.

"You heard no one, for instance, cross Miss Ada's room, or open Miss Ada's door?"

"I've already told you I heard nothing." The old lady's denial was viciously emphatic.

"Nor anyone walking in the hall, or descending the stairs?"

"No one but that incompetent doctor and the impossible Sproot. Were we supposed to have had visitors this morning?"

"Someone shot your son," Markham reminded her coolly.

"It was probably his own fault," she snapped. Then she seemed to relent a bit. "Still, Rex was not as hard and thoughtless as the rest of the children. But even he neglected me shamefully." She appeared to weigh the matter. "Yes," she decided, "he received just punishment for the way he treated me."

Markham struggled with a hot resentment. At last he managed to ask, with apparent calmness:

"Did you hear the shot with which your son was punished?"

"I did not." Her tone was again irate. "I knew nothing of the disturbance until the doctor saw fit to tell me."

"And yet Mr. Rex's door, as well as yours, was open," said Markham. "I can hardly understand your not having heard the shot."

The old lady gave him a look of scathing irony.

"Am I to sympathize with your lack of understanding?"

"Lest you be tempted to, madam, I shall leave you." Markham bowed stiffly and turned on his heel.

As he reached the lower hall Doctor Doremus arrived.

"Your friends are still at it, I hear, Sergeant," he greeted Heath, with his usual breezy manner. Handing his coat and hat to Sproot, he came forward and shook hands with all of us. "When you fellows don't spoil my breakfast you interfere with my lunch," he repined. "Where's the body?"

Heath led him upstairs, and after a few minutes returned to the drawing-room. Taking out another cigar he bit the end of it savagely.

"Well, sir, I guess you'll want to see this Miss Sibella next, won't you?"

"We might as well," sighed Markham. "Then I'll tackle the servants and leave things to you. The reporters will be along pretty soon."

"Don't I know it! And what they're going to do to us in the papers'll be aplenty!"

"And you can't even tell them 'it is confidently expected that an arrest will be made in the immediate future,' don't y' know," grinned Vance. "It's most distressin'."

Heath made an inarticulate noise of exasperation and, calling Sproot, sent him for Sibella.

A moment later she came in carrying a small Pomeranian. She was paler than I had ever seen her, and there was unmistakable fright in her eyes. When she greeted us it was without her habitual gaiety.

"This thing is getting rather ghastly, isn't it?" she remarked when she had taken a seat.

"It is indeed dreadful," returned Markham soberly. "You have our very deepest sympathy..."

"Oh, thanks awfully." She accepted the cigarette Vance offered her. "But I'm beginning to wonder how long I'll be here to receive condolences." She spoke with forced lightness, but a strained quality in her voice told of her suppressed emotion.

Markham regarded her sympathetically.

"I do not think it would be a bad idea if you went away for a while—to some friend's house, let us say—preferably out of the city."

"Oh, no." She tossed her head with defiance. "I shan't run away. If there's anyone really bent on killing me, he'll manage it somehow, wherever I am. Anyway, I'd have to come back sooner or later. I couldn't board with out-of-town friends indefinitely.—Could I?" She looked at Markham with a kind of anxious despair. "You haven't any idea, I suppose, who it is that's obsessed with the idea of exterminating us Greens?"

Markham was reluctant to admit to her the utter hopelessness of the official outlook; and she turned appealingly to Vance.

"You needn't treat me like a child," she said spiritedly. "You, at least, Mr. Vance, can tell me if there is anyone under suspicion."

"No, dash it all, Miss Greene!—there isn't," he answered promptly. "It's an amazin' confession to have to make; but it's true. That's why, I think, Mr. Markham suggested that you go away for a while."

"It's very thoughtful of him and all that," she returned. "But I think I'll stay and see it through."

"You're a very brave girl," said Markham, with troubled admiration. "And I assure you everything humanly possible will be done to safeguard you."

"Well, so much for that." She tossed her cigarette into a receiver, and began abstractedly to pet the dog in her lap. "And now, I suppose, you want to know if I heard the shot. Well, I didn't. So you may continue the inquisition from that point."

"You were in your room, though, at the time of your brother's death?"

"I was in my room all morning," she said. "My first appearance beyond the threshold was when Sproot brought the sad tidings of Rex's passing. But Doctor Von shooed me back again; and there I've remained until now. Model behaviour, don't you think, for a member of this new and wicked generation?"

"What time did Doctor Von Blon come to your room?" asked Vance.

Sibella gave him a faint whimsical smile.

"I'm so glad it was you who asked that question. I'm sure Mr. Markham would have used a disapproving tone—though it's quite *au fait* to receive one's doctor in one's boudoir.—Let me see. I'm sure you asked Doctor Von the same question, so I must be careful... A little before eleven, I should say."

"The doc's exact words," chimed in Heath suspiciously.

Sibella turned a look of amused surprise upon him.

"Isn't that wonderful! But then, I've always been told that honesty is the best policy."

"And did Doctor Von Blon remain in your room until called by Sproot?" pursued Vance.

"Oh, yes. He was smoking his pipe. Mother detests pipes, and he often sneaks into my room to enjoy a quiet smoke."

"And what were you doing during the doctor's visit?"

"I was bathing this ferocious animal." She held up the Pomeranian for Vance's inspection. "Doesn't he look nice?"

"In the bath-room?"

"Naturally. I'd hardly bathe him in the *poudrière*."

"And was the bath-room door closed?"

"As to that I couldn't say. But it's quite likely. Doctor Von is like a member of the family, and I'm terribly rude to him sometimes."

Vance got up.

"Thank you very much, Miss Greene. We're sorry we had to trouble you. Do you mind remaining in your room for a while?"

"Mind? On the contrary. It's about the only place I feel safe." She walked to the archway. "If you do find out anything you'll let me know—won't you? There's no use pretending any longer. I'm dreadfully scared." Then, as if ashamed of her admission, she went quickly down the hall.

Just then Sproot admitted the two finger-print experts—Dubois and Bellamy—and the official photographer. Heath joined them in the hall and took them upstairs, returning immediately.

"And now what, sir?"

Markham seemed lost in gloomy speculation, and it was Vance who answered the sergeant's query.

"I rather think," he said, "that another verbal bout with the pious Hemming and the taciturn Frau Mannheim might dispose of a loose end or two."

Hemming was sent for. She came in labouring under intense excitement. Her eyes fairly glittered with the triumph of the prophetic whose auguries have come to pass. But she had no information whatever to impart. She had spent most of the forenoon in the laundry, and had been unaware of the tragedy until Sproot had mentioned it to her shortly before our arrival. She was voluble, however, on the subject of divine punishment, and it was with difficulty that Vance stemmed her oracular stream of words.

Nor could the cook throw any light on Rex's murder. She had been in the kitchen, she said, the entire morning except for the hour she had gone marketing. She had not heard the shot and, like Hemming, knew of the tragedy only through Sproot. A marked change, however, had come over the woman. When she had entered the drawing-room fright and resentment animated her usually stolid features, and as she sat before us her fingers worked nervously in her lap.

Vance watched her critically during the interview. At the end he asked suddenly:

"Miss Ada has been with you in the kitchen this past half-hour?"

At the mention of Ada's name her fear was perceptibly intensified. She drew a deep breath.

"Yes, little Ada has been with me. And thank the good God she was away this morning when Mr Rex was killed, or it might have been her and not Mr. Rex. They tried once to shoot her, and maybe they'll try again. She oughtn't to be allowed to stay in this house."

"I think it only fair to tell you, Frau Mannheim," said Vance, "that someone will be watching closely over Miss Ada from now on."

The woman looked at him gratefully.

"Why should anyone want to harm little Ada?" she asked, in an anguished tone. "I also shall watch over her."

When she had left us Vance said:

"Something tells me, Markham, that Ada could have no better protector in this house than that motherly German.—And yet," he added, "there'll be no end of this grim carnage until we have the murderer safely gyved." His face darkened: his mouth was as cruel as Pietro de' Medici's. "This hellish business isn't ended. The final picture is only just emerging. And it's damnable—worse than any of the horrors of Rops or Doré."

Markham nodded with dismal depression.

"Yes, there appears to be an inevitability about these tragedies that's beyond mere human power to combat." He got up wearily and addressed himself to Heath. "There's nothing more I can do here at present, Sergeant. Carry on, and phone me at the office before five."

We were about to take our departure when Captain Jerym arrived. He was a quiet, heavy-set man, with a grey, scraggly moustache and small, deep-set eyes. One might easily have mistaken him for a shrewd, efficient merchant. After a brief hand-shaking ceremony Heath piloted him upstairs.

Vance had already donned his ulster, but now he removed it.

"I think I'll tarry a bit and hear what the captain has to say regarding those footprints. Y'know, Markham, I've been evolving a rather fantastic theory about 'em; and I want to test it."

Markham looked at him a moment with questioning curiosity. Then he glanced at his watch.

"I'll wait with you," he said.

Ten minutes later Doctor Doremus came down, and paused long enough on his way out to tell us that Rex had been shot with a .32 revolver held at a distance of about a foot from the forehead, the bullet having entered directly from the front and embedded itself, in all probability, in the midbrain.

A quarter of an hour after Doremus had gone Heath re-entered the drawing-room. He expressed uneasy surprise at seeing us still there.

"Mr. Vance wanted to hear Jerym's report," Markham explained.

"The captain'll be through any minute now." The sergeant sank into a chair. "He's checking Snitkin's measurements. He couldn't make much of the tracks on the carpet, though."

"And finger-prints?" asked Markham.

"Nothing yet."

"And there won't be," added Vance. "There wouldn't be footprints if they weren't deliberately intended for us."

Heath shot him a sharp look, but before he could speak, Captain Jerym and Snitkin came downstairs.

"What's the verdict, Cap?" asked the sergeant.

"Those footprints on the balcony steps," said, Jerym, "were made with galoshes of the same size and markings as the pattern turned over to me by Snitkin a fortnight or so ago. As for the prints in the room, I'm not so sure. They appear to be the same, however; and the dirt on them is sooty, like the dirt on the snow outside the French doors. I've several photographs of them; and I'll know definitely

when I get my enlargements under the microscope."

Vance rose and sauntered to the archway.

"May I have your permission to go upstairs a moment, Sergeant?"

Heath looked mystified. His instinct was to ask a reason for this unexpected request, but all he said was: "Sure. Go ahead."

Something in Vance's manner—an air of satisfaction combined with a suppressed eagerness—told me that he had verified his theory.

He was gone less than five minutes. When he returned he carried a pair of galoshes similar to those that had been found in Chester's closet. He handed them to Captain Jerym.

"You'll probably find that these made the tracks."

Both Jerym and Snitkin examined them carefully, comparing the measurements and fitting the rough patterns to the soles. Finally, the captain took one of them to the window, and affixing a jeweller's glass to his eye, studied the riser of the heel.

"I think you're right," he agreed. "There's a worn place here which corresponds to an indentation on the cast I made."

Heath had sprung to his feet and stood eyeing Vance. "Where did you find 'em?" he demanded.

"Tucked away in the rear of the little linen-closet at the head of the stairs."

The sergeant's excitement got the better of him. He swung about to Markham, fairly spluttering with consternation.

"Those two guys from the Bureau that went over this house looking for the gun told me there wasn't a pair of galoshes in the place; and I specially told 'em to keep their eyes peeled for galoshes. And now Mr. Vance finds 'em in the linen-closet off the main hall upstairs!"

"But, Sergeant," said Vance mildly, "the galoshes weren't there when your sleuths were looking for the revolver. On both former occasions the johnny who wore 'em had plenty of time to put 'em away safely. But to-day, d' ye see, he had no chance to sequester them; so he left 'em in the linen-closet for the time being."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" Heath growled vaguely. "Well, what's the rest of the story, Mr. Vance?"

"That's all there is to date. If I knew the rest I'd know who fired the shots. But I might remind you that neither of your *sergents-de-ville* saw any suspicious person leave here."

"Good God, Vance!" Markham was on his feet. "That means that the murderer is in the house this minute."

"At any rate," returned Vance lazily, "I think we are justified in assuming that the murderer was here when we arrived."

"But nobody's left the place but Von Blon," blurted Heath.

Vance nodded. "Oh, it's wholly possible the murderer is still in the house, Sergeant."

## 16. THE LOST POISONS

(Tuesday, November 30th; 2 p.m.)

MARKHAM and Vance and I had a late lunch at the Stuyvesant Club. During the meal the subject of the murder was avoided as if by tacit agreement; but when we sat smoking over our coffee Markham settled back in his chair and surveyed Vance sternly.

"Now," he said, "I want to hear how you came to find those galoshes in the linen-closet. And, damn it! I don't want any garrulous evasions or quotations out of Bartlett."

"I'm quite willing to unburden my soul," smiled Vance. "It was all so dashed simple. I never put any stock in the burglar theory, and so was able to approach the problem with a virgin mind, as it were."

He lit a fresh cigarette and poured himself another cup of coffee.

"Perpend, Markham. On the night that Julia and Ada were shot a double set of footprints was found. It had stopped snowing at about eleven o'clock, and the tracks had been made between that hour and midnight, when the sergeant arrived on the scene. On the night of Chester's murder there was another set of footprints similar to the others; and they too had been made shortly after the weather had cleared. Here, then, were tracks in the snow, approaching and retreating from the front door, preceding each crime; and both sets had been made after the snow had stopped falling *when they would be distinctly visible and determinable*. This was not a particularly striking coincidence, but it was sufficiently arresting to create a slight strain on my *cortex cerebri*. And the strain increased perceptibly this morning when Snitkin reported his discovery of fresh footprints on the balcony steps; for once again the same meteorological conditions had accompanied our culprit's passion for leaving spoors. I was therefore driven to the irresistible inference, as you learned Solons put it, that the murderer, so careful and calculating about everything else, had deliberately made all these footprints for our special edification. In each instance, d' ye see, he had chosen the only hour of the day when his tracks would not be obliterated by falling snow or confused with other tracks... Are you there?"

"Go ahead," said Markham. "I'm listening."

"To proceed, then. Another coincidence attached to these three sets of footprints. It was impossible, because of the dry, flaky nature of the snow, to determine whether the first set had originated in the house and returned there, or had first approached the house from the street and then retreated. Again, on the night of Chester's demise, when the snow was damp and susceptible to clear impressions, the same doubt arose. The tracks to and from the house were on opposite sides of the front walk: not a single footstep overlapped! Accidental? Perhaps. But not wholly reasonable. A person walking to and from a door along a comparatively narrow pathway would almost certainly have doubled on some of his tracks. And even if he had failed to superimpose any of his footprints, the parallel spoors would have been close together. But these two lines of prints were far apart: each clung to the extreme edge of the walk, as if the person who made them was positively afraid of overlapping. Now, consider the footprints made this morning. There was a single line of them entering the house, but none coming out. We concluded that the murderer had made his escape via the front door and down the neatly swept walk; but this, after all, was only an assumption."

Vance sipped his coffee and inhaled a moment on his cigarette.

"The point I'm trying to bring out is this: there is no proof whatever that all these footprints were not made by someone in the house who first went out and then returned for the express purpose of leading the police to believe that an outsider was guilty. But, on the other hand, there is evidence that the footprints actually did originate in the house; because if an outsider had made them he would have been at no pains to confuse the issue of their origin, since, in any event, they could not have been traced back farther than the street. Therefore, as a tentative starting-point, I assumed that the tracks had, in reality, been made by someone in the house.—I can't say, of course, whether or not my layman's logic adds lustre to the gladsome light of jurisprudence—"

"Your reasoning is consistent as far as it goes," cut in Markham tartly. "But it is hardly complete enough to have led you directly to the linen-closet this morning."

"True. But there were various contributory factors. For instance, the galoshes which Snitkin found in Chester's clothes-closet were the exact size of the prints. At first I toyed with the idea that they were the actual instruments of our unknown's vestigial deception. But when, after they had been taken to Head-quarters, another set of similar tracks appeared—to wit, the ones found this morning—I amended my theory slightly, and concluded that Chester had owned two pairs of galoshes—one that had perhaps been discarded but not thrown away. That was why I wanted to wait for Captain Jerym's report: I was anxious to learn if the new tracks were exactly like the old ones."

"But even so," interrupted Markham, "your theory that the footprints emanated from the house strikes me as being erected on pretty weak scaffolding. Were there any other indicants?"

"I was coming to them," replied Vance reproachfully. "But you will rush me so. Pretend that I'm a lawyer, and my summation will sound positively breathless."

"I'm more likely to pretend that I'm a presiding judge, and give you *sus. per coll.*"

"Ah, well," Vance sighed and continued. "Let us consider the hypothetical intruder's means of escape after the shooting of Julia and Ada. Sproot came into the upper hall immediately after the shot had been fired in Ada's room; yet he heard nothing—neither footsteps in the hall nor the front door closing. And, Markham old thing, a person in galoshes going down marble steps in the dark is no midsummer zephyr for silence. In the circumstances Sproot would have been certain to hear him making his escape. Therefore, the explanation that suggested itself to me was that *he did not make his escape.*"

"And the footprints outside?"

"Were made beforehand by someone walking to the front gate and back.—And that brings me to the night of Chester's murder. You remember Rex's tale of hearing a dragging noise in the hall and a door closing about fifteen minutes before the shot was fired, and Ada's corroboration of the door-shutting part of the story? The noise, please note, was heard after it had stopped snowing—in fact,

after the moon had come out. Could the noise not easily have been a person walking in galoshes, or even taking them off, after having returned from making those separated tracks to and from the gate? And might not that closing door have been the door of the linen-closet where the galoshes were being temporarily cached?"

Markham nodded. "Yes, the sounds Rex and Ada heard might be explained that way."

"And this morning's business was even plainer. There were footprints on the balcony steps, made between nine o'clock and noon. But neither of the guards saw anyone enter the grounds. Moreover, Sproot waited a few moments in the dining-room after the shot had been fired in Rex's room; and if anyone had come down the stairs and gone out the front door Sproot would certainly have heard him. It's true that the murderer might have descended the front stairs as Sproot went up the servants' stairs. But is that likely? Would he have waited in the upper hall after killing Rex, knowing that someone was likely to step out and discover him? I think not. And anyway, the guards saw no one leave the estate. *Ergo*, I concluded that *no one came down the front stairs after Rex's death*. I assumed again that the footprints had been made at some earlier hour. This time, however, the murderer did not go to the gate and return, for a guard was there who would have seen him; and, furthermore, the front steps and the walk had been swept. So our track-maker, after having donned the galoshes, stepped out of the front door, walked round the corner of the house, mounted the balcony steps, and re-entered the upper hall by way of Ada's room."

"I see." Markham leaned over and knocked the ashes from his cigar. "Therefore, you inferred that the galoshes were still in the house."

"Exactly. But I'll admit I didn't think of the linen-closet at once. First I tried Chester's room. Then I took a look round Julia's chamber; and I was about to go up to the servants' quarters when I recalled Rex's story of the closing door. I ran my eye over all the second-story doors, and straightway tried the linen-closet—which was, after all, the most likely place for a transient occultation. And lo! there were the galoshes, tucked under an old drugget. The murderer had probably hidden them there both times before, pending an opportunity of secreting them more thoroughly."

"But where could they have been concealed so that our searchers didn't run across them?"

"As to that, now, I couldn't say. They may have been taken out of the house altogether."

There was a silence for several minutes. Then Markham spoke.

"The finding of the galoshes pretty well proves your theory, Vance. But do you realize what confronts us now? If your reasoning is correct, the guilty person is someone with whom we've been talking this morning. It's an appalling thought. I've gone over in my mind every member of that household; and I simply can't regard any one of them as a potential mass-murderer."

"Sheer moral prejudice, old dear." Vance's voice assumed a note of raillery. "I'm a bit cynical myself, and the only person at the Greene mansion I'd eliminate as a possibility would be Frau Mannheim. She's not sufficiently imaginative to have planned this accumulative massacre. But as regards the others, I could picture any one of 'em as being at the bottom of this diabolical slaughter. It's a mistaken idea, don't y' know, to imagine that a murderer looks like a murderer. No murderer ever does. The only people who really look like murderers are quite harmless. Do you recall the mild and handsome features of the Reverend Richeson of Cambridge? Yet he gave his inamorata cyanide of potassium. The fact that Major Armstrong was a meek and gentlemanly-looking chap did not deter him from feeding arsenic to his wife. Professor Webster of Harvard was not a criminal type; but the dismembered spirit of Doctor Parkman doubtless regards him as a brutal slayer. Doctor Lamson, with his philanthropic eyes and his benevolent beard, was highly regarded as a humanitarian; but he administered aconitine rather cold-bloodedly to his crippled brother-in-law. Then there was Doctor Neil Cream, who might easily have been mistaken for the deacon of a fashionable church; and the soft-spoken and amiable Doctor Waite... And the women! Edith Thompson admitted putting powdered glass in her husband's gruel, though she looked like a pious Sunday-school teacher. Madeleine Smith certainly had a most respectable countenance. And Constance Kent was rather a beauty—a nice girl with an engaging air; yet she cut her little brother's throat in a thoroughly brutal manner. Gabrielle Bompard and Marie Boyer were anything but typical of the *Donna Delinquente*; but the one strangled her lover with the cord of her dressing-gown, and the other killed her mother with a cheese-knife. And what of Madame Fenayrou—?"

"Enough!" protested Markham. "Your lecture on criminal physiognomy can go over a while. Just now I'm trying to adjust my mind to the staggering inferences to be drawn from your finding of those galoshes." A sense of horror seemed to weigh him down. "Good God, Vance! There must be some way out of this nightmare you've propounded. What member of that household could possibly have walked in on Rex Greene and shot him down in broad daylight?"

"Pon my soul, I don't know." Vance himself was deeply affected by the sinister aspects of the case. "But someone in that house did it—someone the others don't suspect."

"That look on Julia's face, and Chester's amazed expression—that's what you mean, isn't it? They didn't suspect either. And they were horrified at the revelation—when it was too late. Yes, all those things fit in with your theory."—

"But there's one thing that doesn't fit, old man." Vance gazed at the table perplexedly. "Rex died peacefully, apparently unaware of his murderer. Why wasn't there also a look of horror on his face? His eyes couldn't have been shut when the revolver was levelled at him, for he was standing, facing the intruder. It's inexplicable—mad!"

He beat a nervous tattoo on the table, his brows contracted.

"And there's another thing, Markham, that's incomprehensible about Rex's death. His door into the hall was open; but nobody upstairs heard the shot—nobody *upstairs*. And yet Sproot—who was downstairs, in the butler's pantry behind the dining-room—heard it distinctly."

"It probably just happened that way," Markham argued, almost automatically. "Sound acts fantastically sometimes."

Vance shook his head.

"Nothing has 'just happened' in this case. There's a terrible logic about everything—a carefully planned reason behind each detail. Nothing has been left to chance. Still, this very systematization of the crime will eventually prove the murderer's downfall. When we can find a key to any one of the ante-rooms, we'll know our way into the main chamber of horrors."

At that moment Markham was summoned to the telephone. When he returned his expression was puzzled and uneasy.

"It was Swacker. Von Blon is at my office now—he has something to tell me."

"Ah! Very interestin'," commented Vance.

We drove to the District Attorney's office, and Von Blon was shown in at once.

"I may be stirring up a mare's nest," he began apologetically, after he had seated himself on the edge of a chair. "But I felt I ought to inform you of a curious thing that happened to me this morning. At first I thought I would tell the police, but it occurred to me they might misunderstand; and I decided to place the matter before you to act upon as you saw fit."

Plainly he was uncertain as to how the subject should be broached, and Markham waited patiently with an air of polite indulgence.

"I phoned the Greene house as soon as I made the—ah—discovery," Von Blon went on hesitantly. "But I was informed you had left for the office; so, as soon as I had lunched, I came directly here."

"Very good of you, doctor," murmured Markham. Again Von Blon hesitated, and his manner became exaggeratedly ingratiating.

"The fact is, Mr. Markham, I am in the habit of carrying a rather full supply of emergency drugs in my medicine-case..."

"Emergency drugs?"

"Strychnine, morphine, caffeine, and a variety of hypnotics and stimulants. I find it often convenient—"

"And it was in connection with these drugs you wished to see me?"

"Indirectly—yes." Von Blon paused momentarily to arrange his words. "To-day it happened that I had in my case a fresh tube of soluble quarter-grain morphine tablets, and a Parke-Davis carton of four tubes of strychnine-thirtieths..."

"And what about this supply of drugs, doctor?"

"The fact is, the morphine and the strychnine have disappeared."

Markham bent forward, his eyes curiously animated.

"They were in my case this morning when I left my office," Von Blon explained; "and I made only two brief calls before I went to the Greenes'. I missed the tubes when I returned to my office."

Markham studied the doctor a moment.

"And you think it improbable that the drugs were taken from your case during either of your other calls?"

"That's just it. At neither place was the case out of my sight for a moment."

"And at the Greenes'?" Markham's agitation was growing rapidly.

"I went directly to Mrs. Greene's room, taking the case with me. I remained there for perhaps half an hour. When I came out—"

"You did not leave the room during that half-hour?"

"No..."

"Pardon me, doctor," came Vance's indolent voice; "but the nurse mentioned that you called to her to bring Mrs. Greene's *bouillon*. From where did you call?"

Von Blon nodded. "Ah, yes. I did speak to Miss Craven. I stepped to the door and called up the servants' stairs."

"Quite so. And then?"

"I waited with Mrs. Greene until the nurse came. Then I went across the hall to Sibella's room."

"And your case?" interjected Markham.

"I set it down in the hall, against the rear railing of the main stairway."

"And you remained in Miss Sibella's room until Sproot called you?"

"That is right."

"Then the case was unguarded in the rear of the upper hall from about eleven until you left the house?"

"Yes. After I had taken leave of you gentlemen in the drawing-room I went upstairs and got it."

"And also made your adieux to Miss Sibella," added Vance.

Von Blon raised his eyebrows with an air of gentle surprise.

"Naturally."

"What amount of these drugs disappeared?" asked Markham.

"The four tubes of strychnine contained in all approximately three grains-three and one-third, to be exact. And there are twenty-five tablets of morphine in a Parke-Davis tube, making six and one-quarter grains."

"Are those fatal doses, doctor?"

"That's a difficult question to answer, sir." Von Blon adopted a professional manner. "One may have a tolerance for morphine and be capable of assimilating astonishingly large doses. But, *ceteris paribus*, six grains would certainly prove fatal. Regarding strychnine, toxicology gives us a very wide range as to lethal dosage, depending on the condition and age of the patient. The average fatal dose for an adult is, I should say, two grains, though death has resulted from administrations of one grain, or even less. And, on the other hand, recovery has taken place after as much as ten grains have been swallowed. Generally speaking, however, three and one-third grains would be sufficient to produce fatal results."

When Von Blon had gone Markham gazed at Vance anxiously.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"I don't like it—I don't at all like it." Vance shook his head despairingly. "It's dashed queer—the whole thing. And the doctor is worried, too. There's a panic raging beneath his elegant facade. He's in a blue funk—and it's not because of the loss of his pills. He fears something, Markham. There was a strained, hunted look in his eyes."

"Doesn't it strike you as strange that he should be carrying such quantities of drugs about with him?"

"Not necessarily. Some doctors do it. The Continental M.D.'s especially are addicted to the practice. And don't forget Von Blon is German-trained..." Vance glanced up suddenly. "By the by, what about those two wills?" There was a look of astonished interrogation in Markham's incisive stare, but he said merely:

"I'll have them later this afternoon. Buckway has been laid up with a cold, but he promised to send me copies to-day."

Vance got to his feet.

"I'm no Chaldean," he drawled; "but I have an idea those two wills may help us to understand the disappearance of the doctor's pellets." He drew on his coat and took up his hat and stick. "And now I'm going to banish this beastly affair from my thoughts.—Come, Van. There's some good chamber-music at Aeolian Hall this afternoon, and if we hurry we'll be in time for the Mozart 'C-Major.'"

## 17. THE TWO WILLS

(Tuesday, November 30th; 8 p.m.)

EIGHT o'clock that night found Inspector Moran, Sergeant Heath, Markham, Vance, and me seated about a small conference-table in one of the Stuyvesant Club's private rooms. The evening papers had created a furore in the city with their melodramatic accounts of Rex Greene's murder; and these early stories were, as we all knew, but the mild forerunners of what the morning journals would publish. The situation itself, without the inevitable impending strictures of the Press, was sufficient to harry and depress those in charge of the official investigation; and, as I looked round the little circle of worried faces that night, I realized the tremendous importance that attached to the outcome of our conference.

Markham was the first to speak.

"I have brought copies of the wills; but before we discuss them I'd like to know if there have been any new developments."

"Developments!" Heath snorted contemptuously. "We've been going round in a circle all afternoon, and the faster we went the quicker we got to where we started. Mr. Markham, not one damn' thing turned up to give us a line of inquiry. If it wasn't for the fact that no gun was found in the room, I'd turn in a report of suicide and then resign from the force."

"Fie on you, Sergeant!" Vance made a half-hearted attempt at levity. "It's a bit too early to give way to such gloomy pessimism. I take it that Captain Dubois found no finger-prints."

"Oh, he found finger-prints, all right—Ada's, and Rex's, and Sproot's, and a couple of the doctor's. But that don't get us anywheres."

"Where were the prints?"

"Everywhere—on the door-knobs, the centre-table, the window-panes; some were even found on the woodwork above the mantel."

"That last fact may prove interestin' some day, though it doesn't seem to mean much just now.—Anything more about the footprints?"

"Nope. I got Jerym's report late this afternoon; but it don't say anything new. The galoshes you found made the tracks."

"That reminds me, Sergeant. What did you do with the galoshes?"

Heath gave him a sly, exultant grin.

"Just exactly what you'd have done with 'em, Mr. Vance. Only—I thought of it first."

Vance smiled back.

"*Salve!* Yes, the idea entirely slipped my mind this morning. In fact, it only just occurred to me."

"May I know what was done with the galoshes?" interjected Markham impatiently.

"Why, the sergeant returned them surreptitiously to the linen-closet, and placed them under the drugget whence they came."

"Right!" Heath nodded with satisfaction. "And I've got our new nurse keeping an eye on 'em. The minute they disappear she's to phone the Bureau."

"You had no trouble installing your woman?" asked Markham.

"A cinch. Everything went like clockwork. At a quarter to six the doc shows up; then at six comes the woman from the Central Office. After the doc has put her wise to her new duties, she gets into her uniform and goes in to Mrs. Greene. The old lady tells the doc she didn't like Miss Craven anyway, and hopes the new nurse will show her more consideration. Things couldn't have gone smoother. I hung around until I got a chance to tip our woman off about the galoshes; then I came away."

"Which of our women did you give the case to, Sergeant?" Moran asked.

"O'Brien—the one who handled the Sitwell affair. Nothing in that house will get by O'Brien; and she's as strong as a man."

"There's another thing you'd better speak to her about as soon as possible." And Markham related in detail the facts of Von Blon's visit to the office after lunch. "If those drugs were stolen in the Greene mansion, your woman may be able to find some trace of them."

Markham's account of the missing poisons had produced a profound effect on both Heath and the inspector.

"Good heavens" exclaimed the latter. "Is this affair going to develop into a poisoning case? It would be the finishing touch." His apprehension went much deeper than his tone implied.

Heath sat staring at the polished table-top with futile consternation.

"Morphine and strychnine. There's no use looking for the stuff. There's a hundred places in the house where it could be hid; and we might search a month and not find it. Anyway, I'll go out there to-night and tell O'Brien to watch for it. If she's on the look-out she maybe can spot any attempt to use it."

"What astounds me," remarked the inspector, "is the security felt by the thief. Within an hour of the time Rex Greene is shot the poison disappears from the upper hall. Good gad! That's cold-bloodedness for you! And nerve, too!"

"There's plenty of cold-bloodedness and nerve in this case," answered Vance. "A relentless determination is back of these murders—and calculation no end. I wouldn't be surprised if the doctor's satchel had been searched a score of times before. Perhaps there's been a patient accumulation of the drugs. This morning's theft may have been the final raid. I see in this whole affair a carefully worked-out plot that's been in preparation perhaps for years. We're dealing with the persistency of an *idée fixe*, and with the demoniacal logic of insanity. And—what is even more hideous—we're confronted with the perverted imagination of a fantastically romantic mind. We're pitted against a fiery, egocentric, hallucinated optimism. And this type of optimism has tremendous stamina and power. The history of nations has been convulsed by it. Mohammed, Bruno, and Jeanne d'Arc—as well as Torquemada, Agrippina, and Robespierre—all had it. It operates in different degrees, and to different ends; but the spirit of individual revolution is at the bottom of it."

"Hell, Mr. Vance!" Heath was uneasy. "You're trying to make this case something that ain't—well, natural."

"Can you make it anything else, Sergeant? Already there have been three murders and an attempted murder. And now comes the theft of the poisons from Von Blon."

Inspector Moran drew himself up and rested his elbows on the table.



"Well, what's to be done? That, I believe, is the business of to-night's conclave." He forced himself to speak with matter-of-factness. "We can't break up the establishment; and we can't assign a separate bodyguard for each remaining member of the household."

"No; and we can't give 'em the works at the police station, either," grumbled Heath.

"It wouldn't help you if you could, Sergeant," said Vance. "There's no third degree known that could unseal the lips of the person who is executing this particular *opus*. There's too much fanaticism and martyrdom in it."

"Suppose we hear those wills, Mr. Markham," suggested Moran. "We may then be able to figure out a motive.—You'll admit, won't you, Mr. Vance, that there's a pretty strong motive back of these killings?"

"There can be no doubt as to that. But I don't believe it's money. Money may enter into it—and probably does—but only as a contributory factor. I'd say the motive was more fundamental—that it had its matrix in some powerful but suppressed human passion. However, the financial conditions may lead us to those depths."

Markham had taken from his pocket several legal-sized sheets of closely typed paper, and smoothed them on the table before him.

"There's no necessity to read these *verbatim*," he said. "I've gone over them thoroughly and can tell you briefly what they contain." He took up the top sheet and held it nearer to the light. "Tobias Greene's last will, drawn up less than a year before his death, makes the entire family, as you know, the residuary devisees, with the stipulation that they live on the estate and maintain it intact for twenty-five years. At the end of that time the property may be sold or otherwise disposed of. I might mention that the domiciliary stipulation was particularly strict: the legatees must live in the Greene mansion *in esse*—no technicality will suffice. They are permitted to travel and make visits; but such absences may not exceed three months in each respective year..."

"What provision was made in case one of them should marry?" asked the inspector.

"None. Even marriage on the part of any of the legatees did not vitiate the restrictions of the will. If a Greene married, he or she had to live out the twenty-five years on the estate just the same. The husband or wife could share the residence, of course. In event of children the will provided for the erection of two other small dwellings on the 52nd Street side of the lot. Only one exception was made to these stipulations. If Ada should marry, she could live elsewhere without losing her inheritance, as she apparently was not Tobias's own child and could not, therefore, carry on the blood line of the Greens."

"What penalties attached to a breaking of the domiciliary terms of the will?" Again the inspector put the question.

"Only one penalty—disinheritance, complete and absolute."

"A rigid old bird," murmured Vance. "But the important thing about the will is, I should say, the manner in which he left the money. How was this distributed?"

"It wasn't distributed. With the exception of a few minor bequests, it was left in its entirety to the widow. She was to have the use of it during her lifetime, and could, at her death, dispose of it to the children—and grandchildren, if any—as she saw fit. It was imperative, however, that it all remain in the family."

"Where do the present generation of Greens get their living expenses? Are they dependent on the old lady's bounty?"

"Not exactly. A provision was made for them in this way: each of the five children was to receive from the executors a stipulated amount from Mrs. Greene's income, sufficient for personal needs." Markham folded up the paper. "And that about covers Tobias's will."

"You spoke of a few minor bequests," said Vance. What were they?"

"Sproot was left a competency, for instance—enough to take care of him comfortably whenever he wished to retire from service. Mrs. Mannheim, also, was to receive an income for life beginning at the end of the twenty-five years."

"Ah! Now, that's most interestin'. And in the meantime she could, if she chose, remain as cook on a liberal salary."

"Yes, that was the arrangement."

"The status of Frau Mannheim fascinates me. I have a feeling that some day ere long she and I will have a heart-to-heart talk.—Any other minor bequests?"

"A hospital, where Tobias recovered from typhus fever contracted in the tropics; and a donation to the chair of criminology at the University of Prague. I might mention too, as a curious item, that Tobias left his library to the New York Police Department, to be turned over to them at the expiration of the twenty-five years."

Vance drew himself up with puzzled interest.

"Amazin'!"

Heath had turned to the inspector.

"Did you know anything about this, sir?"

"It seems to me I've heard of it. But a gift of books a quarter of a century in the future isn't apt to excite the officials of the force."

Vance, to all appearances, was smoking with indolent unconcern; but the precise way he held his cigarette told me that some unusual speculation was absorbing his mind.

"The will of Mrs. Greene," Markham went on, "touches more definitely on present conditions, though personally I see nothing helpful in it. She has been mathematically impartial in doling out the estate. The five children—Julia, Chester, Sibella, Rex, and Ada—receive equal amounts under its terms—that is, each gets a fifth of the entire estate."

"That part of it don't interest me," put in the sergeant. "What I want to know is, who gets all this money in case the others pass out the picture?"

"The provision covering that point is quite simple," explained Markham. "Should any of the children die before a new will is drawn, their share of the inheritance is distributed equally among the remaining beneficiaries."

"Then when any one of 'em passes out, all the others benefit. And if all of 'em, except one, should die, that one would get everything—huh?"

"Yes."

"So, as it stands now, Sibella and Ada would get everything—fifty-fifty—provided the old lady croaked."

"That's correct, Sergeant."

"But suppose both Sibella and Ada, as well as the old lady, should die: what would become of the money?"

"If either of the girls had a husband, the estate would pass to him. But, in event of Sibella and Ada dying single, everything would go to the State. That is to say, the State would get it provided there were no relatives alive—which I believe is the case."

Heath pondered these possibilities for several minutes.

"I can't see anything in the situation to give us a lead," he lamented. "Everybody benefits equally by what's already happened. And there's three of the family still left—the old lady and the two girls."

"Two from three leaves one, Sergeant," suggested Vance quietly.

"What do you mean by that, sir?"

"The morphine and the strychnine."

Heath gave a start and made an ugly face.

"By God!" He struck the table with his fist. "It ain't coming to that if I can stop it!" Then a sense of helplessness tempered his outraged resolution, and he became sullen.

"I know how you feel." Vance spoke with troubled discouragement. "But I'm afraid we'll all have to wait. If the Greene millions are an actuating force in this affair, there's no way on earth to avert at least one more tragedy."

"We might put the matter up to the two girls and perhaps induce them to separate and go away," ventured the inspector.

"That would only postpone the inevitable," Vance returned. "And besides, it would rob them of their patrimony."

"A court ruling might be obtained upsetting the provisions of the will," submitted Markham dubiously. Vance gave him an ironical smile.

"By the time you could get one of your beloved courts to act the murderer would have had time to wipe out the entire local judiciary."

For nearly two hours ways and means of dealing with the case were discussed; but obstacles confronted nearly every line of activity advocated. Finally it was agreed that the only practicable tactics to be pursued were those of the routine police procedure. However, before the conference broke up, certain specific decisions had been taken. The guard about the Greene estate was to be increased, and a man was to be placed on the upper floor of the Narcoss Flats to keep a close watch on the front door and windows. On some pretext or other a detective was to be kept inside of the house as many hours as possible during the day; and the telephone-line of the Greenses was to be tapped.

Vance insisted, somewhat against Markham's inclination, that everyone in the house and every person who called there—however seemingly remote his connection with the case—should be regarded as a suspect and watched vigilantly; and Heath was ordered by the inspector to convey this decision to O'Brien, lest her instinctive partiality should result in the relaxation of her scrutiny of certain persons. The sergeant, it seemed, had already instituted a thorough investigation into the private affairs of Julia, Chester, and Rex; and a dozen men were at work on their associates and activities outside of the Greene mansion, with special instructions to gather reports of conversations which might have contained some hint or reference indicating a foreknowledge or suspicion of the crimes.

Just as Markham rose to terminate the discussion Vance again leaned forward and spoke.

"In case there is to be a poisoning we should, I think, be prepared. Where overdoses of either morphine or strychnine are administered immediate action will sometimes save the victim. I would suggest that an official physician be placed in the Narcoss Flats with the man set to watch the Greene windows; and he should have at hand all the necessary apparatus and antidotes used in combating morphine and strychnine poisoning. Furthermore, I would suggest that we arrange some sort of signal with Sproot and the new nurse, so that, should anything happen, our doctor can be summoned without a moment's delay. If the victim of the attempted poisoning were saved, we might be able to ascertain who administered the drug."

The plan was readily agreed to. The inspector took it upon himself to arrange the matter that night with one of the official police surgeons; and Heath went at once to the Narcoss Flats to secure a room facing the Greene mansion.

## 18. IN THE LOCKED LIBRARY

(Wednesday, December 1st; 1 p.m.)

VANCE, contrary to his custom, rose early the next morning. He was rather waspish, and I left him severely alone. He made several desultory attempts at reading, and once, when he put his book down, I glanced at the title—he had chosen a life of Genghis Khan! Later in the forenoon he attempted to busy himself with cataloguing his Chinese prints.

We were to have lunch with Markham at the Lawyers Club at one o'clock and at a little after twelve Vance ordered his powerful Hispana-Suiza. He always drove himself when engaged on a problem: the activity seemed to steady his nerves and clarify his brain.

Markham was waiting for us, and it was only too plain from his expression that something of a disturbing nature had occurred.

"Unburden, old dear," invited Vance, when we were seated at our table in a corner of the main dining-room. "You look as serious as Saint John of Patmos. I'm sure something wholly to be expected has happened. Have the galoshes disappeared?"

Markham looked at him with some wonder.

"Yes! The O'Brien woman called the Bureau at nine o'clock this morning and reported that they had been removed from the linen-closet during the night. They were there, however, when she went to bed."

"And, of course, they have not been found."

"No. She made a pretty careful search before phoning."

"Fancy that. But she might have saved herself the trouble. What does the doughty sergeant opine?"

"Heath reached the house before ten o'clock, and made an investigation. But he learned nothing. No one admitted hearing any sound in the hall during the night. He researched the house himself, but without result."

"Have you heard from Von Blon this morning?"

"No; but Heath saw him. He came to the house about ten and stayed nearly an hour. He appeared very much upset over the stolen drugs, and immediately asked if any trace of them had been found. He spent most of the hour with Sibella."

"Ah, welladay! Let us enjoy our *truffles gastronome* without the intrusion of unpleasant speculations. This Madeira sauce, by the by, is very good." Thus Vance dismissed the subject.

However, that luncheon was to prove a memorable one; for toward the end of the meal Vance made a suggestion—or, rather, insisted upon an action—that was eventually to solve and explain the terrible tragedies at the Greene mansion. We had reached our dessert when, after a long silence, he looked up at Markham and said:

"The Pandora complex has seized and mastered me. I simply must get into Tobias's locked library. That sacred adytum has begun to infest my slumbers; and ever since you mentioned the legacy of those books I've had no rest. I yearn to become acquainted with Tobias's literary taste, and to learn why he should have selected the police for his beneficiaries."

"But, my dear Vance, what possible connection?"

"Desist! You can't think of a question I have not already put to myself; and I'm unable to answer any of them. But the fact remains, I must inspect that library even if you have to get a judicial order to batter down the door. There are sinister undercurrents in that old house, Markham; and a hint or two may be found in that secret room."

"It will be a difficult proceeding if Mrs. Greene stands firm on her refusal to deliver the key to us." Markham, I could see, had already acquiesced. He was in a mood to accede to any suggestion that even remotely promised a clarification of the problem posed by the Greene murders.

It was nearly three o'clock when we reached the house. Heath had already arrived, in answer to a telephone call from Markham; and we at once presented ourselves to Mrs. Greene. Following an ocular sign from the sergeant the new nurse left the room; and Markham went directly to the point. The old lady had eyed us suspiciously as we came in, and now sat rigidly against her pile of pillows, her gaze fixed on Markham with defensive animosity.

"Madam," he began, somewhat severely, "we regret the necessity of this call. But certain things have arisen which make it imperative that we visit Mr. Greene's library—"

"You shan't" she broke in, her voice rising in an infuriated crescendo. "You shan't put your foot in that room! Not for twelve years has anyone passed the threshold, and no policeman now shall desecrate the place where my husband spent the last years of his life."

"I appreciate the sentiment that actuates your refusal," replied Markham; "but graver considerations have intervened. The room will have to be searched."

"Not if you kill me!" she cried. "How dare you force your way into my house?"

Markham held up his hand authoritatively.

"I am not here to argue the matter. I came to you merely to ask for the key. Of course, if you prefer to have us break down the door..." He drew a sheaf of papers from his pocket. "I have secured a search-warrant for that room; and it would cause me deep regret to have to serve it on you." (I was amazed at his aggressive daring, for I knew he had no warrant.)

Mrs. Greene broke forth with imprecations. Her anger became almost insensate, and she was changed into a creature at once repulsive and pitiful. Markham waited calmly for her paroxysm of fury to pass; and when, her vituperation spent, she beheld his quiet, inexorable bearing, she knew that she had lost. She sank back, white and exhausted.

"Take the key," she capitulated bitterly, "and save me the final infamy of having my house torn down by ruffians... It's in the ivory jewel-case in the top drawer of that cabinet." She pointed weakly to the lacquered high-boy.

Vance crossed the room and secured the key—a long, old-fashioned instrument with a double bit and a filigreed bow.

"Have you always kept the key in this jewel-case, Mrs. Greene?" he asked, as he closed the drawer.

"For twelve years," she whined. "And now, after all that time, it is to be taken from me by force—and by the police, the very police who should be protecting an old, helpless paralytic like me. It's infamy! But what can I expect? Everyone takes delight in torturing

me."

Markham, his object gained, became contrite, and endeavoured to pacify her by explaining the seriousness of the situation. But in this he failed; and a few moments later he joined us in the hall.

"I don't like this sort of thing, Vance," he said.

"You did remarkably well, however. If I hadn't been with you since lunch I'd have believed you really had a search-warrant. You are a veritable Machiavelli. *Te saluto!*"

"Get on with your business, now that you have the key," ordered Markham irritably. And we descended to the main hall.

Vance looked about him cautiously to make sure we were not observed, and led the way to the library.

"The lock works rather easily, considering its twelve years of desuetude," he remarked, as he turned the key and gently pushed open the massive oak door. "And the hinges don't even creak. Astonishin'."

Blackness confronted us, and Vance struck a match.

"Please don't touch anything," he admonished, and, holding the match high before him, he crossed to the heavy velour draperies of the east window. As he drew them apart a cloud of dust filled the air.

"These curtains, at least, have not been touched for years," he said.

The grey light of mid-afternoon suffused the room, revealing an astonishing retreat. The walls were lined with open book-shelves which reached from the floor nearly to the ceiling, leaving only space enough for a row of marble busts and squat bronze vases. At the southern end of the room was a massive flat-topped desk, and in the centre stood a long carved table laden with curious and outlandish ornaments. Beneath the windows and in the corners were piles of pamphlets and portfolios; and along the moulding of the bookcases hung gargoyles and old prints yellow with age. Two enormous Persian lamps of perforated brass depended from the ceiling, and beside the centre-table stood a Chinese scone eight feet high. The floor was covered with overlapping Oriental rugs laid at all angles; and at each end of the fire-place was a hideous painted totem-pole reaching to the beams. A thick coating of dust overlay everything.

Vance returned to the door and, striking another match, closely examined the inner knob.

"Someone," he announced, "has been here recently. There's no sign of dust on this knob."

"We might get the finger-prints," suggested Heath.

Vance shook his head.

"Not even worth trying. The person we're dealing with knows better than to leave sign manuals."

He closed the door softly and threw the bolt. Then he looked about him. Presently he pointed beneath a huge geographical globe beside the desk.

"There are your galoshes, Sergeant. I thought they'd be here."

Heath almost threw himself upon them, and carried them to the window.

"They're the ones, all right," he declared.

Markham gave Vance one of his annoyed, calculating stares.

"You've got some theory," he asserted, in an accusing tone.

"Nothing more than I've already told you. The finding of the galoshes was wholly incidental. I'm interested in other things—just what, I don't know."

He stood near the centre-table and let his eyes roam over the objects of the room. Presently his gaze came to rest on a low wicker reading-chair, the right arm of which was shaped into a book-rest. It stood within a few feet of the wall opposite to the fire-place, facing a narrow section of book-shelves that was surmounted by a replica of the Capitoline Museum bust of Vespasian.

"Most untidy," he murmured. "I'm sure that chair wasn't left in that position twelve years ago."

He moved forward, and stood looking down at it musingly. Instinctively Markham and Heath followed him; and then saw the thing that he had been contemplating. On the table-arm of the chair was a deep saucer in which stood the thick stub of a candle. The saucer was almost filled with smoky wax drippings.

"It took many candles to fill that dish," commented Vance; "and I doubt if the departed Tobias did his reading by candle-light." He touched the seat and the back of the chair, and then examined his hand. "There's dust, but nowhere near a decade's accumulation. Someone has been browsing in this library rather recently; and he was dashed secretive about it. He didn't dare draw the shades or turn on the lights. He sat here with a single candle, sampling Tobias's brand of literature. And it apparently appealed to him, for this one saucer contains evidence of many bookish nights. How many other saucers of paraffin there were we don't know."

"The old lady could tell us who had a chance to put the key back this morning after hiding the galoshes," offered Heath.

"No one put the key back this morning, Sergeant. The person who was in the habit of visiting here wouldn't have stolen it and returned it on each occasion when he could have had a duplicate made in fifteen minutes."

"I guess you're right." The sergeant was sorely perplexed. "But as long as we don't know who's got the key, we're no better off than we were."

"We're not quite through yet with our scrutiny of the library," rejoined Vance. "As I told Mr. Markham at lunch, my main object in coming here was to ascertain Tobias's taste in literature."

"A lot of good that'll do you!"

"One can never tell. Tobias, remember, bequeathed his library to the Police Department...Let's see with what tomes the old boy whiled away his inactive hours."

Vance took out his monocle and, polishing it carefully, fitted it to his eye. Then he turned to the nearest bookshelves. I stepped forward and looked over his shoulder; and, as my glance ran over the dusty titles, I could scarcely suppress an exclamation of amazement. Here was one of the most complete and unusual private libraries of criminology in America—and I was familiar with many of the country's famous collections. Crime in all its phases and ramifications was represented. Rare old treatises, long out of print and now the delight of bibliophiles, shouldered one another in compact tiers on Tobias Greene's shelves.

Nor were the subjects of these books limited to a narrow interpretation of criminology. All the various allied branches of the subject were represented. There were entire sections devoted to insanity and cretinism, social and criminal pathology, suicide, pauperism and

philanthropy, prison reform, prostitution and morphinism, capital punishment, abnormal psychology, legal codes, the argot of the underworld and code writing, toxicology, and police methods. The volumes were in many languages—English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Russian, Dutch, and Latin.<sup>[19]</sup>

Vance's eyes sparkled as he moved along the crowded shelves. Markham also was deeply interested; and Heath, bending here and there towards a volume, registered an expression of bewildered curiosity.

"My word!" murmured Vance. "No wonder your department, Sergeant, was chosen as the future custodian of these tomes. What a collection! Extr'ordin'ry! Aren't you glad, Markham, you wangled the old lady into relinquishing the key?"

Suddenly he stiffened and jerked his head toward the door, at the same time lifting his hand for silence. I, too, had heard a slight noise in the hall, like someone brushing against the woodwork of the door, but had thought nothing of it. For a few moments we waited tensely. But no further sound came to us, and Vance stepped quickly to the door and drew it open. The hall was empty. He stood on the threshold for a while listening. Then he closed the door, and turned again to the room.

"I could have sworn someone was listening in the hall."

"I heard a rustle of some kind," Markham corroborated him. "I took it for granted it was Sproot or the maid passing by."

"Why should anybody's hanging round the hall worry us, Mr. Vance?" Heath asked.

"I really couldn't say, don't y' know. But it bothers me, nevertheless. If someone was at the door listening, it shows that our presence here has produced a state of anxiety in the person privy to the fact. It's possible, d' ye see, that someone is desirous of ascertaining what we have found out."

"Well, I can't see that we've found out enough to make anybody lose any sleep," mumbled Heath.

"You're so discouraging, Sergeant." Vance sighed and went to the book-shelves in front of the wicker reading-chair. "There may be something in this section to cheer us. Let us see if there's a glad tidings or two written in the dust."

He struck match after match as he carefully inspected the tops of the books, beginning at the highest shelf and systematically scrutinizing the volumes of each row. He had reached the second shelf from the floor when he bent over curiously and gave a second long look at two thick grey volumes. Then, putting out the match, he took the volumes to the window.

"The thing is quite mad," he remarked, after a brief examination. "These are the only books within arm's reach of the chair that have been handled recently. And what do you think they are? An old two-volume edition of Professor Hans Gross's 'Handbuch für Untersuchungsrichter als System der Kriminalistik,' or—to claw the title loosely into the vulgate—'A Handbook on the Criminal Sciences for Examining Magistrates.'" He gave Markham a look of facetious reproach. "I say, you haven't, by any chance, been spending your nights in this library learning how to ballyrag suspects?"

Markham ignored his levity. He recognised the outward sign of Vance's inner uneasiness.

"The apparently irrelevant theme of the book," he returned, "might indicate a mere coincidence between the visits of some person to this room and the crimes committed in the house."

Vance made no answer. He thoughtfully returned the books to their place and ran his eyes over the remaining volumes of the bottom shelf. Suddenly he knelt down and struck another match.

"Here are several books out of place." I detected a subdued note of eagerness in his voice. "They belong in other sections; and they've been crowded in here a little out of alignment. Moreover, they're innocent of dust... 'Pon my soul, Markham, here's a coincidence for your sceptical legal mind! Lend an ear to these titles: 'Poisons: Their Effects and Detection,' by Alexander Wynter Blyth,<sup>[20]</sup> and 'Textbook of Medical Jurisprudence, Toxicology, and Public Health,' by John Glaister, Professor of Forensic Medicine at the University of Glasgow. And here we have Friedrich Brügemann's 'Ueber hysterische Dammerzustände,' and Schwarzwald's 'Ueber Hystero-Paralyse and Somnambulismus.' I say! That's deuced queer..."

He rose and walked up and down, agitated.

"No—no; absolutely not," he muttered. "It simply can't be... Why should Von Blon lie to us about her?"

We all knew what was in his mind. Even Heath sensed it at once, for, though he did not speak German, the titles of the two German books—especially the latter—needed no translation to be understood. Hysteria and twilight sleep! Hysterical paralysis and somnambulism! The gruesome and terrible implication in these two titles, and their possible relation to the sinister tragedies of the Greene mansion, sent a chill of horror over me.

Vance stopped his restless pacing and fixed a grave gaze on Markham.

"This thing gets deeper and deeper.—Something unthinkable is going on here.—Come, let us get out of this polluted room. It has told us its gibbering, nightmarish story. And now we will have to interpret it—find some glimmer of sanity in its black suggestions.—Sergeant, will you draw the curtains while I straighten these books? We'd best leave no evidence of our visit."

## 19. SHERRY AND PARALYSIS

(Wednesday, December 1st; 4.30 p.m.)

WHEN we returned to Mrs. Greene's room the old lady was apparently sleeping peacefully and we did not disturb her. Heath gave the key to Nurse O'Brien with instructions to replace it in the jewel-case, and we went downstairs.

Although it was but a little past four o'clock, the early winter twilight had already descended. Sproot had not yet lighted the lamps, and the lower hall was in semidarkness. A ghostly atmosphere pervaded the house. Even the silence was oppressive, and seemed fraught with the spirit of commination. We went straight to the hall-table where we had thrown our coats, eager to get out into the open air.

But we were not to shake the depressing influence of the old mansion so quickly. We had scarcely reached the table when there came a slight stirring of the portières of the archway opposite to the drawing-room, and a tense, whispered voice said:

"Mr. Vance—please!"

We turned, startled. There, just inside of the reception-room, hiding behind the heavy draperies, stood Ada, her face a patch of ghastly white in the gathering gloom. With one finger placed on her lips for silence, she beckoned to us; and we stepped softly into the chill, unused room.

"There's something I must tell you," she said, in a half-whisper— "something terrible! I was going to telephone you to-day, but I was afraid..." A fit of trembling seized her.

"Don't be frightened, Ada," Vance encouraged her soothingly. "In a few days all these awful things will be over.—What have you to tell us?"

She made an effort to draw herself together, and when the tremor had passed she went on hesitantly.

"Last night—it was long after midnight—I woke, and felt hungry. So I got up, slipped on a wrap, and stole downstairs. Cook always leaves something in the pantry for me..." Again she stopped, and her haunted eyes searched our faces. "But when I reached the lower landing of the stairs I heard a soft, shuffling sound in the hall—far back, near the library door. My heart was in my mouth, but I made myself look over the banister. And just then—someone struck a match..."!

Her trembling began afresh, and she clutched Vance's arm with both hands. I was afraid the girl was going to faint, and I moved closer to her; but Vance's voice seemed to steady her.

"Who was it, Ada?"

She caught her breath and looked about her, her face the picture of deadly fear. Then she leaned forward.

"It was mother... *And she was walking!*"

The dread significance of this revelation chilled us all into silence. After a moment a choked whistle escaped Heath; and Markham threw back his head like a man shaking himself out of an encroaching spell of hypnosis. It was Vance who first recovered himself sufficiently to speak.

"Your mother was near the library door?"

Yes; and it seemed as though she held a key in her hand.

"Was she carrying anything else?" Vance's effort at calmness was only half successful.

"I didn't notice—I was too terrified."

"Could she, for instance, have been carrying a pair of galoshes?" he persisted.

"She might have been. I don't know. She had on her long Oriental shawl, and it fell down about her in folds. Maybe under the shawl... Or she might have put them down when she struck the match. I only knew I saw her—moving slowly... there in the darkness."

The memory of that unbelievable vision completely took possession of the girl. Her eyes stared, trance-like, into the deepening shadows.

Markham cleared his throat nervously.

"You say yourself it was dark in the hall last night, Miss Greene. Perhaps your fears got the better of you. Are you sure it might not have been Hemming or the cook?"

She brought her eyes back to Markham with sudden resentment.

"No!" Then her voice took on its former note of terror. "It was mother. The match was burning close to her face, and there was a terrible look in her eyes. I was only a few feet from her—looking straight down on her."

Her hold on Vance's arm tightened, and once more her agonized gaze turned to him.

"Oh, what does it mean? I thought—I thought mother could never walk again."

Vance ignored her anguished appeal.

"Tell me this, for it's very important: did your mother see you?"

"I—don't know." Her words were scarcely audible. "I drew back and ran softly up the stairs. Then I locked myself in my room."

Vance did not speak at once. He regarded the girl for a moment, and then gave her a slow, comforting smile.

"And I think your room is the best place for you now," he said. "Don't worry over what you saw; and keep what you have told us to yourself. There's nothing to be afraid of. Certain types of paralytics have been known to walk in their sleep under the stress of shock or excitement. Anyway, we'll arrange for the new nurse to sleep in your room to-night." And with a friendly pat on her arm he sent her upstairs.

After Heath had given Miss O'Brien the necessary instructions, we left the house and walked toward First Avenue.

"Good God, Vance!" said Markham huskily. "We've got to move quickly. That child's story opens up new and frightful possibilities."

"Couldn't you get a commitment for the old woman to some sanatorium to-morrow, sir?" asked Heath.

"On what grounds? It's a pathological case, pure and simple. We haven't a scrap of evidence."

"I shouldn't attempt it, in any event," interposed Vance. "We mustn't be hasty. There are several conclusions to be drawn from Ada's story; and if the thing that all of us is thinking should be wrong, we'd only make matters worse by a false move. We might delay the slaughter for the time being; but we'd learn nothing. And our only hope is to find out—some way—what's at the bottom of this atrocious business."

"Yeh? And how are we going to do that, Mr. Vance?" Heath spoke with despair.

"I don't know now. But the Greene household is safe for to-night, anyway; and that gives us a little time. I think I'll have another talk with Von Blon. Doctors—especially the younger ones—are apt to give snap diagnoses."

"It can certainly do no harm," agreed Markham. "And it might bring forth something suggestive. When will you tackle him?"

Heath had hailed a taxicab, and we were headed down-town along Third Avenue.

Vance was gazing out of the window.

"Why not at once?" Suddenly his mood had changed. "Here we are in the Forties. And tea-time! What could be more opportune?"

He leaned over and gave the chauffeur an order.

In a few minutes the taxicab drew up to the kerb before Von Blon's brown- stone residence.

The doctor received us apprehensively.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" he asked, trying to read our faces.

"Oh, no," Vance answered easily. "We were passing and thought we'd drop in for a dish of tea and a medical chat."

Von Blon studied him with a slight suspicion.

"Very well. You gentlemen shall have both." He rang for his man. "But I can do even better. I've some old Amontillado sherry—"

"My word!" Vance bowed ceremoniously and turned to Markham. "You see how fortune favours her punctual children?"

The wine was brought and carefully decanted.

Vance took up his glass and sipped it. One would have thought, from his manner, that nothing in the world at that moment was as important as the quality of the wine.

"Ah, my dear doctor," he remarked, with some ostentation, "the blender on the sunny Andalusian slopes unquestionably had many rare and valuable butts with which to glorify this vintage. There was little need for the addition of *vino dulce* that year; but, then, the Spaniards always sweeten their wine, probably because the English object to the slightest dryness. And it's the English, you know, who buy all the best sherries. They have always loved their 'sherris-sack'; and many a British bard has immortalized it in song. Ben Jonson sang its praises, and so did Tom Moore and Byron. But it was Shakespeare—an ardent lover of sherry himself—who penned the greatest and most passionate panegyric to it. You remember Falstaff's 'apostrophe'?—'It ascends me into the brain; dries me there all the foolish and dull and crudy vapours which environ it; makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery and delectable shapes...' Sherry, you probably know, doctor, was once regarded as a cure for gout and other *malaises* of faulty metabolism." He paused and put down his glass.

"I wonder that you haven't prescribed this delicious sherry for Mrs. Greene long ago. I'm sure she would serve you with a writ of confiscation if she knew you had it."

"The fact is," Von Blon returned, "I once took her a bottle, and she gave it to Chester. She doesn't care for wine. I remember my father's telling me she objected violently to her husband's well-stocked cellar."

"Your father died, did he not, before Mrs. Greene became paralyzed?" Vance asked incuriously.

"Yes—about a year."

"And was yours the only diagnosis made of her case?"

Von Blon looked at him with an air of gentle surprise.

"Yes. I saw no necessity of calling in any of the bigwigs. The symptoms were clear-cut and conformed with the anamnesis. Furthermore, everything since then has confirmed my diagnosis."

"And yet, doctor"—Vance spoke with great deference—"something has occurred which, from the layman's point of view, tends to cast doubt on the accuracy of that diagnosis. Therefore, I feel sure you will forgive me when I ask you quite frankly if it would not be possible to place another, and perhaps less serious, interpretation on Mrs. Greene's invalidism."

Von Blon appeared greatly puzzled.

"There is," he said, "not the slightest possibility that Mrs. Greene is suffering from any disease other than an organic paralysis of both legs—a paraplegia, in fact, of the entire lower part of the body."

"If you were to see Mrs. Greene move her legs, what would be your mental reaction?"

Von Blon stared at him incredulously. Then he forced a laugh.

"My mental reaction? I'd know my liver was out of order, and that I was having hallucinations."

"And if you knew your liver was functioning perfectly—then what?"

"I'd immediately become a devout believer in miracles."

Vance smiled pleasantly.

"I sincerely hope it won't come to that. And yet so-called therapeutic miracles have happened."

"I'll admit that medical history is filled with what the uninitiated call miraculous cures. But there is sound pathology beneath all of them. In Mrs. Greene's case, however, I can see no loophole for error. If she should move her legs, it would controvert all the known laws of physiology."

"By the by, doctor"—Vance put the question abruptly—"are you familiar with Brugelmann's 'Ueber hysterische Dämmerzustände'?"

"No—I can't say that I am."

"Or with Schwarzwald's 'Ueber Hystero-Paralyse und Somnambulismus'?"

Von Blon hesitated, and his eyes were focused intently like those of a man who is thinking rapidly.

"I knew Schwarzwald, of course," he answered. "But I'm ignorant of the particular work you mention..." Slowly a look of amazement dawned on his face. "Good heavens You're not trying to connect the subjects of these books with Mrs. Greene's condition, are you?"

"If I were to tell you that both of these books are in the Greene mansion, what would you say?"

"I'd say their presence is no more relevant to the situation there than would be a copy of 'Die Leiden des jungen Werther' or Heine's 'Romanzero.'"

"I'm sorry I can't agree with you," returned Vance politely. "They are certainly relevant to our investigation, and I had hoped you might be able to explain the connection."

Von Blon appeared to ponder the matter, his face the picture of perplexity.

"I wish I could help you," he said, after several moments. Then he glanced up quickly; a new light had come into his eyes. "Permit me to suggest, sir, that you are labouring under a misapprehension as to the correct scientific connotation of the words in the titles of these two books. I have had occasion to do considerable reading along psycho-analytic lines; and both Freud and Jung use the terms '*Somnambulismus*' and '*Dämmerzustände*' in an entirely different sense from our common use of the terms 'somnambulism' and 'twilight sleep.' '*Somnambulismus*,' in the terminology of psychopathology and abnormal psychology, is employed in connection with ambivalence and dual personality: it designates the actions of the submerged, or subconscious, self in cases of aphasia, amnesia, and the like. It does not refer to one's walking in one's sleep. For instance, in psychic hysteria where one loses one's memory and adopts a new personality, the subject is called a *Somnambule*.' It is the same as what the newspapers commonly refer to as an 'amnesia victim.'"

He rose and went to a bookcase. After a few moments' search he took down several volumes.

"Here we have, for example, an old monograph by Freud and Breuer, written in 1893 and entitled 'Ueber den psychischen Mechanismus der hysterischen Phenomene.' If you care to take the trouble to read it, you will see that it is an exposition of the application of the term '*Somnambulismus*' to certain temporary neurotic derangements.—And here also is Freud's 'Traumdeutung,' published in 1894, in which this terminology is explained and amplified.—In addition to these, I have here 'Nervöse Angstzustände,' by Stekel, who, though he leads one of the most important schisms in the Freudian school, uses the same nomenclature in referring to split personality." He laid the three books on the table before Vance. "You may take them along if you like. They may throw some light on the quandary you are in."

"You are inclined to believe, then, that both Schwarzwald and Brugelmann refer to waking psychic states rather than the more common type of somnambulism?"

"Yes, I am inclined to that belief. I know Schwarzwald was a former lecturer at the Psychopathisches Institut, in constant contact with Freud and his teachings. But, as I told you, I am not familiar with either of the books."

"How would you account for the term 'hysteria' in both titles?"

"Its presence there is in no way contradictory. Aphasia, amnesia, aphonia—and often anosmia and apnoea—are symptoms of hysteria. And hysterical paralysis is quite common. There are many cases of paralytics who have been unable to move a muscle for years, as a result of sheer hysteria."

"Ah, exactly!" Vance picked up his glass and drained it. "That brings me to a rather unusual request I desire to make.—As you know, the papers are waxing severe in their criticism of the police and the District Attorney's office, and are accusing of negligence everyone connected with the investigation of the Greene case. Therefore Mr. Markham has decided that it might be advisable for him to possess a report of Mrs. Greene's physical condition which would carry the very highest expert authority. And I was going to suggest that, merely as a matter of formal routine, we get such a report from, let us say, Doctor Felix Oppenheimer."[\[21\]](#)

Von Blon did not speak for several minutes. He sat toying nervously with his glass, his eyes fixed with intent calculation on Vance.

"It might be well for you to have the report," he acceded at last, "if only to dispel your own doubts on the subject.—No, I have no objection to the plan. I will be very glad to make the arrangements."

Vance rose.

"That's very generous of you, doctor. But I must urge you to attend to it without delay."

"I understand perfectly. I will get in touch with Doctor Oppenheimer in the morning and explain to him the official character of the situation. I'm sure he will expedite matters."

When we were again in the taxicab Markham gave voice to his perplexity.

"Von Blon strikes me as a particularly able and trustworthy man. And yet he has obviously gone woefully astray in regard to Mrs. Greene's illness. I fear he's in for a shock when he hears what Oppenheimer has to say after the examination."

"Y' know, Markham," said Vance sombrely, "I'll feel infinitely bucked if we succeed in getting that report from Oppenheimer."

"Succeed! What do you mean?"

"Pon my word, I don't know what I mean. I only know that there's a black terrible intrigue of some kind going on at the Greene house. And we don't yet know who's back of it. But it's someone who's watching us, who knows every move we make, and is thwarting us at every turn."



## 20. THE FOURTH TRAGEDY

(Thursday, December 2nd; forenoon)

THE following day was one that will ever remain in my memory. Despite the fact that what happened had been foreseen by all of us, nevertheless when it actually came it left us as completely stunned as if it had been wholly unexpected. Indeed, the very horror that informed our anticipation tended to intensify the enormity of the event.

The day broke dark and threatening. A damp chill was in the air; and the leaden skies clung close to the earth with suffocating menace. The weather was like a symbol of our gloomy spirits.

Vance rose early, and, though he said little, I knew the case was preying on his mind. After breakfast he sat before the fire for over an hour sipping his coffee and smoking. Then he made an attempt to interest himself in an old French edition of "Till Ulenspiegel," but, failing, took down volume seven of Osler's "Modern Medicine" and turned to Buzzard's article on myelitis. For an hour he read with despairing concentration. At last he returned the book to the shelves.

At half-past eleven Markham telephoned to inform us that he was leaving the office immediately for the Greene mansion and would stop *en route* to pick us up. He refused to say more, and hung up the receiver abruptly.

It wanted ten minutes of being noon when he arrived; and his expression of grim discouragement told us more plainly than words that another tragedy had occurred.

We had on our coats in readiness and accompanied him at once to the car.

"And who is it this time?" asked Vance, as we swung into Park Avenue.

"Ada." Markham spoke bitterly through his teeth.

"I was afraid of that, after what she told us yesterday.—With poison, I suppose."

"Yes—the morphine."

"Still, it's an easier death than strychnine-poisoning."

"She's not dead, thank God!" said Markham. "That is, she was still alive when Heath phoned."

"Heath? Was he at the house?"

"No. The nurse notified him at the Homicide Bureau, and he phoned me from there. He'll probably be at the Greenes' when we arrive."

"You say she isn't dead?"

"Drumm—he's the official police surgeon Moran stationed in the Narcoss Flats—got there immediately, and had managed to keep her alive up to the time the nurse phoned."

"Sproot's signal worked all right, then?"

"Apparently. And I want to say, Vance, that I'm damned grateful to you for that suggestion to have a doctor on hand."

When we arrived at the Greene mansion Heath, who had been watching for us, opened the door.

"She ain't dead," he greeted us in a stage whisper; and then drew us into the reception-room to explain his secretive manner. "Nobody in the house except Sproot and O'Brien knows about this poisoning yet. Sproot found her, and then pulled down all the front curtains in this room—which was the signal agreed on. When Doc Drumm hopped across Sproot was waiting with the door open, and took him upstairs without anybody seeing him. The doc sent for O'Brien, and after they'd worked on the girl for a while he told her to notify the Bureau. They're both up in the room now with the doors locked."

"You did right in keeping the thing quiet," Markham told him. "If Ada recovers we can hush it up and perhaps learn something from her."

"That's what I was thinking, sir. I told Sproot I'd wring his scrawny neck if he spilled anything to anybody."

"And," added Vance, "he bowed politely and said 'Yes, sir.'"

"You bet your life he did!"

"Where is the rest of the household at present?" Markham asked.

"Miss Sibella's in her room. She had breakfast in bed at half-past ten and told the maid she was going back to sleep. The old lady's also asleep. The maid and the cook are in the back of the house somewhere."

"Has Von Blon been here this morning?" put in Vance.

"Sure he's been here—he comes regular. O'Brien said he called at ten, sat with the old lady about an hour, and then went away."

"And he hasn't been notified about the morphine?"

"What's the use? Drumm's a good doctor, and Von Blon might blab about it to Sibella or somebody."

"Quite right." Vance nodded his approval.

We re-entered the hall and divested ourselves of our wraps.

"While we're waiting for Doctor Drumm," said Markham, "we might as well find out what Sproot knows."

We went into the drawing-room, and Heath yanked the bell-cord. The old butler came directly and stood before us without the slightest trace of emotion. His imperturbability struck me as inhuman.

Markham beckoned him to come nearer.

"Now, Sproot, tell us exactly what took place."

"I was in the kitchen resting, sir"—the man's voice was as wooden as usual—"and I was just looking at the clock and thinking I would resume my duties, when the bell of Miss Ada's room rang. Each bell, you understand, sir—"

"Never mind that! What time was it?"

"It was exactly eleven o'clock. And, as I said, Miss Ada's bell rang. I went right upstairs and knocked on her door; but, as there was no answer, I took the liberty of opening it and looking into the room. Miss Ada was lying on the bed; but it was not a natural attitude—"

if you understand what I mean. And then I noticed a very peculiar thing, sir. Miss Sibella's little dog was on the bed—"

"Was there a chair or stool by the bed?" interrupted Vance.

"Yes, sir, I believe there was. An ottoman."

"So the dog could have climbed on the bed unassisted?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Very good. Continue."

"Well, the dog was on the bed, and he looked like he was standing on his hind legs playing with the bell-cord. But the peculiar thing was that his hind legs were on Miss Ada's face, and she didn't seem to even notice it. Inwardly I was a bit startled; and I went to the bed and picked up the dog. Then I discovered that several threads of the silk tassel on the end of the cord had got caught between his teeth; and would you believe it, sir?—it was him who had really rung Miss Ada's bell..."

"Amazin'," murmured Vance. "What then, Sprout?"

"I shook the young lady, although I had little hope of waking her after Miss Sibella's dog had been trampling over her face without her knowing it. Then I came downstairs and drew the curtains in the reception-room as I had been instructed to do in case of an emergency. When the doctor arrived I showed him to Miss Ada's room."

"And that's all you know?"

"Everything, sir."

"Thank you, Sprout." Markham rose impatiently.

"And now you might let Doctor Drumm know that we are here."

It was the nurse, however, who came to the drawing-room a few minutes later. She was a medium-sized, well-built woman of thirty-five, with shrewd brown eyes, a thin mouth, and a firm chin, and a general air of competency. She greeted Heath with a companionable wave of the hand and bowed to the rest of us with aloof formality.

"Doc Drumm can't leave his patient just now," she informed us, seating herself. "So he sent me along. He'll be down presently."

"And what's the report?" Markham was still standing.

"She'll live, I guess. We've been giving her passive exercise and artificial breathing for half an hour, and the doc hopes to have her walking before long."

Markham, his nervousness somewhat abated, sat down again.

"Tell us all you can, Miss O'Brien. Was there any evidence as to how the poison was administered?"

"Nothing but an empty bouillon cup." The woman was ill at ease. "I guess you'll find remains of morphine in it, all right."

"Why do you think the drug was given by means of the bouillon?"

She hesitated and shot Heath an uneasy look.

"It's this way. I always bring a cup of bouillon to Mrs. Greene a little before eleven in the morning; and if Miss Ada's around I bring two cups—that's the old lady's orders. This morning the girl was in the room when I went down to the kitchen, so I brought up two cups. But Mrs. Greene was alone when I returned, so I gave the old lady hers and put the other cup in Miss Ada's room on the table by the bed. Then I went into the hall to call her. She was downstairs—in the living-room, I guess. Anyhow, she came up right away, and, as I had some mending to do for Mrs. Greene, I went to my room on the third floor..."

"Therefore," interpolated Markham, "the bouillon was on Miss Ada's table unprotected for a minute or so after you had left the room and before Miss Ada came up from the lower hall."

"It wasn't over twenty seconds. And I was right outside the door all the time. Furthermore, the door was open, and I'd have heard anyone in the room." The woman was obviously defending herself desperately against the imputation of negligence in Markham's remark.

Vance put the next question.

"Did you see anyone else in the hall besides Miss Ada?"

"No one except Doctor Von Blon. He was in the lower hall getting into his coat when I called down."

"Did he leave the house at once?"

"Why—yes."

"You actually saw him pass through the door?"

"No—o. But he was putting on his coat, and he had said good bye to Mrs. Greene and me..."

"When?"

"Not two minutes before. I'd met him coming out of Mrs. Greene's door just as I brought in the bouillon."

"And Miss Sibella's dog—did you notice it in the hall anywhere?"

"No; it wasn't around when I was there."

Vance lay back drowsily in his chair, and Markham again took up the interrogation.

"How long did you remain in your room, Miss O'Brien, after you had called Miss Ada?"

"Until the butler came and told me that Doctor Drumm wanted me."

"And how much later would you say that was?"

"About twenty minutes—maybe a little longer."

Markham smoked pensively a while.

"Yes," he commented at length; "it plainly appears that the morphine was somehow added to the bouillon.—You'd better return to Doctor Drumm now, Miss O'Brien. We'll wait here for him."

"Hell!" growled Heath, after the nurse had gone upstairs. "She's the best woman for this sort of a job that we've got. And now she goes and falls down on it."

"I wouldn't say she'd fallen down exactly, Sergeant," dissented Vance, his eyes fixed dreamily on the ceiling. "After all, she only stepped into the hall for a few seconds to summon the young lady to her matutinal broth. And if the morphine hadn't found its way into the bouillon this morning it would have done so to-morrow, or the day after, or some time in the future. In fact, the propitious gods

may actually have favoured us this morning as they did the Grecian host before the walls of Troy."

"They will have favoured us," observed Markham, "if Ada recovers and can tell us who visited her room before she drank the bouillon."

The silence that ensued was terminated by the entrance of Doctor Drumm, a youthful, earnest man with an aggressive bearing. He sank heavily into a chair and wiped his face with a large silk handkerchief.

"She's pulled through," he announced. "I happened to be standing by the window looking out—sheer chance—when I saw the curtains go down—saw 'em before Hennessey[22] did. I grabbed up my bag and the pulmotor, and was over here in a jiffy. The butler was waiting at the door, and took me upstairs. Queer crab, that butler. The girl was lying across the bed, and it didn't take but one look to see that I wasn't dealing with strychnine. No spasms or sweating or risus sardonicus, you understand. Quiet and peaceful; shallow breathing; cyanosis. Morphine evidently. Then I looked at her pupils. Pinpoints. No doubt now. So I sent for the nurse and got busy."

"A close call?" asked Markham.

"Close enough." The doctor nodded importantly. "You can't tell what would have happened if somebody hadn't got to her in a hurry. I figured she'd got all six grains that were lost, and gave her a good stiff hypo of atropine—a fiftieth. It reacted like a shot. Then I washed her stomach out with potassium permanganate. After that I gave her artificial respiration—she didn't seem to need it, but I wasn't taking any chances. Then the nurse and I got busy exercising her arms and legs, trying to keep her awake. Tough work, that. Hope I don't get pneumonia sweating there with the windows all open... Well, so it went. Her breathing kept getting better, and I gave her another hundredth of atropine for good measure. At last I managed to get her on her feet. The nurse is walking her up and down now." He mopped his face again with a triumphant flourish of the handkerchief.

"We're greatly indebted to you, doctor," said Markham. "It's quite possible you have been the means of solving this case.—When will we be able to question your patient?"

"She'll be loggy and nauseated all day—kind of general collapse, you understand, with painful breathing, drowsiness, headache, and that sort of thing—no fit condition to answer questions. But to-morrow morning you'll be able to talk to her as much as you like."

"That will be satisfactory. And what of the bouillon cup the nurse mentioned?"

"It tasted bitter—morphine, all right."

As Drumm finished speaking Sproot passed down the hall to the front door. A moment later Von Blon paused at the archway and looked into the drawing-room. The strained silence which followed the exchange of greetings caused him to study us with growing alarm.

"Has anything happened?" he finally asked.

It was Vance who rose and, with quick decision, assumed the rôle of spokesman.

"Yes, doctor. Ada has been poisoned with morphine. Doctor Drumm here happened to be in the Narcoss Flats opposite and was called in."

"And Sibella—is she all right?" Von Blon spoke excitedly.

"Oh, quite."

A relieved sigh escaped him, and he sank into a chair. "Tell me about it. When was the—the murder discovered?"

Drumm was about to correct him when Vance said quickly:

"Immediately after you left the house this morning. The poison was administered in the bouillon the nurse brought from the kitchen."

"But... how could that be?" Von Blon appeared unbelieving. "I was just going when she brought the bouillon. I saw her enter with it. How could the poison—?"

"That reminds me, doctor." Vance's tone was almost dulcet. "Did you, by any hap, go upstairs again after you had donned your coat?"

Von Blon looked at him with outraged astonishment. "Certainly not! I left the house immediately."

"That would have been just after the nurse called down to Ada."

"Why—yes. I believe the nurse did call down; and Ada went upstairs at once—if I recall correctly."

Vance smoked a moment, his gaze resting curiously on the doctor's troubled face.

"I would suggest, without any intention of being impertinent, that your present visit follows rather closely upon your former one."

Von Blon's face clouded over, but I failed to detect any resentment in his expression.

"Quite true," he rejoined, and shifted his eyes. "The fact is, sir, that ever since those drugs disappeared from my case I've felt that something tragic was impending, and that I was in some way to blame. Whenever I'm in this neighbourhood I can't resist the impulse to call here and—and see how things are going."

"Your anxiety is wholly understandable." Vance's tone was non-committal. Then he added negligently: "I suppose you will have no objection to Doctor Drumm continuing with Ada's case."

"Continuing?" Von Blon brought himself up straight in his chair. "I don't understand. You said a moment ago—"

"That Ada had been poisoned," finished Vance. "Quite. But d'y'e see, she didn't die."

The other looked dumbfounded.

"Thank God for that!" he exclaimed, rising nervously.

"And," added Markham, "we are making no mention whatever of the episode. You will, therefore, be guided by our decision."

"Of course.—And is it permitted that I see Ada?"

Markham hesitated, and Vance answered:

"If you care to—certainly." He turned to Drumm. "Will you be so good as to accompany Doctor Von Blon?"

Drumm and Von Blon left the room together.

"I don't wonder he's on edge," commented Markham. "It's not pleasant to learn of people being poisoned with drugs lost through one's own carelessness."

"He wasn't worrying as much over Ada as he was over Sibella," remarked Heath.

"Observin' fella!" smiled Vance. "No, Sergeant; Ada's demise apparently bothered him far less than Sibella's possible state of health... Now, I wonder what that means. It's an inveiglin' point. But—dash it all—it everts my pet theory."

"So you have a theory." Markham spoke rebukingly.

"Oh, any number of 'em. And, I might add, they're all pets." Vance's lightness of tone meant merely that he was not ready to outline his suspicions; and Markham did not push the matter.

"We won't need any theories," declared Heath, "after we've heard what Ada's got to tell us. As soon as she talks to us to-morrow we'll be able to figure out who poisoned her"

"Perhaps," murmured Vance.

Drumm returned alone a few minutes later.

"Doctor Von Blon has stepped into the other girl's room. Said he'd be down right away."

"What did he have to say about your patient?" asked Vance.

"Nothing much. She put new energy into her walking the minute she saw him, though. Smiled at him, too, by Jove! A good sign, that. She'll come through fast. Lot of resistance in her."

Drumm had hardly ceased speaking when we heard Sibella's door close and the sound of descending footsteps on the stairs.

"By the by, doctor," said Vance to Von Blon as the latter re-entered the drawing-room, "have you seen Oppenheimer yet?"

I saw him at eleven. The fact is, I went direct to him after leaving here this morning. He has agreed to make an examination to-morrow at ten o'clock."

"And was Mrs. Greene agreeable?"

"Oh, yes. I spoke to her about it this morning; and she made no objection whatever."

A short while later we took our departure. Von Blon accompanied us to the gate, and we saw him drive off in his car.

"We'll know more by this time to-morrow, I hope," said Markham on the way down-town. He was unwontedly depressed, and his eyes were greatly troubled. "You know, Vance, I'm almost appalled by the thought of what Oppenheimer's report may be."

No report was ever made by Doctor Oppenheimer, however. At some time between one and two the next morning Mrs. Greene died in convulsions as a result of strychnine poisoning.

## 21. A DEPLETED HOUSEHOLD

(Friday, December 3rd; forenoon)

MARKHAM brought us the news of Mrs. Greene's death before ten o'clock the next morning. The tragedy had not been discovered until nine, when the nurse brought up her patient's morning tea. Heath had notified Markham, and Markham had stopped on his way to the Greene mansion to apprise Vance of the new development. Vance and I had already breakfasted, and we accompanied him to the house.

"This knocks out our only prop," Markham said despondently, as we sped up Madison Avenue. "The possibility that the old lady was guilty was frightful to contemplate; though all along I've been trying to console myself with the thought that she was insane. Now, however, I almost wish our suspicions had proved true, for the possibilities that are left seem even more terrible. We're dealing now with a cold-blooded calculating rationality."

Vance nodded.

"Yes, we're confronted with something far worse than mania. I can't say, though, that I'm deeply shocked by Mrs. Greene's death. She was a detestable woman, Markham—a most detestable woman. The world will not bemoan her loss."

Vance's comment expressed exactly the sentiment I had felt when Markham informed us of Mrs. Greene's death. The news had of course shaken me, but I had no pity for the victim. She had been vicious and unnatural; she had thrived on hatred, and had made life a hell for everyone about her. It was better that her existence was over.

Both Heath and Drumm were waiting for us in the drawing-room. Excitement and depression were mingled in the Sergeant's countenance, and the desperation of despair shone in his china-blue eyes. Drumm revealed only a look of professional disappointment: his chief concern apparently was that he had been deprived of an opportunity to display his medical skill.

Heath, after shaking hands absently, briefly explained the situation.

"O'Brien found the old dame dead at nine this morning, and told Sproot to wigwag to Doc Drumm. Then she phoned the Bureau, and I notified you and Doc Doremus. I got here fifteen or twenty minutes ago, and locked up the room."

"Did you inform Von Blon?" Markham asked.

"I phoned him to call off the examination he'd arranged for ten o'clock. Said I'd communicate with him later, and hung up before he had time to ask any questions."

Markham indicated his approval and turned toward Drumm.

"Give us your story, doctor."

Drumm drew himself up, cleared his throat, and assumed an attitude calculated to be impressive. "I was downstairs in the Narcoss dining-room eating breakfast when Hennesey came in and told me the curtains had gone down in the reception-room here. So I snatched my outfit and came over on the run. The butler took me to the old lady's room, where the nurse was waiting. But right away I saw I was too late to be of any good. She was dead—contorted, blue and cold—and *rigor mortis* had set in. Died of a big dose of strychnine. Probably didn't suffer much—exhaustion and coma came inside of half an hour, I'd say. Too old, you understand, to throw it off. Old people succumb to strychnine pretty swiftly..."

"What about her ability to cry out and give the alarm?"

"You can't tell. The spasm may have rendered her mute. Anyway, no one heard her. Probably passed into unconsciousness after the first seizure. My experience with such cases has taught me—"

"What time would you say the strychnine was taken?"

"Well, now, you can't tell exactly." Drumm became oracular. "The convulsions may have been prolonged before death supervened, or death may have supervened very shortly after the poison was swallowed."

At what hour, then, would you fix the time of death?"

"There again you can't say definitely. Confusion between *rigor mortis* and the phenomenon of cadaveric spasm is a pitfall into which many doctors fall. There are however, distinct points of dissimilarity—"

"No doubt." Markham was growing impatient with Drumm's sophomoric pedantries. "But leaving all explanation to one side, what time do you think Mrs. Greene died?"

Drumm pondered the point.

"Roughly, let us say, at two this morning."

"And the strychnine might have been taken as early as eleven or twelve?"

"It's possible."

"Anyhow, we'll know about it when Doc Doremus gets here," asserted Heath with brutal frankness. He was in vicious mood that morning.

"Did you find any glass or cup by which the drug might have been administered, doctor?" Markham hastened to ask, by way of covering up Heath's remark.

"There was a glass near the bed with what appeared to be sulphate crystals adhering to the sides of it."

"But wouldn't a fatal dose of strychnine make an ordin'ry drink noticeably bitter?" Vance had suddenly become alert.

"Undoubtedly. But there was a bottle of citrocarbonate—a well-known antacid—on the night-table; and if the drug had been taken with this, the taste would not have been detected. Citrocarbonate is slightly saline and highly effervescing."

"Could Mrs. Greene have taken the citrocarbonate alone?"

"It's not likely. It has to be carefully mixed with water, and the operation would be highly awkward for anyone in bed."

"Now, that's most interestin'." Vance listlessly lighted a cigarette. "We may presume, therefore, that the person who gave Mrs. Greene the citrocarbonate also administered the strychnine." He turned to Markham. "I think Miss O'Brien might be able to help us."

Heath went at once and summoned the nurse.

But her evidence was unilluminating. She had left Mrs. Greene reading about eleven o'clock, had gone to her own room to make her toilet for the night, and had returned to Ada's room half an hour later, where she had slept all night, according to Heath's instructions. She had risen at eight, dressed, and gone to the kitchen to fetch Mrs. Greene's tea. As far as she knew, Mrs. Greene had drunk nothing before retiring—certainly she had taken no citrocarbonate up to eleven o'clock. Furthermore, Mrs. Greene never attempted to take it alone.

"You think, then," asked Vance, "that it was given to her by someone else?"

"You can bank on it," the nurse assured him bluntly. "If she'd wanted it, she'd have raised the house before mixing it herself."

"It's quite obvious," Vance observed to Markham, "that someone entered her room after eleven o'clock and prepared the citrocarbonate."

Markham got up and walked anxiously about the room.

"Our immediate problem boils down to finding out who had the opportunity to do it," he said. "You, Miss O'Brien, may return to her room..." Then he went to the bell-cord and rang for Sproot.

During a brief interrogation of the butler the following facts were brought out:

The house had been locked up, and Sproot had retired, at about half-past ten.

Sibella had gone to her room immediately after dinner and had remained there.

Hemming and the cook had lingered in the kitchen until shortly after eleven, at which time Sproot had heard them ascend to their rooms.

The first intimation Sproot had of Mrs. Greene's death was when the nurse sent him to draw the reception-room shades at nine that morning.

Markham dismissed him and sent for the cook. She was, it appeared, unaware of Mrs. Greene's death and of Ada's poisoning as well; and what evidence she had to give was of no importance. She had, she said, been in the kitchen or in her own room practically all of the preceding day.

Hemming was interviewed next. From the nature of the questions put to her she became suspicious almost at once. Her piercing eyes narrowed, and she gave us a look of shrewd triumph.

"You can't hoodwink me," she burst out. "The Lord's been busy with his besom again. And a good thing, too! 'The Lord preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked shall he destroy.'"

"Will," corrected Vance. "And seeing that you have been so tenderly preserved, perhaps we had better inform you that both Miss Ada and Mrs. Greene have been poisoned."

He was watching the woman closely, but it took no scrutiny to see her cheeks go pale and her jaw sag. The Lord had evidently been too precipitously devastating even for this devout disciple; and her faith was insufficient to counteract her fear.

"I'm going to leave this house," she declared faintly. "I've seen enough to bear witness for the Lord."

"An excellent idea," nodded Vance. "And the sooner you go the more time you'll have to give apocryphal testimony."

Hemming rose, a bit dazed, and started for the archway. Then she quickly turned back and glared at Markham maliciously.

"But let me tell you something before I pass from the den of iniquity. That Miss Sibella is the worst of the lot, and the Lord is going to strike her down next—mark my words! There's no use to try and save her. She's—*doomed!*"

Vance lifted his eyebrows languidly.

"I say, Hemming, what unrighteousness has Miss Sibella been up to now?"

"The usual thing." The woman spoke with relish. "She's nothing but a hussy, if you ask me. Her carryings-on with this Doctor Von Blon have been scandalous. They're together, as thick as thieves, at all hours." She nodded her head significantly. "He came here again last night and went to her room. There's no telling what time he left."

"Fancy that, now. And how do you happen to know about it?"

"Didn't I let him in?"

"Oh, you did? What time was this?—And where was Sproot?"

"Mr. Sproot was eating his dinner, and I'd gone to the front door to take a look at the weather when the doctor walks up. 'Howdy-do, Hemming?' he says with his oily smile. And he brushes past me, nervouslike, and goes straight to Miss Sibella's room."

"Perhaps Miss Sibella was indisposed, and sent for him," suggested Vance indifferently.

"Huh!" Hemming tossed her head contemptuously, and strode from the room.

Vance rose at once and rang again for Sproot.

"Did you know Doctor Von Blon was here last night?" he asked when the butler appeared.

The man shook his head.

"No, sir. I was quite unaware of the fact."

"That's all, Sproot.—And now please tell Miss Sibella we'd like to see her."

"Yes, sir."

It was fifteen minutes before Sibella put in an appearance.

"I'm beastly lazy these days," she explained, settling herself in a large chair. "What's the party for this morning?"

Vance offered her a cigarette with an air half quizzical and half deferential.

"Before we explain our presence," he said, "please be good enough to tell us what time Doctor Von Blon left here last night?"

"At a quarter of eleven," she answered, a hostile challenge coming into her eyes.

"Thank you. And now I may tell you that both your mother and Ada have been poisoned."

"Mother and Ada poisoned?" She echoed the words vaguely, as if they were only half intelligible to her; and for several moments she sat motionless, staring stonily out of flintlike eyes. Slowly her gaze became fixed on Markham.

"I think I'll take your advice," she said. "I have a girl chum in Atlantic City... This place is really becoming too—too creepy." She forced a faint smile. "I'm off for the seashore this afternoon." For the first time the girl's nerve seemed to have deserted her.

"Your decision is very wise," observed Vance. "Go, by all means; and arrange to stay until we have settled this affair."

She looked at him in a spirit of indulgent irony.

"I'm afraid I can't stay so long," she said; then added: "I suppose mother and Ada are both dead."

"Only your mother," Vance told her. "Ada recovered."

"She would!" Every curve of her features expressed a fine arrogant contempt. "Common clay has great resistance, I've heard. You know, I'm the only one standing between her and the Greene millions now."

"Your sister had a very close call," Markham reprimanded her. "If we had not had a doctor on guard, you might now be the sole remaining heir to those millions."

"And that would look frightfully suspicious, wouldn't it?" Her question was disconcertingly frank. "But you may rest assured that if I had planned this affair, little Ada would not have recovered."

Before Markham could answer she switched herself out of the chair.

"Now, I'm going to pack. Enough is enough."

When she had left the room, Heath looked with doubtful inquisitiveness at Markham.

"What about it, sir? Are you going to let her leave the city? She's the only one of the Greenes who hasn't been touched."

We knew what he meant; and this spoken suggestion of the thought that had been passing through all our minds left us silent for a moment.

"We can't take the chance of forcing her to stay here," Markham returned finally. "If anything should happen..."

"I get you, sir." Heath was on his feet. "But I'm going to see that she's tailed—believe me! I'll get two good men up here who'll stick to her from the time she goes out that front door till we know where we stand." He went into the hall, and we heard him giving orders to Snitkin over the telephone.

Five minutes later Doctor Doremus arrived. He was no longer jaunty, and his greeting was almost sombre. Accompanied by Drumm and Heath he went at once to Mrs. Greene's room, while Markham and Vance and I waited downstairs. When he returned at the end of fifteen minutes he was markedly subdued, and I noticed he did not put on his hat at its usual rakish angle.

"What's the report?" Markham asked him.

"Same as Drumm's. The old girl passed out, I'd say, between one and two."

"And the strychnine was taken when?"

"Midnight, or thereabouts. But that's only a guess. Anyway, she got it along with the citrocarbonate. I tasted it on the glass."[\[23\]](#)

"By the by, doctor," said Vance, "when you do the autopsy can you let us have a report on the state of atrophy of the leg muscles?"

"Sure thing." Doremus was somewhat surprised by the request.

When he had gone, Markham addressed himself to Drumm.

"We'd like to talk to Ada now. How is she this morning?"

"Oh, fine!" Drumm spoke with pride. "I saw her right after I'd looked at the old lady. She's weak and a bit dried up with all the atropine I gave her, but otherwise practically normal."

"And she has not been told of her mother's death?"

"Not a word."

"She will have to know," interposed Vance; "and there's no point in keeping the fact from her any longer. It's just as well that the shock should come when we're all present."

Ada was sitting by the window when we came in, her elbows on the sill, chin in hands, gazing out into the snow-covered yard. She was startled by our entry, and the pupils of her eyes dilated, as if with sudden fright. It was plain that the experiences she had been through had created in her a state of nervous fear.

After a brief exchange of amenities, during which both Vance and Markham strove to allay her nervousness, Markham broached the subject of the bouillon.

"We'd give a great deal," he said, "not to have to recall so painful an episode, but much depends on what you can tell us regarding yesterday morning.—You were in the drawing-room, weren't you, when the nurse called down to you?"

The girl's lips and tongue were dry, and she spoke with some difficulty.

"Yes. Mother had asked me to bring her a copy of a magazine, and I had just gone downstairs to look for it when the nurse called."

"You saw the nurse when you came upstairs?"

"Yes; she was just going toward the servants' stairway."

"There was no one in your room when you entered?" She shook her head. "Who could have been there?"

"That's what we're trying to find out, Miss Greene," replied Markham gravely. "Someone certainly put the drug in your bouillon."

She shuddered, but made no reply.

"Did anyone come in while you were there?" Markham continued.

"Not a soul."

Heath impatiently projected himself into the interrogation.

"And say; did you drink your soup right away?"

"No—not right away. I felt a little chilly, and I went across the hall to Julia's room to get an old Spanish shawl to put round me."

Heath made a disgusted face, and sighed noisily.

"Every time we get going on this case," he complained, "something comes along and sinks us.—If Miss Ada left the soup in here, Mr. Markham, while she went to get a shawl, then almost anybody coulda sneaked in and poisoned the stuff."

"I'm so sorry," Ada apologized, almost as though she had taken Heath's words as a criticism of her actions.

"It's not your fault, Ada," Vance assured her. "The Sergeant is unduly depressed. But tell me this: when you went into the hall did you see Miss Sibella's dog anywhere around?"

She shook her head wonderingly.

"Why, no. What has Sibella's dog to do with it?"

"He probably saved your life." And Vance explained to her how Sproot had happened to find her.

She gave a half-breathless murmur of amazement and incredulity, and fell into abstracted reverie.

"When you returned from your sister's room, did you drink your bouillon at once?" Vance asked her next.

With difficulty she brought her mind back to the question.

"Yes."

"And didn't you notice a peculiar taste?"

Not particularly. Mother always likes a lot of salt in her bouillon."

"And then what happened?"

"Nothing happened. Only, I began to feel funny. The back of my neck tightened up, and I got very warm and drowsy. My skin tingled all over, and my arms and legs seemed to get numb. I was terribly sleepy, and I lay back on the bed. That's all I remember."

"Another washout," grumbled Heath.

There was a short silence, and Vance drew his chair nearer.

"Now, Ada," he said, "you must brace yourself for more bad news... Your mother died during the night."

The girl sat motionless for a moment, and then turned to him eyes of a despairing clearness.

"Died?" she repeated. "How did she die?"

"She was poisoned—she took an overdose of strychnine."

"You mean... she committed suicide?"

This query startled us all. It expressed a possibility that had not occurred to us. After a momentary hesitation, however, Vance slowly shook his head.

"No, I hardly think so. I'm afraid the person who poisoned you also poisoned your mother."

Vance's reply seemed to stun her. Her face grew pale, and her eyes were set in a glassy stare of terror. Then presently she sighed deeply, as if from a kind of mental depletion.

"Oh, what's going to happen next? ...I'm—afraid!"

"Nothing more is going to happen," said Vance with emphasis. "Nothing more can happen. You are going to be guarded every minute. And Sibella is going this afternoon to Atlantic City for a long visit."

"I wish I could go away," she breathed pathetically.

"There will be no need of that," put in Markham. "You'll be safer in New York. We are going to keep the nurse here to look after you, and also put a man in the house day and night until everything is straightened out. Hemming is leaving to-day, but Sproot and the cook will take care of you." He rose and patted her shoulder comfortingly. "There's no possible way any one can harm you now."

As we descended into the lower hall Sproot was just admitting Doctor Von Blon.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, hastening toward us. "Sibella just phoned me about Mrs. Greene." He looked truculently at Markham, his suavity for the moment forgotten. "Why wasn't I informed, sir?"

"I saw no necessity of bothering you, doctor," Markham returned equably. "Mrs. Greene had been dead several hours when she was found. And we had our own doctor at hand."

A quick flame leaped in Von Blon's eyes.

"And am I to be forcibly kept from seeing Sibella?" he asked coldly. "She tells me she is leaving the city to-day, and has asked me to assist with her arrangements."

Markham stepped aside.

"You are free, doctor, to do whatever you desire," he said, a perceptible chill in his voice.

Von Blon bowed stiffly, and went up the stairs.

"He's sore," grinned Heath.

"No, Sergeant," Vance corrected. "He's worried—oh, deuced worried."

Shortly after noon that day Hemming departed forever from the Greene mansion; and Sibella took the three-fifteen o'clock train for Atlantic City. Of the original household, only Ada and Sproot and Mrs. Mannheim were left. However, Heath gave orders for Miss O'Brien to remain on duty indefinitely and keep an eye on everything that happened; and, in addition to this protection, a detective was stationed in the house to augment the nurse's watch.



## 22. THE SHADOWY FIGURE

(Friday, December 3rd; 6 p.m.)

AT six o'clock that evening Markham called another informal conference at the Stuyvesant Club. Not only were Inspector Moran and Heath present, but Chief Inspector O'Brien dropped in on his way home from the office.<sup>[24]</sup>

The afternoon papers had been merciless in their criticism of the police for its unsuccessful handling of the investigation. Markham, after consulting with Heath and Doremus, had explained the death of Mrs. Greene to the reporters as "the result of an overdose of strychnine—a stimulant she had been taking regularly under her physician's orders." Swacker had typed copies of the item so there would be no mistake as to its exact wording; and the announcement ended by saying: "There is no evidence to show that the drug was not self-administered as the result of error." But although the reporters composed their news stories in strict accord with Markham's report, they interpolated subtle intimations of deliberate murder, so that the reader was left with little doubt as to the true state of affairs. The unsuccessful attempt to poison Ada had been kept a strict official secret. But this suppressed item had not been needed to inflame the public's morbid imagination to an almost unprecedented degree.

Both Markham and Heath had begun to show the strain of their futile efforts to solve the affair; and one glance at Inspector Moran, as he sank heavily into a chair beside the District Attorney, was enough to make one realize that a corroding worry had undermined his habitual equanimity. Even Vance revealed signs of tensy and uneasiness; but with him it was an eager alertness, rather than worry, that marked any deviation from normality in his attitude.

As soon as we were assembled that evening Heath briefly epitomized the case. He went over the various lines of investigation, and enumerated the precautions that had been taken. When he had finished, and before anyone could make a comment, he turned to Chief Inspector O'Brien and said:

"There's plenty of things, sir, we might've done in any ordinary case. We could've searched the house for the gun and the poison like the narcotic squad goes through a single room or small apartment—punching the mattresses, tearing up the carpets, and sounding the woodwork—but in the Greene house it would've taken a coupla months. And even if we'd found the stuff, what good would it have done us? The guy that's tearing things wide open in that dump isn't going to stop just because we take his dinky thirty-two away from him, or grab his poison. After Chester or Rex was shot we could've arrested all the rest of the family and put 'em through a third degree. But there's too much noise in the papers now every time we give anybody the works; and it ain't exactly healthy for us to grill a family like the Greenes. They've got too much money and pull; they'd have had a whole battalion of high-class lawyers smearing us with suits and injunctions and God knows what. And if we'd just held 'em as material witnesses, they'd have got out in forty-eight hours on *habeas-corpus* actions. Then, again, we might've planted a bunch of huskies in the house. But we couldn't keep a garrison there indefinitely, and the minute they'd have been called off, the dirty work would've begun. Believe me, Inspector, we've been up against it good and plenty."

O'Brien grunted and tugged at his white cropped moustache.

"What the Sergeant says is perfectly true," Moran remarked. "Most of the ordinary methods of action and investigation have been denied us. We're obviously dealing with an inside family affair."

"Moreover," added Vance, "we're dealing with an extr'ordin'rily clever plot—something that has been thought out and planned down to the minutest detail, and elaborately covered up at every point. Everything has been staked—even life itself—on the outcome. Only a supreme hatred and an exalted hope could have inspired the crimes. And against such attributes, d'ye see, the ordin'ry means of prevention are utterly useless."

"A family affair!" repeated O'Brien heavily, who apparently was still pondering over Inspector Moran's statement. "It don't look to me as though there's much of the family left. I'd say, on the evidence, that some outsider was trying to wipe the family out." He gave Heath a glowering look. "What have you done about the servants? You're not scared to monkey with them, are you? You could have arrested one of 'em a long time ago and stopped the yapping of the newspapers for a time, anyway."

Markham came immediately to Heath's defence.

"I'm wholly responsible for any seeming negligence on the Sergeant's part in that regard," he said with a noticeable accent of cold reproach. "As long as I have anything to say about this case no arrests are going to be made for the mere purpose of quieting unpleasant criticism." Then his manner relaxed slightly. "There isn't the remotest indication of guilt in connection with any of the servants. The maid Hemming is a harmless fanatic, and is quite incapable mentally of having planned the murders. I permitted her to leave the Greenes' to-day..."

"We know where to find her, Inspector," Heath hastened to add by way of forestalling the other's inevitable question.

"As to the cook," Markham went on; "she, too, is wholly outside of any serious consideration. She's temperamentally unfitted to be cast in the rôle of murderer."

"And what about the butler?" asked O'Brien acrimoniously.

"He's been with the family thirty years, and was even remembered liberally in Tobias Greene's will. He's a bit queer, but I think if he had had any reason for destroying the Greenes he wouldn't have awaited till old age came on him." Markham looked troubled for a moment. "I must admit, however, that there's an atmosphere of mysterious reserve about the old fellow. He always gives me the impression of knowing far more than he admits."

"What you say, Markham, is true enough," remarked Vance. "But Sproot certainly doesn't fit this particular saturnalia of crime. He reasons too carefully; there's an immense cautiousness about the man, and his mental outlook is highly conservative. He might stab an enemy if there was no remote chance of detection. But he lacks the courage and the imaginative resiliency that have made possible this present gory debauch. He's too old—much too old... By Jove!"

Vance leaned over and tapped the table with an incisive gesture.

"That's the thing that's been evading me! Vitality! That's what is the bottom of this business—a tremendous, elastic, self-confident vitality: a supreme ruthlessness mingled with audacity and impudence—an intrepid and reckless egoism—an undaunted belief in one's own ability. And they're not the components of age. There's youth in all this—youth with its ambition and venturesomeness—that doesn't count the cost, that takes no thought of risk... No. Sproot could never qualify."

Moran shifted his chair uneasily, and turned to Heath. "Whom did you send to Atlantic City to watch Sibella?"

"Guilfoyle and Mallory—the two best men we've got." The Sergeant smiled with a kind of cruel satisfaction. "She won't get away. And she won't pull anything, either." [25]

"And have you extended your attention to Doctor Von Blon, by any chance?" negligently asked Vance. Again Heath's canny smile appeared.

"He's been tailed ever since Rex was shot."

Vance regarded him admiringly.

"I'm becoming positively fond of you, Sergeant," he said; and beneath his chaffing note was the ring of sincerity.

O'Brien leaned ponderously over the table and brushing the ashes from his cigar, fixed a sullen look on the District Attorney.

"What was this story you gave out to the papers, Mr. Markham? You seemed to want to imply that the old woman took the strychnine herself. Was that hogwash, or was there something in it?"

"I'm afraid there was nothing in it, Inspector." Markham spoke with a sense of genuine regret. "Such a theory doesn't square with the poisoning of Ada—or with any of the rest of it, for that matter."

"I'm not so sure," retorted O'Brien. "Moran here has told me that you fellows had an idea the old woman was faking her paralysis." He rearranged his arms on the table and pointed a short, thick finger at Markham. "Supposing she shot three of the children, using up all the cartridges in the revolver, and then stole the two doses of poison—one for each of the two girls left; and then supposing she gave the morphine to the younger one, and had only one dose left..." He paused and squinted significantly.

"I see what you mean," said Markham. "Your theory is that she didn't count on our having a doctor handy to save Ada's life, and that, having failed to put Ada out of the way, she figured the game was up and took the strychnine."

"That's it!" O'Brien struck the table with his fist. "And it makes sense. Furthermore, it means we've cleared up the case—see?"

"Yes, it unquestionably makes sense." It was Vance's quiet, drawling voice that answered. "But forgive me if I suggest that it fits the facts much too tidily. It's a perfect theory, don't y' know; it leaps to the brain, almost as though someone had planned it for our benefit. I rather fancy that we're intended to adopt that very logical and sensible point of view. But really now, Inspector, Mrs. Greene was not the suicidal type, however murderous she may have been."

While Vance was speaking, Heath had left the room. A few minutes later he returned and interrupted O'Brien in a long, ill-natured defence of his suicide theory.

"We haven't got to argue any more along that line," he announced. "I've just had Doc Doremus on the phone. He's finished the autopsy; and he says that the old lady's leg muscles had wasted away—gone plumb flabby—and that there wasn't a chance in the world of her moving her legs, let alone walking on 'em."

"Good God!" Moran was the first to recover from the amazement this news had caused us. "Who was it, then, that Ada saw in the hall?"

"That's just it!" Vance spoke hurriedly, trying to stem his rising sense of excitement. "If only we knew! That's the answer to the whole problem. It may not have been the murderer; but the person who sat in that library night after night and read strange books by candle light is the key to everything..."

"But Ada was so positive in her identification," objected Markham, in a bewildered tone.

"She's hardly to be blamed in the circumstances," Vance returned. "The child had been through a frightful experience and was scarcely normal. And it is not at all unlikely that she, too, suspected her mother. If she did, what would have been more natural than for her to imagine that this shadowy figure she saw in the hall long after midnight was the actual object of her dread? It is not unusual for a person under the stress of fright to distort an object by the projection of a dominating mental image."

"You mean," said Heath, "that she saw somebody else, and imagined it was her mother because she was thinking so hard of the old woman?"

"It's by no means improbable."

"Still, there was that detail of the Oriental shawl," objected Markham. "Ada might easily have mistaken the person's features, but her insistence on having seen that particular shawl was fairly definite."

Vance gave a perplexed nod.

"The point is well taken. And it may prove the Ariadne's clue that will lead us out of this Cretan labyrinth. We must find out more about that shawl."

Heath had taken out his note-book and was turning the pages with scowling concentration.

"And don't forget, Mr. Vance," he said, without looking up, "about that diagram Ada found in the rear of the hall near the library door. Maybe this person in the shawl was the one who'd dropped it, and was going to the library to look for it, but got scared off when she saw Ada."

"But whoever shot Rex," said Markham, "evidently stole the paper from him, and therefore wouldn't be worrying about it."

"I guess that's right," Heath admitted reluctantly.

"Such speculation is futile," commented Vance. "This affair is too complicated to be untangled by the unravelling of details. We must determine, if possible, who it was that Ada saw that night. Then we'll have opened a main artery of inquiry."

"How are we going to find that out," demanded O'Brien, "when Ada was the only person who saw this woman in Mrs. Greene's shawl?"

"Your question contains the answer, Inspector. We must see Ada again and try and counteract the suggestion of her own fears. When we explain that it couldn't have been her mother, she may recall some other point that will put us on the right track."

And this was the course taken. When the conference ended, O'Brien departed, and the rest of us dined at the club. At half-past eight

we were on our way to the Greene mansion.

We found Ada and the cook alone in the drawing-room. The girl sat before the fire, a copy of Grimms' "Fairy Tales" turned face down on her knees; and Mrs. Mannheim, busy with a lapful of mending, occupied a straight chair near the door. It was a curious sight, in view of the formal correctness of the house, and it brought forcibly to my mind how fear and adversity inevitably level all social standards.

When we entered the room Mrs. Mannheim rose, and gathering up her mending, started to go. But Vance indicated that she was to remain, and without a word she resumed her seat.

"We're here to annoy you again, Ada," said Vance, assuming the rôle of interrogator. "But you're about the only person we can come to for help." His smile put the girl at ease, and he continued gently: "We want to talk to you about what you told us the other afternoon..."

Her eyes opened wide, and she waited in a kind of awed silence.

"You told us you thought you had seen your mother—"

"I did see her—I did!"

Vance shook his head. "No; it was not your mother. She was unable to walk, Ada. She was truly and helplessly paralyzed. It was impossible for her even to make the slightest movement with either leg."

"But—I don't understand." There was more than bewilderment in her voice: there was terror and alarm as one might experience at the thought of supernatural malignancy. "I heard Doctor Von Blon tell mother he was bringing a specialist to see her this morning. But she died last night—so how could you know? Oh, you must be mistaken. I saw her—I *know* I saw her."

She seemed to be battling desperately for the preservation of her sanity. But Vance again shook his head.

"Doctor Oppenheimer did not examine your mother," he said. "But Doctor Doremus did—to-day. And he found that she had been unable to move for many years."

"Oh!" The exclamation was only breathed. The girl seemed incapable of speech.

"And what we've come for," continued Vance, "is to ask you to recall that night, and see if you cannot remember something—some little thing—that will help us. You saw this person only by the flickering light of a match. You might easily have made a mistake."

"But how could I? I was so close to her."

"Before you woke up that night and felt hungry, had you been dreaming of your mother?"

She hesitated and shuddered slightly.

"I don't know, but I've dreamed of mother constantly—awful, scary dreams—ever since that first night when somebody came into my room..."

"That may account for the mistake you made." Vance paused a moment and then asked: "Do you distinctly remember seeing your mother's Oriental shawl on the person in the hall that night?"

"Oh, yes," she said, after a slight hesitation. "It was the first thing I noticed. Then I saw her face..."

A trivial but startling thing happened at this moment. We had our back to Mrs. Mannheim and, for the time being, had forgotten her presence in the room. Suddenly what sounded like a dry sob broke from her, and the sewing-basket on her knees fell to the floor. Instinctively we turned. The woman was staring at us glassily.

"What difference does it make who she saw?" she asked in a dead, monotonous voice. "She maybe saw me."

"Nonsense, Gertrude," Ada said quickly. "It wasn't you."

Vance was watching the woman with a puzzled expression.

Do you ever wear Mrs. Greene's shawl, Frau Mannheim?"

"Of course she doesn't," Ada cut in.

"And did you ever steal into the library and read after the household is asleep?" pursued Vance.

The woman picked up her sewing morosely, and again lapsed into sullen silence. Vance studied her a moment and then turned back to Ada.

"Do you know of anyone who might have been wearing your mother's shawl that night?"

"I—don't know," the girl stammered, her lips trembling.

"Come; that won't do." Vance spoke with some asperity. "This isn't the time to shield anyone. Who was in the habit of using the shawl?"

"No one was in the habit..." She stopped and gave Vance a pleading look; but he was obdurate.

"Who, then, besides your mother ever wore it?"

"But I would have known if it had been Sibella I saw—"

"Sibella? She sometimes borrowed the shawl?"

Ada nodded reluctantly. "Once in a great while. She—she admired the shawl... Oh, why do you make me tell you this!"

"And you have never seen anyone else with it on?"

"No; no one ever wore it except mother and Sibella."

Vance attempted to banish her obvious distress with a whimsical reassuring smile.

"Just see how foolish all your fears have been," he said lightly. "You probably saw your sister in the hall that night, and, because you'd been having bad dreams about your mother, you thought it was she. As a result, you became frightened, and locked yourself up and worried. It was rather silly, what?"

A little later we took our leave.

"It has always been my contention," remarked Inspector Moran, as we rode down-town, "that any identification under strain or excitement is worthless. And here we have a glaring instance of it."

"I'd like a nice quiet little chat with Sibella," mumbled Heath, busy with his own thoughts.

"It wouldn't comfort you, Sergeant," Vance told him. "At the end of your *tête-à-tête* you'd know only what the young lady wanted you to know."

"Where do we stand now?" asked Markham, after a silence.

"Exactly where we stood before," answered Vance dejectedly, "in the midst of an impenetrable fog.— And I'm not in the least convinced," he added, "that it was Sibella whom Ada saw in the hall."

Markham looked amazed.

"Then who, in Heaven's name, was it?"

Vance sighed gloomily. "Give me the answer to that one question, and I'll complete the saga."

That night Vance sat up until nearly two o'clock writing at his desk in the library.

## 23. THE MISSING FACT

(Saturday, December 4th; 1 p.m.)

SATURDAY was the District Attorney's "half-day" at the office, and Markham had invited Vance and me to lunch at the Bankers Club. But when we reached the Criminal Courts Building he was swamped with an accumulation of work, and we had a tray-service meal in his private conference room. Before leaving the house that noon Vance had put several sheets of closely-written paper in his pocket, and I surmised—correctly, as it turned out—that they were what he had been working on the night before.

When lunch was over Vance lay back in his chair languidly and lit a cigarette.

"Markham, old dear," he said, "I accepted your invitation to-day for the sole purpose of discussing art. I trust you are in a receptive mood."

Markham looked at him with frank annoyance.

"Damn it, Vance, I'm too confounded busy to be bothered with your irrelevancies. If you feel artistically inclined, take Van here to the Metropolitan Museum. But leave me alone."

Vance sighed, and wagged his head reproachfully.

"There speaks the voice of America! 'Run along and play with your aesthetic toys if such silly things amuse you; but let me attend to my serious affairs.' It's very sad. In the present instance, however, I refuse to run along; and most certainly I shall not browse about that mausoleum of Europe's rejected corpses, known as the Metropolitan Museum. I say, it's a wonder you didn't suggest that I make the rounds of our municipal statuary."

"I'd have suggested the Aquarium—"

"I know. Anything to get rid of me." Vance adopted an injured tone. "And yet, don't y' know, I'm going to sit right here and deliver an edifying lecture on aesthetic composition."

"Then don't talk too loud," said Markham, rising; "for I'll be in the next room working."

"But my lecture has to do with the Greene case. And really you shouldn't miss it."

Markham paused and turned.

"Merely one of your wordy prologues, eh?" He sat down again. "Well, if you have any helpful suggestions to make, I'll listen."

Vance smoked a moment.

"Y' know, Markham," he began, assuming a lazy, unemotional air, "there's a fundamental difference between a good painting and a photograph. I'll admit many painters appear unaware of this fact; and when colour photography is perfected—my word! What a horde of academicians will be thrown out of employment! But none the less there's a vast chasm between the two; and it's this technical distinction that's to be the burden of my lay. How, for instance, does Michelangelo's 'Moses' differ from a camera study of a patriarchal old man with whiskers and a stone tablet? Wherein lie the points of divergence between Rubens's 'Landscape with Château de Stein' and a tourist's snapshot of a Rhine castle? Why is a Cézanne still life an improvement on a photograph of a dish of apples? Why have the Renaissance paintings of Madonnas endured for hundreds of years whereas a mere photograph of a mother and child passes into artistic oblivion at the very click of the lens shutter? ..."

He held up a silencing hand as Markham was about to speak.

"I'm not being futile. Bear with me a moment. The difference between a good painting and a photograph is this: the one is arranged, composed, organized; the other is merely the haphazard impression of a scene, or a segment of realism, just as it exists in nature. In short, the one has form; the other is chaotic. When a true artist paints a picture, d' ye see, he arranges all the masses and lines to accord with his preconceived idea of composition—that is, he bends everything in the picture to a basic design; and he also eliminates any objects or details that go contr'y to, or detract from, that design. Thus he achieves a homogeneity of form, so to speak. Every object in the picture is put there for a definite purpose, and is set in a certain position to accord with the underlying structural pattern. There are no irrelevancies, no unrelated details, no detached objects, no arbit'ry arrangement of values. All the forms and lines are interdependent; every object—indeed, every brush stroke—takes its exact place in the pattern and fulfils a given function. The picture, in fine, is a unity."

"Very instructive," commented Markham, glancing ostentatiously at his watch. "And the Greene case?"

"Now, a photograph, on the other hand," pursued Vance, ignoring the interruption, "is devoid of design or even of arrangement in the aesthetic sense. To be sure, a photographer may pose and drape a figure—he may even saw off the limb of a tree that he intends to record on his negative; but it's quite impossible for him to compose the subject-matter of his picture to accord with a preconceived design, the way a painter does. In a photograph there are always details that have no meaning, variations of light and shade that are harmonically false, textures that create false notes, lines that are discords, masses that are out of place. The camera, d' ye see, is deucedly forthright—it records whatever is before it, irrespective of art values. The inevitable result is that a photograph lacks organization and unity; its composition is, at best, primitive and obvious. And it is full of irrelevant factors—of objects which have neither meaning nor purpose. There is no uniformity of conception in it. It is haphazard, heterogeneous, aimless, and amorphous—just as is nature."

"You needn't belabour the point," Markham spoke impatiently. "I have a rudimentary intelligence.—Where is this elaborate truism leading you?"

Vance gave him an engaging smile.

"To East 53rd Street. But before we reach our destination permit me another brief amplification.—Quite often a painting of intricate and subtle design does not at once reveal its composition to the spectator. In fact, only the designs of the simpler and more obvious paintings are immediately grasped. Generally the spectator has to study a painting carefully—trace its rhythms, compare its forms, weigh its details, and fit together all its salients—before its underlying design becomes apparent. Many well-organized and perfectly

balanced paintings—such as Renoir's figure-pieces, Matisse's interiors, Cezanne's water-colours, Picasso's still lifes, and Leonardo's anatomical drawings—may at first appear meaningless from the standpoint of composition; their forms may seem to lack unity and cohesion; their masses and linear values may give the impression of having been arbitrarily put down. And it is only after the spectator has related all their integers and traced all their contrapuntal activities that they take on significance and reveal their creator's motivating conception—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Markham. "Paintings and photographs differ; the objects in a painting possess design; the objects in a photograph are without design; one must often study a painting in order to determine the design.—That, I believe, covers the ground you have been wandering over desultorily for the past fifteen minutes."

"I was merely trying to imitate the vast deluge of repetitive verbiage found in legal documents," explained Vance. "I hope thereby to convey my meaning to your lawyer's mind."

"You have succeeded with a vengeance," snapped Markham. "What follows?"

Vance became serious again.

"Markham, we've been looking at the various occurrences in the Greene case as though they were the unrelated objects of a photograph. We've inspected each fact as it came up; but we have failed to analyze sufficiently its connection with all the other known facts. We've regarded this whole affair as though it were a series, or collection, of isolated integers. And we've missed the significance of everything because we haven't yet determined the shape of the basic pattern of which each of these incidents is but a part.—Do you follow me?"

"My dear fellow!"

"Very well.—Now, it goes without saying that there is a design at the bottom of this whole amazin' business. Nothing has happened haphazardly. There has been premeditation behind each act—a subtly and carefully concocted composition, as it were. And everything has emanated from that central shape. Everything has been fashioned by a fundamental structural idea. Therefore, nothing important that has occurred since the first double shooting has been unrelated to the predetermined pattern of the crime. All the aspects and events of the case, taken together, form a unity—a co-ordinated, interactive whole. In short, the Greene case is a painting, not a photograph. And when we have studied it in that light—when we have determined the inter-relationship of all the external factors, and have traced the visual forms to their generating lines—then, Markham, we will know the composition of the picture; we will see the design on which the perverted painter has erected his document'ry material. And once we have discovered the underlying shape of this hideous picture's pattern, we'll know its creator."

"I see your point," said Markham slowly. "But how does it help us? We know all the external facts; and they certainly don't fit into any intelligible conception of a unified whole."

"Not yet, perhaps," agreed Vance. "But that's because we haven't gone about it systematically. We've done too much investigating and too little thinking. We've been side-tracked by what the modern painters call documentation—that is, by the objective appeal of the picture's recognizable parts. We haven't sought for the abstract content. We've overlooked the 'significant form'—a loose phrase; but blame Clive Bell for it."[\[26\]](#)

"And how would you suggest that we set about determining the compositional design of this bloody canvas? We might dub the picture, by the way, 'Nepotism Gone Wrong.'" By this facetious remark, he was, I knew, attempting to counteract the serious impression the other's disquisition had made on him; for, though he realized Vance would not have drawn his voluminous parallel without a definite hope of applying it successfully to the problem in hand, he was chary of indulging any expectations lest they result in further disappointments.

In answer to Markham's question, Vance drew out the sheaf of papers he had brought with him.

"Last night," he explained, "I set down briefly and chronologically all the outstanding facts of the Greene case—that is, I noted each important external factor of the ghastly picture we've been contemplating for the past few weeks. The principal forms are all here, though I may have left out many details. But I think I have tabulated a sufficient number of items to serve as a working basis."

He held out the papers to Markham.

"The truth lies somewhere in that list. If we could put the facts together—relate them to one another with their correct values—we'd know who was at the bottom of this orgy of crime; for, once we determined the pattern, each of the items would take on a vital significance, and we could read clearly the message they had to tell us."

Markham took the summary and, moving his chair nearer to the light, read through it without a word.

I preserved the original copy of the document; and, of all the records I possess, it was the most important and far-reaching in its effects. Indeed, it was the instrument by means of which the Greene case was solved. Had it not been for this recapitulation, prepared by Vance and later analyzed by him, the famous mass murder at the Greene mansion would doubtless have been relegated to the category of unsolved crimes.

Herewith is a verbatim reproduction of it:

## GENERAL FACTS

1. An atmosphere of mutual hatred pervades the Greene mansion.
2. Mrs. Greene is a nagging, complaining paralytic, making life miserable for the whole household.
3. There are five children—two daughters, two sons, and one adopted daughter—who have nothing in common, and live in a state of constant antagonism and bitterness toward one another.
4. Though Mrs. Mannheim, the cook, was acquainted with Tobias Greene years ago and was remembered in his will, she refuses to reveal any of the facts in her past.
5. The will of Tobias Greene stipulated that the family must live in the Greene mansion for twenty-five years on pain of disinheritance, with the one exception that, if Ada should marry, she could establish a residence elsewhere, as she was not of the Greene blood. By the will Mrs. Greene has the handling and disposition of the money.

6. Mrs. Greene's will makes the five children equal beneficiaries. In event of death of any of them the survivors share alike; and if all should die the estate goes to their families.

7. The sleeping-rooms of the Greens are arranged thus: Julia's and Rex's face each other at the front of the house; Chester's and Ada's face each other in the centre of the house; and Sibella's and Mrs. Greene's face each other at the rear. No two rooms intercommunicate, with the exception of Ada's and Mrs. Greene's; and these two rooms also give on to the same balcony.

8. The library of Tobias Greene, which Mrs. Greene believes she has kept locked for twelve years, contains a remarkably complete collection of books on criminology and allied subjects.

9. Tobias Greene's past was somewhat mysterious, and there were many rumours concerning shady transactions carried on by him in foreign lands.

#### FIRST CRIME

10. Julia is killed by a contact shot, fired from the front, at 11.30 p.m.

11. Ada is shot from behind, also by a contact shot. She recovers.

12. Julia is found in bed, with a look of horror and amazement on her face.

13. Ada is found on the floor before the dressing-table.

14. The lights have been turned on in both rooms.

15. Over three minutes elapse between the two shots.

16. Von Blon, summoned immediately, arrives within half an hour.

17. A set of footprints, other than Von Blon's, leaving and approaching the house, is found; but the character of the snow renders them indecipherable.

18. The tracks have been made during the half-hour preceding the crime.

19. Both shootings are done with a .32 revolver.

20. Chester reports that an old .32 revolver of his is missing.

21. Chester is not satisfied with the police theory of a burglar, and insists that the District Attorney's office investigate the case.

22. Mrs. Greene is aroused by the shot fired in Ada's room, and hears Ada fall. But she hears no footsteps or sound of a door closing.

23. Spoot is half-way down the servants' stairs when the second shot is fired, yet he encounters no one in the hall. Nor does he hear any noise.

24. Rex, in the next room to Ada's, says he heard no shot.

25. Rex intimates that Chester knows more about the tragedy than he admits.

26. There is some secret between Chester and Sibella.

27. Sibella, like Chester, repudiates the burglar theory, but refuses to suggest an alternative, and says frankly that any member of the Greene family may be guilty.

28. Ada says she was awakened by a menacing presence in her room, which was in darkness; that she attempted to run from the intruder, but was pursued by shuffling footsteps.

29. Ada says a hand touched her when she first arose from bed, but refuses to make any attempt to identify the hand.

30. Sibella challenges Ada to say that it was she (Sibella) who was in the room, and then deliberately accuses Ada of having shot Julia. She also accuses Ada of having stolen the revolver from Chester's room.

31. Von Blon, by his attitude and manner, reveals a curious intimacy between Sibella and himself.

32. Ada is frankly fond of Von Blon.

#### SECOND CRIME

33. Four days after Julia and Ada are shot, at 11.30 p.m., Chester is murdered by a contact shot fired from a .32 revolver.

34. There is a look of amazement and horror on his face.

35. Sibella hears the shot and summons Spoot.

36. Sibella says she listened at her door immediately after the shot was fired, but heard no other sound.

37. The lights are on in Chester's room. He was apparently reading when the murderer entered.

38. A clear double set of footprints is found on the front walk. The tracks have been made within half an hour of the crime.

39. A pair of galoshes, exactly corresponding to the footprints, is found in Chester's clothes-closet.

40. Ada had a premonition of Chester's death, and, when informed of it, guesses he has been shot in the same manner as Julia. But she is greatly relieved when shown the footprint patterns indicating that the murderer is an outsider.

41. Rex says he heard a noise in the hall and the sound of a door closing twenty minutes before the shot was fired.

42. Ada, when told of Rex's story, recalls also having heard a door close at some time after eleven.

43. It is obvious that Ada knows or suspects something.

44. The cook becomes emotional at the thought of anyone wanting to harm Ada, but says she can understand a person having a reason to shoot Julia and Chester.

45. Rex, when interviewed, shows clearly that he thinks someone in the house is guilty.

46. Rex accuses Von Blon of being the murderer.

47. Mrs. Greene makes a request that the investigation be dropped.

#### THIRD CRIME

48. Rex is shot in the forehead with a .32 revolver, at 11.20 a.m., twenty days after Chester has been killed and within five minutes

Ada phones him from the District Attorney's office.

49. There is no look of horror or surprise on Rex's face, as was the case with Julia and Chester.

50. His body is found on the floor before the mantel.

51. A diagram which Ada asked him to bring with him to the District Attorney's office has disappeared.

52. No one upstairs hears the shot, though the doors are open; but Sproot, downstairs in the butler's pantry, hears it distinctly.

53. Von Blon is visiting Sibella that morning; but she says she was in the bath-room bathing her dog at the time Rex was shot.

54. Footprints are found in Ada's room coming from the balcony door, which is ajar.

55. A single set of footprints is found leading from the front walk to the balcony.

56. The tracks could have been made at any time after nine o'clock that morning.

57. Sibella refuses to go away on a visit.

58. The galoshes that made all three sets of footprints are found in the linen-closet, although they were not there when the house was searched for the revolver.

59. The galoshes are returned to the linen-closet, but disappear that night.

#### FOURTH CRIME

60. Two days after Rex's death Ada and Mrs. Greene are poisoned within twelve hours of each other—Ada with morphine, Mrs. Greene with strychnine.

61. Ada is treated at once and recovers.

62. Von Blon is seen leaving the house just before Ada swallows the poison.

63. Ada is discovered by Sproot as a result of Sibella's dog catching his teeth in the bell-cord.

64. The morphine was taken in the bouillon which was, as a rule, given to Ada in the mornings by Mrs. Greene.

65. Ada states that no one visited her in her room after the nurse had called her to come and drink the bouillon; but that she went to Julia's room to get a shawl, leaving the bouillon unguarded for several moments.

66. Neither Ada nor the nurse remembers having seen Sibella's dog in the hall before the poisoned bouillon was taken.

67. Mrs. Greene is found dead of strychnine-poisoning the morning after Ada swallowed the morphine.

68. The strychnine could have been administered only after 11 p.m. the previous night.

69. The nurse was in her room on the third floor between 11 and 11.30 p.m.

70. Von Blon was calling on Sibella that night, but Sibella says he left her at 10.45.

71. The strychnine was administered in a dose of citro-carbonate, which, presumably, Mrs. Greene would not have taken without assistance.

72. Sibella decides to visit a girl chum in Atlantic City, and leaves New York on the afternoon train.

#### DISTRIBUTABLE FACTS

73. The same revolver is used on Julia, Ada, Chester, and Rex.

74. All three sets of footprints have obviously been made by someone in the house for the purpose of casting suspicion on an outsider.

75. The murderer is someone whom both Julia and Chester would receive in their rooms, in negligée, late at night.

76. The murderer does not make himself known to Ada, but enters her room surreptitiously.

77. Nearly three weeks after Chester's death Ada comes to the District Attorney's office, stating that she has important news to impart.

78. Ada says that Rex has confessed to her that he heard the shot in her room and also heard other things, but was afraid to admit them; and she asks that Rex be questioned.

79. Ada tells of having found a cryptic diagram, marked with symbols, in the lower hall near the library door.

80. On the day of Rex's murder Von Blon reports that his medicine-case has been rifled of three grains of strychnine and six grains of morphine—presumably at the Greene mansion.

81. The library reveals the fact that someone has been in the habit of going there and reading by candle-light. The books that show signs of having been read are: a handbook of the criminal sciences, two works on toxicology, and two treatises on hysterical paralysis and sleep-walking.

82. The visitor in the library is someone who understands German well, for three of the books that have been read are in German.

83. The galoshes that disappeared from the linen-closet on the night of Rex's murder are found in the library.

84. Someone listens at the door while the library is being inspected.

85. Ada reports that she saw Mrs. Greene walking in the lower hall the night before.

86. Von Blon asserts that Mrs. Greene's paralysis is of a nature that makes movement a physical impossibility.

87. Arrangements are made with Von Blon to have Doctor Oppenheimer examine Mrs. Greene.

88. Von Blon informs Mrs. Greene of the proposed examination, which he has scheduled for the following day.

89. Mrs. Greene is poisoned before Doctor Oppenheimer's examination can be made.

90. The post-mortem reveals conclusively that Mrs. Greene's leg muscles were so atrophied that she could not have walked.

91. Ada, when told of the autopsy, insists that she saw her mother's shawl about the figure in the hall, and, on being coerced, admits that Sibella sometimes wore it.

92. During the questioning of Ada regarding the shawl Mrs. Mannheim suggests that it was she herself whom Ada saw in the hall.

93. When Julia and Ada were shot there were, or could have been, present in the house: Chester, Sibella, Rex, Mrs. Greene, Von Blon, Barton, Hemming, Sproot, and Mrs. Mannheim.



94. When Chester was shot there were, or could have been, present in the house: Sibella, Rex, Mrs. Greene, Ada, Von Blon, Barton, Hemming, Sproot, and Mrs. Mannheim.

95. When Rex was shot there were, or could have been, present in the house: Sibella, Mrs. Greene, Von Blon, Hemming, Sproot, and Mrs. Mannheim.

96. When Ada was poisoned there were, or could have been, present in the house: Sibella, Mrs. Greene, Von Blon, Hemming, Sproot, and Mrs. Mannheim.

97. When Mrs. Greene was poisoned there were, or could have been, present in the house: Sibella, Von Blon, Ada, Hemming, Sproot, and Mrs. Mannheim.

When Markham had finished reading the summary, he went through it a second time. Then he laid it on the table.

"Yes, Vance," he said, "you've covered the main points pretty thoroughly." But I can't see any coherence in them. In fact, they seem only to emphasize the confusion of the case."

"And yet, Markham, I'm convinced that they only need rearrangement and interpretation to be perfectly clear. Properly analyzed, they'll tell us everything we want to know."

Markham glanced again through the pages.

"If it wasn't for certain items, we could make out a case against several people. But no matter what person in the list we may assume to be guilty, we are at once confronted by a group of contradictory, and insurmountable facts. This précis could be used effectively to prove that everyone concerned is innocent."

"Superficially it appears that way," agreed Vance. "But we first must find the generating line of the design, and then relate the subsidiary forms of the pattern to it."

Markham made a hopeless gesture.

"If only life were as simple as your aesthetic theories!"

"It's dashed simpler," Vance asserted. "The mere mechanism of a camera can record life; but only a highly developed creative intelligence, with a profound philosophic insight, can produce a work of art."

"Can you make any sense—aesthetic or otherwise—out of this?" Markham petulantly tapped the sheets of paper.

"I can see certain tracteries, so to speak—certain suggestions of a pattern; but I'll admit the main design has thus far eluded me. The fact is, Markham, I have a feeling that some important factor in this case—some balancing line of the pattern, perhaps—is still hidden from us. I don't say that my resume is insusceptible of interpretation in its present state; but our task would be greatly simplified if we were in possession of the missing integer."

Fifteen minutes later, when we had returned to Markham's main office, Swacker came in and laid a letter on the desk.

"There's a funny one, Chief," he said.

Markham took up the letter and read it with a deepening frown. When he had finished, he handed it to Vance. The letter-head read, "Rectory, Third Presbyterian Church, Stamford, Connecticut"; the date was the preceding day; and the signature was that of the Reverend Anthony Seymour. The contents of the letter, written in a small, precise hand, were as follows:

THE HONOURABLE JOHN F.-X. MARKHAM,

*Dear Sir,*—As far as I am aware, I have never betrayed a confidence. But there can arise, I believe, unforeseen circumstances to modify the strictness of one's adherence to a given promise, and indeed impose upon one a greater duty than that of keeping silent.

I have read in the papers of the wicked and abominable things that have happened at the Greene residence in New York; and I have therefore come to the conclusion, after much heart-searching and prayer, that it is my bounden duty to put you in possession of a fact which, as the result of a promise, I have kept to myself for over a year. I would not now betray this trust did I not believe that some good might possibly come of it, and that you, my dear sir, would also treat the matter in the most sacred confidence. It may not help you—indeed, I do not see how it can possibly lead to a solution of the terrible curse that has fallen upon the Greene family—but since the fact is connected intimately with one of the members of that family, I will feel better when I have communicated it to you.

On the night of August 29th, of last year, a machine drove up to my door, and a man and a woman asked that I secretly marry them. I may say that I am frequently receiving such requests from runaway couples. This particular couple appeared to be well-bred dependable people, and I concurred with their wishes, giving them my assurances that the ceremony would, as they desired, be kept confidential.

The names that appeared on the licence—which had been secured in New Haven late that afternoon—were Sibella Greene, of New York City, and Arthur Von Blon, also of New York City.

Vance read the letter and handed it back.

"Really, y' know, I can't say that I'm astonished—"

Suddenly he broke off, his eyes fixed thoughtfully before him. Then he rose nervously and paced up and down.

"That tears it!" he exclaimed.

Markham threw him a look of puzzled interrogation. "What's the point?"

"Don't you see?" Vance came quickly to the District Attorney's desk. "My word! That's the one fact that's missing from my tabulation." He then unfolded the last sheet and wrote:

98. Sibella and Von Blon were secretly married a year ago.

"But I don't see how that helps," protested Markham. "Neither do I at this moment," Vance replied. "But I'm going to spend this evening in erudite meditation."

## 24. A MYSTERIOUS TRIP

(Sunday, December 5th)

THE Boston Symphony Orchestra was scheduled that afternoon to play a Bach Concerto and Beethoven's C-Minor Symphony; and Vance, on leaving the District Attorney's office, rode direct to Carnegie Hall. He sat through the concert in a state of relaxed receptivity, and afterward insisted on walking the two miles back to his quarters—an almost unheard-of thing for him.

Shortly after dinner Vance bade me good night and, donning his slippers and house-robe, went into the library. I had considerable work to do that night, and it was long past midnight when I finished. On the way to my room I passed the library door, which had been left slightly ajar, and I saw Vance sitting at his desk—his head in his hands, the summary lying before him—in an attitude of oblivious concentration. He was smoking, as was habitual with him during any sort of mental activity; and the ash- receiver at his elbow was filled with cigarette-stubs. I moved on quietly, marvelling at the way this new problem had taken hold of him.

It was half-past three in the morning when I suddenly awoke, conscious of footsteps somewhere in the house. Rising quietly, I went into the hall, drawn by a vague curiosity mingled with uneasiness. At the end of the corridor a panel of light fell on the wall, and as I moved forward in the semi-darkness I saw that the light issued from the partly-open library door. At the same time I became aware that the footsteps, too, came from that room. I could not resist looking inside; and there I saw Vance walking up and down, his chin sunk on his breast, his hands crammed into the deep pockets of his dressing-gown. The room was dense with cigarette- smoke, and his figure appeared misty in the blue haze. I went back to bed and lay awake for an hour. When finally I dozed off it was to the accompaniment of those rhythmic footfalls in the library.

I rose at eight o'clock. It was a dark, dismal Sunday, and I had my coffee in the living-room by electric light. When I glanced into the library at nine Vance was still there, sitting at his desk. The reading- lamp was burning, but the fire on the hearth had died out. Returning to the living-room, I tried to interest myself in the Sunday newspapers; but after scanning the accounts of the Greene case I lit my pipe and drew up my chair before the grate.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Vance appeared at the door. All night he had been up, wrestling with his self-imposed problem; and the devitalizing effects of this long, sleepless concentration showed on him only too plainly. There were shadowed circles around his eyes; his mouth was drawn; and even his shoulders sagged wearily. But, despite the shock his appearance gave me, my dominant emotion was one of avid curiosity. I wanted to know the outcome of this all-night vigil; and as he came into the room I gave him a look of questioning expectancy.

When his eyes met mine he nodded slowly.

"I've traced the design," he said, holding out his hands to the warmth of the fire. "And it's more horrible than I even imagined." He was silent for some minutes. "Telephone Markham for me, will you, Van? Tell him I must see him at once. Ask him to come to breakfast. Explain that I'm a bit fagged."

He went out, and I heard him calling to Currie to prepare his bath.

I had no difficulty in inducing Markham to breakfast with us after I had explained the situation; and in less than an hour he arrived. Vance was dressed and shaved, and looked considerably fresher than when I had first seen him that morning; but he was still pale, and his eyes were fatigued.

No mention was made of the Greene case during breakfast, but when we had sought easy chairs in the library, Markham could withhold his impatience no longer.

"Van intimated over the phone that you had made something out of the summary."

"Yes." Vance spoke dispiritedly. "I've fitted all the items together. And it's damnable! No wonder the truth escaped us."

Markham leaned forward, his face tense, unbelieving. "You know the truth?"

"Yes, I know," came the quiet answer. "That is, my brain has told me conclusively who's at the bottom of this fiendish affair; but even now—in the daylight—I can't credit it. Everything in me revolts against the acceptance of the truth. The fact is, I'm almost afraid to accept it... Dash it all, I'm getting mellow. Middle-age has crept upon me." He attempted to smile, but failed.

Markham waited in silence.

"No, old man," continued Vance; "I'm not going to tell you now. I can't tell you until I've looked into one or two matters. You see, the pattern is plain enough, but the recognizable objects, set in their new relationships, are grotesque—like the shapes in an awful dream. I must first touch them and measure them to make sure that they're not, after all, mere abortive vagaries."

"And how long will this verification take?" Markham knew there was no use to try to force the issue. He realized that Vance was fully conscious of the seriousness of the situation, and respected his decision to investigate certain points before revealing his conclusions.

"Not long, I hope." Vance went to his desk and wrote something on a piece of paper, which he handed to Markham. "Here's a list of the five books in Tobias's library that showed signs of having been read by the nocturnal visitor. I want those books, Markham—immediately. But I don't want anyone to know about their being taken away. Therefore, I'm going to ask you to phone Nurse O'Brien to get Mrs. Greene's key and secure them when no one is looking. Tell her to wrap them up and give them to the detective on guard in the house with instructions to bring them here. You can explain to her what section of the book-shelves they're in."

Markham took the paper and rose without a word. At the door of the den, however, he paused.

"Do you think it wise for the man to leave the house?"

"It won't matter," Vance told him. "Nothing more can happen there at present."

Markham went on into the den. In a few minutes he returned.

"The books will be here in half an hour."

When the detective arrived with the package Vance unwrapped it and laid the volumes beside his chair.

"Now, Markham, I'm going to do some reading. You won't mind, what?" Despite his casual tone, it was evident that an urgent seriousness underlay his words.

Markham got up immediately; and again I marvelled at the complete understanding that existed between these two desperate men.

"I have a number of personal letters to write," he said, "so I'll run along. Currie's omelette was excellent.—When shall I see you again? I could drop round at tea-time."

Vance held out his hand with a look bordering on affection.

"Make it five o'clock. I'll be through with my perusings by then. And thanks for your tolerance." Then he added gravely: "You'll understand, after I've told you everything, why I wanted to wait a bit."

When Markham returned that afternoon a little before five Vance was still reading in the library; but shortly afterward he joined us in the living-room.

"The picture clarifies," he said. "The fantastic images are gradually taking on the aspect of hideous realities. I've substantiated several points, but a few facts still need corroboration."

"To vindicate your hypothesis?"

"No, not that. The hypothesis is self-proving. There's no doubt as to the truth. But—dash it all, Markham! I refuse to accept it until every scrap of evidence has been incontestably sustained."

"Is the evidence of such a nature that I can use it in a court of law?"

"That is something I refuse even to consider. Criminal proceedings seem utterly irrelevant in the present case. But I suppose society must have its pound of flesh, and you—the duly elected Shylock of God's great common people—will no doubt wield the knife. However, I assure you I shall not be present at the butchery."

Markham studied him curiously.

"Your words sound rather ominous. But if, as you say, you have discovered the perpetrator of these crimes, why shouldn't society exact punishment?"

"If society were omniscient, Markham, it would have a right to sit in judgment. But society is ignorant and venomous, devoid of any trace of insight or understanding. It exalts knavery, and worships stupidity. It crucifies the intelligent, and puts the diseased in dungeons. And, withal, it arrogates to itself the right and ability to analyze the subtle sources of what it calls 'crime,' and to condemn to death all persons whose inborn and irresistible impulses it does not like. That's your sweet society, Markham—a pack of wolves watering at the mouth for victims on whom to vent its organized lust to kill and flay."

Markham regarded him with some astonishment and considerable concern.

"Perhaps you are preparing to let the criminal escape in the present case," he said with the irony of resentment.

"Oh, no," Vance assured him. "I shall turn your victim over to you. The Greene murderer is of a particularly vicious type, and should be rendered impotent. I was merely trying to suggest that the electric chair—that touchin' device of your beloved society—is not quite the correct method of dealing with this culprit."

"You admit, however, that he is a menace to society."

"Undoubtedly. And the hideous thing about it is that this tournament of crime at the Greene mansion will continue unless we can put a stop to it. That's why I am being so careful. As the case now stands, I doubt if you could even make an arrest."

When tea was over Vance got up and stretched himself.

"By the by, Markham," he said off-handedly, "have you received any report on Sibella's activities?"

"Nothing important. She's still in Atlantic City, and evidently intends to stay there for some time. She phoned Sproot yesterday to send down another trunkful of her clothes."

"Did she, now? That's very gratifyin'." Vance walked to the door with sudden resolution. "I think I'll run out to the Greenes' for a little while. I shan't be gone over an hour; Wait for me here, Markham—there's a good fellow; I don't want my visit to have an official flavour. There's a new *Simplicissimus* on the table to amuse you till I return. Con it and thank your own special gods that you have no Thony or Gulbransen in this country to caricature your Gladstonian features."

As he spoke he beckoned to me, and, before Markham could question him, we passed out into the hall and down the stairs. Fifteen minutes later a taxicab set us down before the Greene mansion.

Sproot opened the door for us, and Vance, with only a curt greeting, led him into the drawing-room.

"I understand," he said, "that Miss Sibella phoned you yesterday from Atlantic City and asked to have a trunk shipped to her."

Sproot bowed. "Yes, sir. I sent the trunk off last night."

"What did Miss Sibella say to you over the phone?" "Very little, sir—the connection was not good. She said merely that she had no intention of returning to New York for a considerable time and needed more clothes than she had taken with her."

"Did she ask how things were going at the house here?"

"Only in the most casual way, sir."

"Then she didn't seem apprehensive about what might happen here while she was away?"

"No, sir. In fact—if I may say so without disloyalty—her tone of voice was quite indifferent, sir."

"Judging from her remarks about the trunk, how long would you say she intends to be away?"

Sproot considered the matter.

"That's difficult to say, sir. But I would go so far as to venture the opinion that Miss Sibella intends to remain in Atlantic City for a month or more."

Vance nodded with satisfaction.

"And now, Sproot," he said, "I have a particularly important question to ask you. When you first went into Miss Ada's room on the night she was shot and found her on the floor before the dressing-table, was the window open? Think! I want a positive answer. You know the window is just beside the dressing-table and overlooks the steps leading to the stone balcony. *Was it open or shut?*"

Sproot contracted his brows and appeared to be recalling the scene. Finally he spoke, and there was no doubt in his voice.

"The window was open, sir. I recall it now quite distinctly. After Mr. Chester and I had lifted Miss Ada to the bed, I closed it at once

for fear she would catch cold."

"How far open was the window?" asked Vance with eager impatience.

"Eight or nine inches, sir, I should say. Perhaps a foot." "Thank you, Sprout. That will be all. Now please tell the cook I want to see her."

Mrs. Mannheim came in a few minutes later, and Vance indicated a chair near the desk-light. When the woman had seated herself he stood before her and fixed her with a stern, implacable gaze.

"Frau Mannheim, the time for truth-telling has come. I am here to ask you a few questions, and unless I receive a straight answer to them I shall report you to the police. You will, I assure you, receive no consideration at their hands."

The woman tightened her lips stubbornly and shifted her eyes, unable to meet Vance's penetrating stare.

"You told me once that your husband died in New Orleans thirteen years ago. Is that correct?"

Vance's question seemed to relieve her mind, and she answered readily.

"Yes, yes. Thirteen years ago."

"What month?"

"In October."

"Had he been ill long?"

"About a year."

"What was the nature of his illness?"

Now a look of fright came into her eyes.

"I—don't know—exactly," she stammered. "The doctors didn't let me see him."

"He was in a hospital?"

She nodded several times rapidly. "Yes—a hospital."

"And I believe you told me, Frau Mannheim, that you saw Mr. Tobias Greene a year before your husband's death. That would have been about the time your husband entered the hospital—fourteen years ago."

She looked vaguely at Vance, but made no reply.

"And it was exactly fourteen years ago that Mr. Greene adopted Ada."

The woman caught her breath sharply. A look of panic contorted her face.

"So when your husband died," continued Vance, "you came to Mr. Greene, knowing he would give you a position."

He went up to her and touched her filially on the shoulder.

"I have suspected for some time, Frau Mannheim," he said kindly, "that Ada is your daughter. It's true, isn't it?"

With a convulsive sob the woman hid her face in her apron.

"I gave Mr. Greene my word," she confessed brokenly, "that I wouldn't tell anyone—not even Ada—if he let me stay here—to be near her."

"You haven't told anyone," Vance consoled her. "It was not your fault that I guessed it."

When Mrs. Mannheim left us a little later Vance had succeeded in allaying her apprehension and distress. He then sent for Ada.

As she entered the drawing-room the troubled look in her eyes and the pallor of her cheeks told clearly of the strain she was under. Her first question voiced the fear uppermost in her mind.

"Have you found out anything, Mr. Vance?" She spoke with an air of pitiful discouragement. "It's terrible alone here in this big house—especially at night. Every sound I hear..."

"You mustn't let your imagination get the best of you, Ada," Vance counselled her. Then he added: "We know a lot more now than we did, and before long, I hope, all your fears will be done away with. In fact, it's in regard to what we've found out that I've come here to-day. I thought perhaps you could help me again."

"If only I could! But I've thought and thought..."

Vance smiled.

"Let us do the thinking, Ada.—What I wanted to ask you is this: do you know if Sibella speaks German well?" The girl appeared surprised.

"Why, yes. And so did Julia and Chester and Rex. Father insisted on their learning it. And he spoke it too—almost as well as he spoke English. As for Sibella, I've often heard her and Doctor Von Blon talking in German."

"But she spoke with an accent, I suppose."

"A slight accent—she'd never been long in Germany. But she spoke German very well."

"That's what I wanted to be sure of."

"Then you do know something!" Her voice quavered with eagerness. "Oh, how long before this awful suspense will be over? Every night for weeks I've been afraid to turn out my lights and go to sleep."

"You needn't be afraid to turn out your lights now," Vance assured her. "There won't be any more attempts on your life, Ada."

She looked at him for a moment searchingly, and something in his manner seemed to hearten her. When we took our leave the colour had come back to her cheeks.

Markham was pacing the library restlessly when we arrived home.

"I've checked several more points," Vance announced. "But I've missed the important one—the one, that would explain the unbelievable hideousness of the thing I've unearthed."

He went directly into the den, and we could hear him telephoning. Returning a few minutes later, he looked anxiously at his watch. Then he rang for Currie and ordered his bag packed for a week's trip.

"I'm going away, Markham," he said. "I'm going to travel—they say it broadens the mind. My train departs in less than an hour; and I'll be away a week. Can you bear to be without me for so long? However, nothing will happen in connection with the Greene case during my absence. In fact, I'd advise you to shelve it temporarily."

He would say no more, and in half an hour he was ready to go.

"There's one thing you can do for me while I'm away," he told Markham, as he slipped into his overcoat. "Please have drawn up for me a complete and detailed weather report from the day preceding Julia's death to the day following Rex's murder."

He would not let either Markham or me accompany him to the station, and we were left in ignorance of even the direction in which his mysterious trip was to take him.

## 25. THE CAPTURE

(Monday, December 13th; 4 p.m.)

IT was eight days before Vance returned to New York. He arrived on the afternoon of Monday, December 13th, and, after he had had his tub and changed his clothes, he telephoned Markham to expect him in half an hour. He then ordered his Hispano-Suiza from the garage; and by this sign I knew he was under a nervous strain. In fact, he had spoken scarcely a dozen words to me since his return, and as he picked his way down-town through the late afternoon traffic he was gloomy and preoccupied. Once I ventured to ask him if his trip had been successful, and he had merely nodded. But when we turned into Centre Street he relented a little, and said:

"There was never any doubt as to the success of my trip, Van. I knew what I'd find. But I didn't dare trust my reason; I had to see the records with my own eyes before I'd capitulate unreservedly to the conclusion I'd formed."

Both Markham and Heath were waiting for us in the District Attorney's office. It was just four o'clock, and, the sun had already dropped below the New York Life Building which towered about the old Criminal Courts structure a block to the south-west.

"I took it for granted you had something important to tell me," said Markham; "so I asked the sergeant to come here."

"Yes, I've much to tell." Vance had thrown himself into a chair, and was lighting a cigarette. "But first I want to know if anything has happened in my absence."

"Nothing. Your prognostication was quite accurate. Things have been quiet and apparently normal at the Greene mansion."

"Anyhow," interposed Heath, "we may have a little better chance this week of getting hold of something to work on. Sibella returned from Atlantic City yesterday, and Von Blon's been hanging round the house ever since."

"Sibella back?" Vance sat up, and his eyes became intent.

"At six o'clock yesterday evening," said Markham. "The newspaper man at the beach ferreted her out and ran a sensational story about her. After that the poor girl didn't have an hour's peace; so yesterday she packed up and came back. We got word of the move through the men the sergeant had set to watch her. I ran out to see her this morning, and advised her to go away again. But she was pretty thoroughly disgusted, and stubbornly refused to quit the Greene house—said death was preferable to being hounded by reporters and scandal-mongers."

Vance had risen and moved to the window, where he stood scanning the grey skyline.

"Sibella's back, eh?" he murmured. Then he turned round. "Let me see that weather report I asked you to prepare for me."

Markham reached into a drawer and handed him a typewritten sheet of paper.

After perusing it, he tossed it back on the desk.

"Keep that, Markham. You'll need it when you face your twelve good men and true."

"What is it you have to tell us, Mr. Vance?" The sergeant's voice was impatient despite his effort to control it. "Mr. Markham said you had a line on the case. For God's sake, sir, if you've got any evidence against any one, slip it to me and let me make an arrest. I'm getting thin worrying over this damn business."

Vance drew himself together.

"Yes, I know who the murderer is, Sergeant; and I have the evidence—though it wasn't my plan to tell you just yet. However"—he went to the door with grim resolution—"we can't delay matters any longer now. Our hand has been forced.—Get into your coat, Sergeant—and you, too, Markham. We'd better get out to the Greene house before dark."

"But, damn it all, Vance!" Markham expostulated. "Why don't you tell us what's in your mind?"

"I can't explain now—you'll understand why later—"

"If you know so much, Mr. Vance," broke in Heath, "what's keeping us from making an arrest?"

"You're going to make your arrest, Sergeant—inside of an hour." Though he gave the promise without enthusiasm, it acted electrically on both Heath and Markham.

Five minutes later the four of us were driving up West Broadway in Vance's car.

Sproot as usual admitted us without the faintest show of interest, and stood aside respectfully for us to enter.

"We wish to see Miss Sibella," said Vance. "Please tell her to come to the drawing-room—alone."

"I'm sorry, sir, but Miss Sibella is out."

"Then tell Miss Ada we want to see her."

"Miss Ada is out also, sir." The butler's unemotional tone sounded strangely incongruous in the tense atmosphere we had brought with us.

"When do you expect them back?"

"I couldn't say, sir. They went out motoring together. They probably won't be gone long. Would you gentlemen care to wait?"

Vance hesitated.

"Yes, we'll wait," he decided, and walked toward the drawing-room.

But he had barely reached the archway when he turned suddenly and called to Sproot, who was retreating slowly toward the rear of the hall.

"You say Miss Sibella and Miss Ada went motoring together? How long ago?"

"About fifteen minutes—maybe twenty, sir." A barely perceptible lift of the man's eyebrows indicated that he was greatly astonished by Vance's sudden change of manner.

"Whose car did they go in?"

"In Doctor Von Blon's. He was here to tea—" And who suggested the ride, Sproot?"

"I really couldn't say, sir. They were sort of debating about it when I came in to clear away the tea things."

"Repeat everything you heard!" Vance spoke rapidly and with more than a trace of excitement.

"When I entered the room the doctor was saying as how he thought it would be a good thing for the young ladies to get some fresh air; and Miss Sibella said she'd had enough fresh air."

"And Miss Ada?"

"I don't remember her saying anything, sir."

"And they went out to the car while you were here?"

"Yes, sir. I opened the door for them."

"And did Doctor Von Blon go in the car with them?"

"Yes. But I believe they were to drop him at Mrs. Riglander's, where he had a professional call to make. From what he said as he went out I gathered that the young ladies were then to take a drive, and that he was to call here for the car after dinner."

"What!" Vance stiffened, and his eyes burned upon the old butler. "Quick, Sproot! Do you know where Mrs. Riglander lives?"

"On Madison Avenue in the Sixties, I believe."

"Get her on the phone—find out if the doctor has arrived."

I could not help marvelling at the impassive way in which the man went to the telephone to comply with this astonishing and seemingly incomprehensible request. When he returned his face was expressionless.

"The doctor has not arrived at Mrs. Riglander's, sir," he reported.

"He's certainly had time," Vance commented, half to himself. Then: "Who drove the car when it left here, Sproot?"

I couldn't say for certain, sir. I didn't notice particularly. But it's my impression that Miss Sibella entered the car first as though she intended to drive—"

"Come, Markham!" Vance started for the door. "I don't like this at all. There's a mad idea in my head... Hurry, man! If something devilish should happen..."

We had reached the car, and Vance sprang to the wheel. Heath and Markham, in a daze of incomprehension but swept along by the other's ominous insistence, took their places in the tonneau; and I sat beside the driver's seat.

"We're going to break all the traffic and speed regulations, Sergeant," Vance announced, as he manoeuvred the car in the narrow street; "so have your badge and credentials handy. I may be taking you chaps on a wild- goose chase, but we've got to risk it."

We darted toward First Avenue, cut the corner short, and turned up-town. At 59th Street we swung west and went toward Columbus Circle. A surface car held us up at Lexington Avenue; and at Fifth Avenue we were stopped by a traffic officer. But Heath showed his card and spoke a few words, and we struck across Central Park. Swinging perilously round the curves of the driveways, we came out into 81st Street and headed for Riverside Drive. There was less congestion here, and we made between forty and fifty miles an hour all the way to Dyckman Street.

It was a nerve-racking ordeal, for not only had the shadows of evening fallen, but the streets were slippery in places where the melted snow had frozen in large sheets along the sloping sides of the Drive. Vance, however, was an excellent driver. For two years he had driven the same car, and he understood thoroughly how to handle it. Once we skidded drunkenly, but he managed to right the traction before the rear wheels came in contact with the high kerbing. He kept the siren horn screeching constantly, and other cars drew away from us, giving us a fairly clear road.

At several street intersections we had to slow down; and twice we were halted by traffic officers, but were permitted to proceed the moment the occupants of the tonneau were recognized. On North Broadway we were forced to the kerb by a motor-cycle policeman, who showered us with a stream of picturesque abuse. But when Heath had cut him short with still more colourful vituperation, and he had made out Markham's features in the shadows, he became ludicrously humble, and acted as an advance-guard for us all the way to Yonkers, clearing the road and holding up traffic at every cross-street.

At the railroad tracks near Yonker's Ferry we were obliged to wait several minutes for the shunting of some freight-cars, and Markham took this opportunity of venting his emotions.

"I presume you have a good reason for this insane ride, Vance," he said angrily. "But since I'm taking my life in my hands by accompanying you, I'd like to know what your objective is."

"There's not time now for explanations," Vance replied brusquely. "Either I'm on a fool's errand, or there's an abominable tragedy ahead of us." His face was set and white, and he looked anxiously at his watch. "We're twenty minutes ahead of the usual running time from the Plaza to Yonkers. Furthermore, we're taking the direct route to our destination—another ten minutes' saving. If the thing I fear is scheduled for to-night, the other car will go by the Spuyten Duyvil Road and through the back lanes along the river—"

At this moment the crossing-bars were lifted, and our car jerked forward, picking up speed with breathless rapidity.

Vance's words had set a train of thought going in my mind. The Spuyten Duyvil Road—the back lanes along the river... Suddenly there flashed on my brain a memory of that other ride we had taken weeks before with Sibella and Ada and Von Blon; and a sense of something inimical and indescribably horrifying took possession of me. I tried to recall the details of that ride—how we had turned off the main road at Dyckman Street, skirted the palisades through old wooded estates, traversed private hedge-lined roadways, entered Yonkers from the Riverdale Road, turned again from the main highway past the Ardsley Country Club, taken the little-used road along the river toward Tarrytown, and stopped on the high cliff to get a panoramic view of the Hudson... That cliff overlooking the waters of the river!—Ah, now I remembered Sibella's cruel jest—her supposedly satirical suggestion of how a perfect murder might be committed there. And on the instant of that recollection I knew where Vance was heading—I understood the thing he feared! He believed that another car was also heading for that lonely precipice beyond Ardsley—a car that had nearly half an hour start...

We were now below the Longue Vue hill, and a few moments later we swung into the Hudson Road. At Dobbs Ferry another officer stepped in our path and waved frantically; but Heath, leaning over the running-board, shouted some unintelligible words, and Vance, without slackening speed, skirted the officer and plunged ahead toward Ardsley.

Ever since we had passed Yonkers, Vance had been inspecting every large car along the way. He was, I knew, looking for Von Blon's low-hung yellow Daimler. But there had been no sign of it, and, as he threw on the brakes preparatory to turning into the narrow road by the Country Club golf- links, I heard him mutter half aloud:

"God help us if we're too late!"[27]

We made the turn at the Ardsley station at such a rate of speed that I held my breath for fear we would upset; and I had to grip the seat with both hands to keep my balance as we jolted over the rough road along the river level. We took the hill before us in high gear, and climbed swiftly to the dirt roadway along the edge of the bluff beyond.

Scarcely had we rounded the hill's crest when an exclamation broke from Vance, and simultaneously I noticed a flickering red light bobbing in the distance. A new spurt of speed brought us perceptibly nearer to the car before us, and it was but a few moments before we could make out its lines and colour. There was no mistaking Von Blon's great Daimler.

"Hide your faces," Vance shouted over his shoulder to Markham and Heath. "Don't let anyone see you as we pass the car ahead."

I leaned over below the panel of the front door, and a few seconds later a sudden swerve told me that we were about circling the Daimler. The next moment we were back in the road, rushing forward in the lead.

Half a mile farther on the road narrowed. There was a deep ditch on one side and dense shrubbery on the other. Vance quickly threw on the brakes, and our rear wheels skidded on the hard frozen earth, bringing us to a halt with our car turned almost at right-angles with the road, completely blocking the way.

"Out, you chaps!" called Vance.

We had no more than alighted when the other car drove up and, with a grinding of brakes, came to a lurching halt within a few feet of our machine. Vance had run back, and as the car reached a standstill he threw open the front door. The rest of us had instinctively crowded after him, urged forward by some undefined sense of excitement and dread foreboding. The Daimler was of the sedan type with small high windows, and even with the lingering radiance of the western sky and the dashboard illumination I could barely make out the figures inside. But at that moment Heath's pocket flashlight blazed in the semi-darkness.

The sight that met my straining eyes was paralyzing. During the drive I had speculated on the outcome of our tragic adventure, and I had pictured several hateful possibilities. But I was wholly unprepared for the revelation that confronted me.

The tonneau of the car was empty; and, contrary to my suspicions, there was no sign of Von Blon. In the front seat were the two girls. Sibella was on the farther side, slumped down in the corner, her head hanging forward. On her temple was an ugly cut, and a stream of blood ran down her cheek. At the wheel sat Ada, glowering at us with cold ferocity. Heath's flash-light fell, directly on her face, and at first she did not recognize us. But as her pupils became adjusted to the glare her gaze concentrated on Vance, and a foul epithet burst from her.

Simultaneously her right hand dropped from the wheel to the seat beside her, and when she raised it again it held a small glittering revolver. There was a flash of flame and a sharp report, followed by a shattering, of glass where the bullet had struck the wind-shield. Vance had been standing with one foot on the running-board leaning into the car, and, as Ada's arm came up with the revolver, he had snatched her wrist and held it.

"No, my dear," came his drawling voice, strangely calm, and without animosity; "you shan't add me to your list. I was rather expecting that move, don't y' know."

Ada, frustrated in her attempt to shoot him, hurled herself upon him with savage fury. Vile abuse and unbelievable blasphemies poured from her snarling lips. Her wrath, feral and rampant, utterly possessed her. She was like a wild animal, cornered and conscious of defeat, yet fighting with a last instinct of hopeless desperation. Vance, however, had secured both her wrists, and could have broken her arms with a single twist of his hands; but he treated her almost tenderly, like a father subduing an infuriated child. Stepping back quickly he drew her into the roadway, where she continued her struggles with renewed violence.

"Come, Sergeant!" Vance spoke with weary exasperation. "You'd better put handcuffs on her. I don't want to hurt her."

Heath had stood watching the amazing drama in a state of bewilderment, apparently too nonplussed to move. But Vance's voice awakened him to sharp activity. There were two metallic clicks, and Ada suddenly relaxed into a listless attitude of sullen tractability. She leaned panting against the side of the car as if too weak to stand alone.

Vance bent over and picked up the revolver which had fallen to the road. With a cursory glance at it he handed it to Markham.

"There's Chester's gun," he said. Then he indicated Ada with a pitying movement of the head. "Take her to your office, Markham—Van will drive the car. I'll join you there as soon as I can. I must get Sibella to a hospital."

He stepped briskly into the Daimler. There was a shifting of gears, and with a few deft manipulations he reversed the car in the narrow road.

"And watch her, Sergeant!" he flung back, as the car darted away toward Ardsley.

I drove Vance's car back to the city. Markham and Heath sat in the rear seat with the girl between them. Hardly a word was spoken during the entire hour-and-a-half's ride. Several times I glanced behind me at the silent trio. Markham and the sergeant appeared completely stunned by the surprising truth that had just been revealed to them. Ada, huddled between them, sat apathetically with closed eyes, her head forward. Once I noticed that she pressed a handkerchief to her face with her manacled hands; and I thought I heard the sound of smothered sobbing. But I was too nervous to pay any attention. It took every effort of my will to keep my mind on my driving.

As I drew up before the Franklin Street entrance of the Criminal Courts Building and was about to shut off the engine, a startled exclamation from Heath caused me to release the switch.

"Holy Mother o' God!" I heard him say in a hoarse voice. Then he thumped me on the back. "Get to the Beekman Street Hospital—as quick as hell, Mr. Van Dine. Damn the traffic lights! Step on it!"

Without looking round I knew what had happened. I swung the car into Centre Street again, and fairly raced for the hospital. We carried Ada into the emergency ward, Heath bawling loudly for the doctor as we passed through the door.

It was more than an hour later when Vance entered the District Attorney's office, where Markham and Heath and I were waiting. He glanced quickly round the room and then looked at our faces.

"I told you to watch her, Sergeant," he said, sinking into a chair; but there was neither reproach nor regret in his voice.

None of us spoke. Despite the effect Ada's suicide had had on us, we were waiting, with a kind of conscience-stricken anxiety, for news of the other girl whom all of us, I think, had vaguely suspected.

Vance understood our silence and nodded reassuringly.



"Sibella's all right. I took her to the Trinity Hospital in Yonkers. A slight concussion—Ada had struck her with a box-wrench which was always kept under the front seat. She'll be out in a few days. I registered her at the hospital as Mrs. Von Blon, and then phoned her husband. I caught him at home, and he hurried out. He's with her now. Incidentally, the reason we didn't reach him at Mrs. Riglander's is because he stopped at the office for his medicine-case. That delay saved Sibella's life. Otherwise, I doubt if we'd have reached her before Ada had run her over the precipice in the machine."

He drew deeply on his cigarette for a moment. Then he lifted his eyebrows to Markham.

"Cyanide of potassium?"

Markham gave a slight start.

"Yes—or so the doctor thinks. There was a bitter-almond odour on her lips." He shot his head forward angrily. "But if you knew—"

"Oh, I wouldn't have stopped it in any case," interrupted Vance. "I discharged my wholly mythical duty to the State when I warned the sergeant. However, I didn't know at the time. Von Blon just gave me the information. When I told him what had happened I asked him if he had ever lost any other poisons—you see, I couldn't imagine anyone planning so devilish and hazardous an exploit as the Greene murders without preparing for the eventuality of failure. He told me he'd missed a tablet of cyanide from his dark room about three months ago. And when I jogged his memory he recalled that Ada had been poking round there and asking questions a few days before. The one cyanide tablet was probably all she dared take at the time; so she kept it for herself in case of an emergency."[\[28\]](#)

"What I want to know, Mr. Vance," said Heath, "is how she worked this scheme. Was there anyone else in on the deal?"

"No, Sergeant. Ada planned and executed every part of it."

"But how, in God's name—?"

Vance held up his hand.

"It's all very simple, Sergeant—once you have the key. What misled us was the fiendish cleverness and audacity of the plot. But there's no longer any need to speculate about it. I have a printed and bound explanation of everything that happened. And it's not a fictional or speculative explanation. It's actual criminal history, garnered and recorded by the greatest expert on the subject the world has yet known—doctor Hans Gross, of Vienna."

He rose and took up his coat.

"I phoned Currie from the hospital, and he has a belated dinner waiting for all of us. When we have eaten, I'll present you with a reconstruction and exposition of the entire case."

## 26. THE ASTOUNDING TRUTH

(Monday, December 13th; 11 p.m.)

"AS you know, Markham," Vance began, when we were seated about the library fire late that night, "I finally succeeded in putting together the items of my summary in such a way that I could see plainly who the murderer was.<sup>[29]</sup> Once I had found the basic pattern, every detail fitted perfectly into a plastic whole. The technique of the crimes, however, remained obscure; so I asked you to send for the books in Tobias's library—I was sure they would tell me what I wanted to know. First, I went through Gross's 'Handbuch fur Untersuchungsrichter,' which I regarded as the most likely source of information. It is an amazing treatise, Markham. It covers the entire field of the history and science of crime; and, in addition, is a compendium of criminal technique, citing specific cases and containing detailed explanations and diagrams. Small wonder it is the world's standard cyclopaedia on its subject. As I read it, I found what I was looking for. Ada had copied every act of hers, every method, every device, every detail, from its pages—from *actual criminal history*! We are hardly to be blamed for our inability to combat her schemes; for it was not she alone who was deceiving us; it was the accumulated experience of hundreds of shrewd criminals before her, plus the analytic science of the world's greatest criminologist Doctor Hans Gross."

He paused to light another cigarette.

"But even when I had found the explanation of her crimes," he continued, "I felt that there was something lacking, some fundamental *penchant*—the thing that made this orgy of horror possible and gave viability, so to speak, to her operations. We knew nothing of Ada's early life or of her progenitors and inherited instincts; and without that knowledge the crimes, despite their clear logic, were incredible. Consequently, my next step was to verify Ada's psychological and environmental sources. I had had a suspicion from the first that she was Frau Mannheim's daughter. But even when I verified this fact I couldn't see its bearing on the case. It was obvious, from our interview with Frau Mannheim, that Tobias and her husband had been in shady deals together in the old days; and she later admitted to me that her husband had died thirteen years ago, in October, at New Orleans after a year's illness in a hospital. She also said, as you may recall, that she had seen Tobias a year prior to her husband's death. This would have been fourteen years ago—just the time Ada was adopted by Tobias. I thought there might be some connection between Mannheim and the crimes, and I even toyed with the idea that Sproot was Mannheim, and that a dirty thread of blackmail ran through the situation. So I decided to investigate. My mysterious trip last week was to New Orleans; and there I had no difficulty in learning the truth. By looking up the death records for October thirteen years ago, I discovered that Mannheim had been in an asylum for the criminally insane for a year preceding his death. And from the police I ascertained something of his record. Adolph Mannheim—Ada's father—was, it seems, a famous German criminal and murderer, who had been sentenced to death, but had escaped from the penitentiary at Stuttgart and come to America. I have a suspicion that the departed Tobias was, in some way, mixed up in that escape. But whether or not I wrong him, the fact remains that Ada's father was homicidal and a professional criminal. And therein lies the explanatory background of her actions..."

"You mean she was crazy like her old man?" asked Heath.

"No, Sergeant. I merely mean that the potentialities of criminality had been handed down to her in her blood. When the motive for the crimes became powerful, her inherited instincts asserted themselves."

"But mere money," put in Markham, "seems hardly a strong enough motive to inspire such atrocities as hers."

"It wasn't money alone that inspired her. The real motive went much deeper. Indeed, it was perhaps the most powerful of all human motives—a strange, terrible combination of hate and love and jealousy and a desire for freedom. To begin with, she was the Cinderella in that abnormal Greene family, looked down upon, treated like a servant, made to spend her time caring for a nagging invalid, and forced—as Sibella put it—to earn her livelihood. Can you not see her for fourteen years brooding over this treatment, nourishing her resentment, absorbing the poison about her, and coming at length to despise everyone in that household? That alone would have been enough to awaken her congenital instincts. One almost wonders that she did not break forth long before. But another equally potent element entered the situation. She fell in love with Von Blon—a natural thing for a girl in her position to do—and then learned that Sibella had won his affections. She either knew or strongly suspected that they were married; and her normal hatred of her sister was augmented by a vicious and eroding jealousy..."

"Now, Ada was the only member of the family who, according to the terms of old Tobias's will, was not compelled to live on the estate in event of marriage and in this fact she saw a chance to snatch all the things she craved and at the same time to rid herself of the persons against whom her whole passionate nature cried out in deadly hatred. She calculated to get rid of the family, inherit the Greene millions, and set her cap for Von Blon. There was vengeance, too, as a motivating factor in all this; but I'm inclined to think the amatory phase of the affair was the primary actuating force in the series of horrors she later perpetrated. It gave her strength and courage; it lifted her into that ecstatic realm where everything seemed possible, and where she was willing to pay any price for the desired end. And there is one point I might recall parenthetically—you remember that Barton, the younger maid, told us how Ada sometimes acted like a devil and used vile language. That fact should have given me a hint; but who could have taken Barton seriously at that stage of the game? ...

"To trace the origin of her diabolical scheme we must first consider the locked library. Alone in the house, bored, resentful, tied down—it was inevitable that this pervertedly romantic child should play Pandora. She had every opportunity of securing the key and having a duplicate made; and so the library became her retreat, her escape from the gruelling, monotonous routine of her existence. There she ran across those books on criminology. They appealed to her, not only as a vicious outlet for her smouldering, repressed hatred, but because they struck a responsive chord in her tainted nature. Eventually she came upon Gross's great manual, and thus found the entire technique of crime laid out before her, with diagrams and examples—not a handbook for examining magistrates, but a guide for a potential murderer! Slowly the idea of her gory orgy took shape. At first perhaps she only imagined, as a means of self-gratification, the application of this technique of murder to those she hated. But after a time, no doubt, the conception became real. She saw its practical possibilities; and the terrible plot was formulated. She created this horror, and then, with her diseased imagination, she

came to believe in it. Her plausible stories to us, her superb acting, her clever deceptions—all were part of this horrible fantasy she had engendered. That book of Grimms' 'Fairy Tales'—I should have understood. Y' see, it wasn't histrionism altogether on her part; it was a kind of demoniac possession. She lived her dream. Many young girls are like that under the stress of ambition and hatred. Constance Kent completely deceived the whole of Scotland Yard into believing in her innocence."

Vance smoked a moment thoughtfully.

"It's curious how we instinctively close our eyes to the truth when history is filled with substantiating examples of the very thing we are contemplating. The annals of crime contain numerous instances of girls in Ada's position who have been guilty of atrocious crimes. Besides the famous case of Constance Kent, there were, for example, Marie Boyer, and Madeliene Smith, and Grete Beyer. I wonder if we'd have suspected them."[\[30\]](#)

"Keep to the present, Vance," interposed Markham impatiently. "You say Ada took all her ideas from Gross. But Gross's handbook is written in German. How did you know she spoke German well enough—?"

"That Sunday when I went to the house with Van I inquired of Ada if Sibella spoke German. I put my questions in such a way that she could not answer without telling me whether or not she, too, knew German well. Incidentally, I wanted her to think that I suspected Sibella, so that she would not hasten matters until I returned from New Orleans. I knew that as long as Sibella was in Atlantic City she was safe from Ada."

"But what I want to know," put in Heath, "is how she killed Rex when she was sitting in Mr. Markham's office."

"Let us take things in order, Sergeant," answered Vance. "Julia was killed first because she was the manager of the establishment. With her out of the way, Ada would have a free hand. And, another thing, the death of Julia at the start fitted best into the scheme she had outlined; it gave her the most plausible setting for staging the attempted murder on herself. Ada had undoubtedly heard some mention of Chester's revolver, and after she had secured it she waited for the opportunity to strike the first blow. The propitious circumstances fell on the night of November 8th; and at half past eleven, when the house was asleep, she knocked on Julia's door. She was admitted, and doubtless sat on the edge of Julia's bed telling some story to explain her late visit. Then she drew the gun from under her dressing-gown and shot Julia through the heart. Back in her own bedroom, with the lights on, she stood before the large mirror of the dressing-table, and, holding the gun in her right hand, placed it against her left shoulder-blade at an oblique angle. The mirror and the lights were essential, for she could thus see exactly where to point the muzzle of the revolver. All this occupied the three-minute interval between the shots. Then she pulled the trigger—"

"But a girl shooting herself as a fake!" objected Heath. "It ain't natural."

"But Ada wasn't natural, Sergeant. None of the plot was natural. That was why I was so anxious to look up her family history. But as to shooting herself; that was quite logical when one considers her true character. And, as a matter of fact, there was little or no danger attaching to it. The gun was on a hair-trigger, and no pressure was needed to discharge it. A slight flesh wound was the worst she had to fear. Moreover, history is full of cases of self-mutilation where the object to be gained was far smaller than what Ada was after. Gross is full of them..."

He took up Volume I of the "Handbuch für Untersuchungsrichter," which lay on the table beside him, and opened it at a marked page.

"Listen to this, Sergeant. I'll translate the passage roughly as I read: 'It is not uncommon to find people who inflict wounds upon themselves; such are, besides persons pretending to be the victims of assaults with deadly weapons, those who try to extort damages or blackmailers. Thus it often happens that, after an insignificant scuffle, one of the combatants shows wounds which he pretends to have received. It is characteristic of these voluntary mutilations that most frequently those who perform them do not quite complete the operation, and that they are for the most part people who manifest excessive piety, or lead a solitary life.'[\[31\]](#) ...And surely, Sergeant, you are familiar with the self-mutilation of soldiers to escape service. The most common method used by them is to place their hand over the muzzle of the gun and blow their fingers off."

Vance closed the book.

"And don't forget that the girl was hopeless, desperate, and unhappy, with everything to win and nothing to lose. She would probably have committed suicide if she had not worked out the plan of the murders. A superficial wound in the shoulder meant little to her in view of what she was to gain by it. And women have an almost infinite capacity for self-immolation. With Ada, it was part of her abnormal condition. No, Sergeant; the self-shooting was perfectly consistent in the circumstances..."

"But in the back!" Heath looked dumbfounded. "That's what gets me. Whoever heard—?"

"Just a moment." Vance took up Volume II of the "Handbuch" and opened it to a marked page. "Gross, for instance, has heard of many such cases—in fact, they're quite common on the Continent. And his record of them indubitably gave Ada the idea for shooting herself in the back. Here's a single paragraph culled from many pages of similar cases: 'That you should not be deceived by the seat of the wound is proved by the following two cases. In the Vienna Prater a man killed himself in the presence of several people by shooting himself in the back of the head with a revolver. Without the testimony of several witnesses nobody would have accepted the theory of suicide. A soldier killed himself by a shot with his military rifle through the back, by fixing the rifle in a certain position and then lying down over it. Here again the position of the wound seemed to exclude the theory of suicide.'[\[32\]](#)

"Wait a minute!" Heath heaved himself forward and shook his cigar at Vance. "What about the gun? Sproot entered Ada's room right after the shot was fired, and there wasn't no sign of a gun!"

Vance, without answering, merely turned the pages of Gross's "Handbuch" to where another marker protruded, and began translating:

"Early one morning the authorities were informed that the corpse of a murdered man had been found. At the spot indicated the body was discovered of a grain merchant, A. M., supposed to be a well-to-do man, face downward with a gunshot wound behind his ear. The bullet, after passing through the brain, had lodged in the frontal bone above the left eye. The place where the corpse was found was in the middle of a bridge over a deep stream. Just when the inquiry was concluding and the corpse was about to be removed for the post-mortem, the investigating officer observed quite by chance that on the decayed wooden parapet of the bridge, almost opposite to the spot where the corpse lay, there was a small but perfectly fresh dent which appeared to have been caused by a violent blow on the

upper edge of the parapet of a hard and angular object. He immediately suspected that the dent had some connection with the murder. Accordingly he determined to drag the bed of the stream below the bridge, when almost immediately there was picked up a strong cord about fourteen feet long with a large stone at one end and at the other a discharged pistol, the barrel of which fitted exactly the bullet extracted from the head of A. M. The case was thus evidently one of suicide. A. M. had hung the stone over the parapet of the bridge and discharged the pistol behind his ear. The moment he fired he let go the pistol, which the weight of the stone dragged over the parapet into the water.[33] ... Does that answer your question, Sergeant?"

Heath stared at him with gaping eyes.

"You mean her gun went out the window the same like that guy's gun went over the bridge?"

"There can be no doubt about it. There was no other place for the gun to go. The window, I learned from Sproot, was open a foot, and Ada stood before the window when she shot herself. Returning from Julia's room she attached a cord to the revolver with a weight of some kind on the other end, and hung the weight out of the window. When her hand released the weapon it was simply drawn over the sill and disappeared in the drift of soft snow on the balcony steps. And there is where the importance of the weather came in. Ada's plan needed an unusual amount of snow; and the night of November 8th was ideal for her grisly purpose."

"My God, Vance" Markham's tone was strained and unnatural. "This thing begins to sound more like a fantastic nightmare than a reality."

"Not only was it a reality, Markham," said Vance gravely, "but it was an actual duplication of reality. It had all been done before and duly recorded in Gross's treatise, with names, dates, and details."

"Hell No wonder we couldn't find the gun." Heath spoke with awed disgust. "And what about the footprints, Mr. Vance? I suppose she faked 'em all."

"Yes, Sergeant—with Gross's minute instructions and the footprint forgeries of many famous criminals to guide her, she faked them. As soon as it had stopped snowing that night she slipped downstairs, put on a pair of Chester's discarded galoshes, and walked to the front gate and back. Then she hid the galoshes in the library."

Vance turned once more to Gross's manual.

"There's everything here that one could possibly want to know about the making and detection of footprints, and—what is more to the point—about the manufacturing of footprints in shoes too large for one's feet.—Let me translate a short passage: 'The criminal may intend to cast suspicion upon another person, especially if he foresees that suspicion may fall upon himself. In this case he produces clear footprints which, so to speak, leap to the eyes, by wearing shoes which differ essentially from his own. One may often in this way, as has been proved by numerous experiments, produce footprints which deceive perfectly.'[34] ... And here at the end of the paragraph, Gross refers specifically to galoshes[35]—a fact which very likely gave Ada her inspiration to use Chester's overshoes. She was shrewd enough to profit by the suggestions in this passage."

"And she was shrewd enough to hoodwink all of us when we questioned her," commented Markham bitterly.

"True. But that was because she had a *folie de grandeur*, and lived the story. Moreover, it was all based on fact; its details were grounded in reality. Even the shuffling sound she said she heard in her room was an imaginative projection of the actual shuffling sound she made when she walked in Chester's huge galoshes. Also, her own shuffling, no doubt, suggested to her how Mrs. Greene's footsteps would have sounded had the old lady regained the use of her legs. And I imagine it was Ada's original purpose to cast a certain amount of suspicion on Mrs. Greene from the very beginning. But Sibella's attitude during that first interview caused her to change her tactics. As I see it, Sibella was suspicious of little sister, and talked the situation over with Chester, who may also have had misgivings about Ada. You remember his *sub-rosa* chat with Sibella when he went to summon her to the drawing-room. He was probably informing her that he hadn't yet made an accusation against Ada, and was advising her to go easy until there was some specific proof. Sibella evidently agreed, and refrained from any direct charge until Ada, in telling her grotesque fairy-tale about the intruder, rather implied it was a woman's hand that had touched her in the dark. That was too much for Sibella, who thought Ada was referring to her; and she burst forth with her accusation, despite its seeming absurdity. The amazing thing about it was that it happened to be the truth. She named the murderer and stated a large part of the motive before any of us remotely guessed the truth, even though she did back down and change her mind when the inconsistency of it was pointed out to her. And she really did see Ada in Chester's room looking for the revolver."

Markham nodded.

"It's astonishing. But after the accusation, when Ada knew that Sibella suspected her, why didn't she kill Sibella next?"

"She was too canny. It would have tended to give weight to Sibella's accusations. Oh, Ada played her hand perfectly."

"Go on with the story, sir," urged Heath, intolerant of these side issues.

"Very well, Sergeant." Vance shifted more comfortably into his chair. "But first we must revert to the weather; for the weather ran like a sinister motif through all that followed. The second night after Julia's death it was quite warm, and the snow had melted considerably. That was the night chosen by Ada to retrieve the gun. A wound like hers rarely keeps one in bed over forty-eight hours; and Ada was well enough on Wednesday night to slip into a coat, step out on the balcony, and walk down the few steps to where the gun lay hidden. She merely brought it back and took it to bed with her—the last place anyone would have thought to look for it. Then she waited patiently for the snow to fall again—which it did the next night, stopping, as you may remember, about eleven o'clock. The stage was set. The second act of the tragedy was about to begin..."

"Ada rose quietly, put on her coat, and went down to the library. Getting into the galoshes, she again walked to the front gate and back. Then she went directly upstairs so that her tracks would show on the marble steps, and hid the galoshes temporarily in the linen-closet. That was the shuffling sound and the closing door that Rex heard a few minutes before Chester was shot. Ada, you recall, told us afterwards she had heard nothing; but when we repeated Rex's story to her she became frightened and conveniently remembered having heard a door close. My word! That was a ticklish moment for her. But she certainly carried it off well. And I can now understand her obvious relief when we showed her the pattern of the footprints and let her think we believed the murderer came from outside... Well, after she had removed the galoshes and put them in the linen-closet, she took off her coat, donned a dressing-gown, and went to Chester's room—probably opened the door without knocking, and went in with a friendly greeting. I picture her as sitting on

the arm of Chester's chair, or the edge of the desk, and then, in the midst of some trivial remark, drawing the revolver, placing it against his breast, and pulling the trigger before he had time to recover from his horrified astonishment. He moved instinctively, though, just as the weapon exploded—which would account for the diagonal course of the bullet. Then Ada returned quickly to her own room and got into bed. Thus was another chapter written in the Greene tragedy."

"Did it strike you as strange," asked Markham, "that Von Blon was not at his office during the commission of either of the crimes?"

"At first—yes. But, after all, there was nothing unusual in the fact that a doctor should have been out at that time of night."

"It's easy enough to see how Ada got rid of Julia and Chester," grumbled Heath. "But what stops me is how she murdered Rex."

"Really, y' know, Sergeant," returned Vance, "that trick of hers shouldn't cause you any perplexity. I'll never forgive myself for not having guessed it long ago—Ada certainly gave us enough clues to work on. But, before I describe it to you, let me recall a certain architectural detail of the Greene mansion. There is a Tudor fire-place, with carved wooden panels, in Ada's room, and another fire-place—a duplicate of Ada's in Rex's room; and these two fire-places are back to back on the same wall. The Greene house, as you know, is very old, and at some time in the past—perhaps when the fire-places were built—an aperture was made between the two rooms, running from one of the panels in Ada's mantel to the corresponding panel in Rex's mantel. This miniature tunnel is about six inches square—the exact size of the panels—and a little over two feet long, or the depth of the two mantels and the wall. It was originally used, I imagine, for private communication between the two rooms. But that point is immaterial. The fact remains that such a shaft exists—I verified it to-night on my way down-town from the hospital. I might also add that the panel at either end of the shaft is on a spring hinge, so that when it is opened and released it closes automatically, snapping back into place without giving any indication that it is anything more than a solid part of the woodwork—"

"I get you!" exclaimed Heath, with the excitement of satisfaction. "Rex was shot by the old man-killing safe idea: the burglar opens the safe door and gets a bullet in his head from a stationary gun."

"Exactly. And the same device has been used in scores of murders. In the early days out West an enemy would go to a rancher's cabin during the tenant's absence, hang a shot-gun from the ceiling over the door, and tie one end of a string to the trigger and the other end to the latch. When the rancher returned—perhaps days later—his brains would be blown out as he entered his cabin; and the murderer would, at the time, be in another part of the country."

"Sure!" The sergeant's eyes sparkled. "There was a shooting like that in Atlanta two years ago—Boscomb was the name of the murdered man. And in Richmond, Va."

"There have been many instances of it, Sergeant. Gross quotes two famous Austrian cases, and also has something to say about this method in general."

Again he opened the "Handbuch."

"On page 943 Gross remarks: 'The latest American safety devices have nothing to do with the safe itself, and can in fact be used with any receptacle. They act through chemicals or automatic firing devices, and their object is to make the presence of a human being who illegally opens the safe impossible on physical grounds. The judicial question would have to be decided whether one is legally entitled to kill a burglar without further ado or damage his health. However, a burglar in Berlin in 1902 was shot through the forehead by a self-shooter attached to a safe in an exporting house. This style of self-shooter has also been used by murderers. A mechanic, G. Z., attached a pistol in a china-closet, fastening the trigger to the catch, and thus shot his wife when he himself was in another city. R. C., a merchant of Budapest, secured a revolver in a humidor belonging to his brother, which, when the lid was opened, fired and sent a bullet into his brother's abdomen. The explosion jerked the box from the table, and thus exposed the mechanism before the merchant had a chance to remove it.'<sup>[36]</sup> ... In both these latter cases Gross gives a detailed description of the mechanisms employed. And it will interest you, Sergeant—in view of what I am about to tell you—to know that the revolver in the china-closet was held in place by a *Stiefelknecht*, or bootjack."

He closed the volume, but held it on his lap.

"There, unquestionably, is where Ada got the suggestion for Rex's murder. She and Rex had probably discovered the hidden passage-way between their rooms years ago. I imagine that as children—they were about the same age, don't y' know—they used it as a secret means of correspondence. This would account for the name by which they both knew it—'our private mailbox.' And, given this knowledge between Ada and Rex, the method of the murder becomes perfectly clear. To-night I found an old-fashioned boot-jack in Ada's clothes-closet—probably taken from Tobias's library. Its width, over-all, was just six inches, and it was a little less than two feet long—it fitted perfectly into the communicating cupboard. Ada, following Gross's diagram, pressed the handle of the gun tightly between the tapering claws of the bootjack, which would have held it like a vice; then tied a string to the trigger, and attached the other end to the inside of Rex's panel, so that when the panel was opened wide the revolver, being on a hair trigger, would discharge straight along the shaft and inevitably kill anyone looking into the opening. When Rex fell with a bullet in his forehead the panel flapped back into place on its spring hinge; and a second later there was no visible evidence whatever pointing to the origin of the shot. And here we also have the explanation for Rex's calm expression of unawareness. When Ada returned with us from the District Attorney's office, she went directly to her room, removed the gun and the bootjack, hid them in her closet, and came down to the drawing-room to report the foot-tracks on her carpet—foot-tracks she herself had made before leaving the house. It was just before she came downstairs, by the way, that she stole the morphine and strychnine from Von Blon's case."

"But, my God, Vance!" said Markham. "Suppose her mechanism had failed to work. She would have been in for it then."

"I hardly think so. If, by any remote chance, the trap had not operated or Rex had recovered, she could easily have put the blame on someone else. She had merely to say she had secreted the diagram in the chute and that this other person had prepared the trap later on. There would have been no proof of her having set the gun."

"What about that diagram, sir?" asked Heath.

For answer Vance again took up the second volume of Gross and, opening it, extended it toward us. On the right-hand page were a number of curious line-drawings.

"There are the three stones, and the parrot, and the heart, and even your arrow, Sergeant. They're all criminal graphic symbols; and Ada simply utilized them in her description. The story of her finding the paper in the hall was a pure fabrication, but she knew it would



pique our curiosity. The truth is, I suspected the paper of being faked by someone, for it evidently contained the signs of several types of criminal, and the symbols were meaninglessly jumbled. I rather imagined it was a false clue deliberately placed in the hall for us to find—like the footprints; but I certainly didn't suspect Ada of having made up the tale. Now, however, as I look back at the episode it strikes me as deuced queer that she shouldn't have brought so apparently significant a paper to the office. Her failure to do so was neither logical nor reasonable; and I ought to have been suspicious. But—my word!—what was one illogical item more or less in such a *mélange* of inconsistencies? As it happened, her decoy worked beautifully, and gave her the opportunity to telephone Rex to look into the chute. But it didn't really matter. If the scheme had fallen through that morning, it would have been successful later on. Ada was highly persevering."

"You think, then," put in Markham, "that Rex really heard the shot in Ada's room that first night, and confided in her?"

"Undoubtedly. That part of her story was true enough. I'm inclined to think that Rex heard the shot and had a vague idea Mrs. Greene had fired it. Being rather close to his mother temperamentally, he said nothing. Later he voiced his suspicions to Ada; and that confession gave her the idea for killing him—or, rather, for perfecting the technique she had already decided on; for Rex would have been shot through the secret cupboard in any event. But Ada now saw a way of establishing a perfect alibi for the occasion; although even her idea of being actually with the police when the shot was fired was not original. In Gross's chapter on alibis there is much suggestive material along that line."

Heath sucked his teeth wonderingly.

"I'm glad I don't run across many of her kind," he remarked.

"She was her father's daughter," said Vance. "But too much credit should not be given to her, Sergeant. She had a printed and diagrammed guide for everything. There was little for her to do but follow instructions and keep her head. And as for Rex's murder, don't forget that, although she was actually in Mr. Markham's office at the time of the shooting, she personally engineered the entire *coup*. Think back. She refused to let either you or Mr. Markham come to the house, and insisted upon visiting the office. Once there, she told her story and suggested that Rex be summoned immediately. She even went so far as to plead with us to call him by phone. Then, when we had complied, she quickly informed us of the mysterious diagram, and offered to tell Rex exactly where she had hidden it, so he could bring it with him. And we sat there calmly, listening to her send Rex to his death! Her actions at the Stock Exchange should have given me a hint; but I confess I was particularly blind that morning. She was in a state of high nervous excitement; and when she broke down and sobbed on Mr. Markham's desk after he had told her of Rex's death, her tears were quite real—only, they were not for Rex; they were the reaction from that hour of terrific tension."

"I begin to understand why no one upstairs heard the shot," said Markham. "The revolver detonating in the wall, as it were, would have been almost completely muffled. But why should Sproot have heard it so distinctly downstairs?"

"You remember there was a fire-place in the living-room directly beneath Ada's—Chester once told us it was rarely lighted because it wouldn't draw properly—and Sproot was in the butler's pantry just beyond. The sound of the report went downward through the flue and, as a result, was heard plainly on the lower floor."

"You said a minute ago, Mr. Vance," argued Heath, "that Rex maybe suspected the old lady. Then why should he have accused Von Blon the way he did that day he had a fit?"

"The accusation primarily, I think, was a sort of instinctive effort to drive the idea of Mrs. Greene's guilt from his own mind. Then, again, as Von Blon explained, Rex was frightened after you had questioned him about the revolver, and wanted to divert suspicion from himself."

"Get on with the story of Ada's plot, Vance." This time it was Markham who was impatient.

"The rest seems pretty obvious, don't y' know. It was unquestionably Ada who was listening at the library door the afternoon we were there. She realized we had found the books and galoshes; and she had to think fast. So, when we came out, she told us the dramatic yarn of having seen her mother walking, which was sheer moonshine. She had run across those books on paralysis, d' ye see, and they had suggested to her the possibility of focusing suspicion on Mrs. Greene—the chief object of her hate. It is probably true, as Von Blon said, that the two books do not deal with actual hysterical paralysis and somnambulism, but they no doubt contain references to these types of paralysis. I rather think Ada had intended all along to kill the old lady last and have it appear as the suicide of the murderer. But the proposed examination by Oppenheimer changed all that. She learned of the examination when she heard Von Blon apprise Mrs. Greene of it on his morning visit; and, having told us of that mythical midnight promenade, she couldn't delay matters any longer. The old lady had to die—*before Oppenheimer arrived*. And half an hour later Ada took the morphine. She feared to give Mrs. Greene the strychnine at once lest it appear suspicious..."

"That's where those books on poisons come in, isn't it, Mr. Vance?" interjected Heath. "When Ada had decided to use poison on some of the family, she got all the dope she needed on the subject out of the library."

"Precisely. She herself took just enough morphine to render her unconscious—probably about two grains. And to make sure she would get immediate assistance she devised the simple trick of having Sibella's dog appear to give the alarm. Incidentally, this trick cast suspicion on Sibella. After Ada had swallowed the morphine, she merely waited until she began to feel drowsy, pulled the bell-cord, caught the tassel in the dog's teeth, and lay back. She counterfeited a good deal of her illness; but Drumm couldn't have detected her malingering even if he had been as great a doctor as he wanted us to believe; for the symptoms for all doses of morphine taken by mouth are practically the same during the first half-hour. And, once she was on her feet, she had only to watch for an opportunity of giving the strychnine to Mrs. Greene..."

"It all seems too cold-blooded to be real," murmured Markham.

"And yet there has been any number of precedents for Ada's actions. Do you recall the mass murders of those three nurses, Madame Jegado, Frau Zwanzigger, and Vrouw Van der Linden? And there was Mrs. Belle Gunness, the female Bluebeard; and Amelia Elizabeth Dyer, the Reading baby-farmer; and Mrs. Pearcey. Cold-blooded? Yes! But in Ada's case there was passion too. I'm inclined to believe that it takes a particularly hot flame—a fire at white heat, in fact—to carry the human heart through such a Gethsemane. However that may be, Ada watched for her chance to poison Mrs. Greene, and found it that night. The nurse went to the third floor to prepare for bed between eleven and eleven-thirty; and during that half-hour Ada visited her mother's room. Whether she suggested the

citro- carbonate or Mrs. Greene herself asked for it, we'll never know. Probably the former, for Ada had always given it to her at night. When the nurse came downstairs again Ada was already back in bed, apparently asleep, and Mrs. Greene was on the verge of her first—and, let us hope, her only—convulsion."

"Doremus's *post-mortem* report must have given her a terrific shock," commented Markham.

"It did. It upset all her calculations. Imagine her feelings when we informed her that Mrs. Greene couldn't have walked! She backed out of the danger nicely, though. The detail of the Oriental shawl, however, nearly entangled her. But even that point she turned to her own advantage by using it as a clue against Sibella."

"How do you account for Mrs. Mannheim's actions during that interview?" asked Markham. "You remember her saying it might have been she whom Ada saw in the hall."

A cloud came over Vance's face.

"I think," he said sadly, "that Frau Mannheim began to suspect her little Ada at that point. She knew the terrible history of the girl's father, and perhaps had lived in fear of some criminal outcropping in the child."

There was a silence for several moments. Each of us was busy with his own thoughts. Then Vance continued:

"After Mrs. Greene's death, only Sibella stood between Ada and her blazing goal; and it was Sibella herself who gave her the idea for a supposedly safe way to commit the final murder. Weeks ago, on a ride Van and I took with the two girls and Von Blon, Sibella's venomous pique led her to make a foolish remark about running one's victim over a precipice in a machine; and it no doubt appealed to Ada's sense of the fitness of things that Sibella should thus suggest the means of her own demise. I wouldn't be at all surprised if Ada intended, after having killed her sister, to say that Sibella had tried to murder *her*, but that she had suspected the other's purpose and jumped from the car in time to save herself; and that Sibella had miscalculated the car's speed and been carried over the precipice. The fact that Von Blon and Van and I had heard Sibella speculate on just such a method of murder would have given weight to Ada's story. And what a neat ending it would have made—Sibella, the murderer, dead; the case closed; Ada, the inheritor of the Greene millions, free to do as she chose! And—'pon my soul, Markham!—it came very near succeeding."

Vance sighed, and reached for the decanter. After refilling our glasses, he settled back and smoked moodily.

"I wonder how long this terrible plot had been in preparation. We'll never know. Maybe years. There was no haste in Ada's preparations. Everything was worked out carefully; and she let circumstances—or, rather, opportunity—guide her. Once she had secured the revolver, it was only a question of waiting for a chance when she could make the footprints and be sure the gun would sink out of sight in the snow-drift on the balcony steps. Yes, the most essential condition of her scheme was the snow! ...Amazin'!"

\* \* \* \* \*

There is little more to add to this record. The truth was not given out, and the case was "shelved." The following year Tobias's will was upset by the Supreme Court in Equity—that is, the twenty-five-year domiciliary clause was abrogated in view of all that had happened at the house; and Sibella came into the entire Greene fortune. How much Markham had to do with the decision, through his influence with the Administration judge who rendered it, I don't know; and naturally I have never asked. But the old Greene mansion was, as you remember, torn down shortly afterward, and the estate sold to a realty corporation.

Mrs. Mannheim, broken-hearted over Ada's death, claimed her inheritance—which Sibella generously doubled—and returned to Germany to seek what comfort she might among the nieces and nephews with whom, according to Chester, she was constantly corresponding. Sproot went back to England. He told Vance before departing that he had long planned a cottage retreat in Surrey where he could loaf and invite his soul. I picture him now, sitting in an ivied porch overlooking Kew Gardens, reading his beloved Martial.

Doctor and Mrs. Von Blon, immediately after the court's decision relating to the will, sailed for the Riviera and spent a year's belated honeymoon there. They are now settled in Vienna, where the doctor has become a *Docent* at the University—his father's Alma Mater. He is, I understand, making quite a name for himself in the field of neurology.

One domestic item may be appended. Several months ago a friend of mine, returning from Vienna, brought me the news that Sibella had given birth to a son and heir. The fact, I admit, struck me as somewhat incongruous. It is difficult for me to picture Sibella in the rôle of mother. But, as one of our leading sociologists recently assured us, the modern girl harbours beneath her callous and highly sophisticated exterior an intense, age-old maternalism. "Indeed," added this eminent sociologist, "the modern girls make the best mothers." Let us sincerely hope that Sibella will confirm his generous optimism.

THE END

## Footnotes

[1] It is, I hope, unnecessary for me to state that I have received official permission for my task.

[2] "The Benson Murder Case"

[3] "The 'Canary' Murder Case"

[4] This was subsequently proved correct. Nearly a year later Maleppo was arrested in Detroit, extradited to New York, and convicted of the murder. His two companions had already been successfully prosecuted for robbery. They are now serving long terms in Sing Sing.

[5] It was Sergeant Ernest Heath, of the Homicide Bureau, who had been in charge of both the Benson and the Canary cases; and, although he had been openly antagonistic to Vance during the first of these investigations, a curious good-fellowship had later grown up between them. Vance admired the Sergeant's dogged and straightforward qualities; and Heath had developed a keen respect—for Vance's abilities.

[6] Vance, after reading proof of this sentence, requested me to make mention here of that beautiful volume, "Terra Cotta of the Italian Renaissance," recently published by the National Terra Cotta Society, New York.

[7] Doctor Emanuel Doremus, the Chief Medical Examiner.

[8] Sibella was here referring to Tobias Greene's will, which stipulated not only that the Greene mansion should be maintained intact for twenty-five years, but that the legatees should live on the estate during that time or become disinherited.

[9] E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie, Paris, 1893.

[10] Inspector William M. Moran, who died last summer, had been the commanding officer of the Detective Bureau for eight years. He was a man of rare and unusual qualities, and with his death the New York Police Department lost one of its most efficient and trustworthy officials. He had formerly been a well-known up-State banker who had been forced to close his doors during the 1907 panic.

[11] Captain Anthony P. Jerym was one of the shrewdest and most painstaking criminologists of the New York Police Department. Though he had begun his career as an expert in the Bertillon system of measurements, he had later specialized in footprints—a subject which he had helped to elevate to an elaborate and complicated science. He had spent several years in Vienna studying Austrian methods, and had developed a means of scientific photography for footprints which gave him rank with such men as Londe, Burias, and Reiss.

[12] I remember, back in the nineties, when I was a schoolboy, hearing my father allude to certain picturesque tales of Tobias Greene's escapades.

[13] Captain Hagedorn was the expert who supplied Vance with the technical data in the Benson murder case, which made it possible for him to establish the height of the murderer.

[14] It was Inspector Brenner who examined and reported on the chiselled jewel-box in the "Canary" murder case.

[15] Among the famous cases mentioned as being in some manner comparable to the Greene shootings were the mass murders of Landru, Jean-Baptiste Troppmann, Fritz Haarmann and Mrs. Belle Gunness; the tavern murders of the Benders; the Van der Linden poisonings in Holland; the Bela Kiss tin-cask stranglings; the Rugeley murders of Doctor William Palmer; and the beating to death of Benjamin Nathan.

[16] The famous impure-milk scandal was then to the fore, and the cases were just appearing on the court calendar. Also, at that time, there was an anti-gambling campaign in progress in New York; and the District Attorney's office had charge of all the prosecutions.

[17] The Modern Gallery was then under the direction of Marius de Zayas, whose collection of African statuette-fetiches was perhaps the finest in America.

[18] Colonel Benjamin Hanlon, one of the Department's greatest authorities on extradition, was then the commanding officer of the Detective Division attached to the District Attorney's office, with quarters in the Criminal Courts Building.

[19] Among the volumes of Tobias Greene's library I may mention the following as typical of the entire collection: Heinroth's "De morborum animi et pathematum animi differentia," Hoh's "De maniae pathologia," P. S. Knight's "Observations on the Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment of Derangement of the Mind," KrafftEbing's "Grundzuge der Kriminal- Psychologie," Bailey's "Diary of a Resurrectionist," Lange's "Om Arvelighedens Inflydelse i Sindssygedommene," Leuret's "Fragments psychologiques sur la folie," D'Aguanno's "Recension di antropologia giuridica," Amos's "Crime and Civilisation," Andronico's "Studi clinici sul delitto," Lombroso's "Uomo Delinquente," de Aramburu's "La nueva ciencia penal," Bleakley's "Some Distinguished Victims of the Scaffold," Arenal's "Psychologie comparée du criminel," Aubry's "De l'homicide commis par la femme," Beccaria's "Crimes and Punishments," Benedikt's "Anatomical Studies upon the Brains of Criminals," Bittinger's "Crimes of Passion and of Reflection," Bosselli's "Nuovi studi sul tatuaggio nei criminali," Favalli's "La delinquenza in rapporto alla civiltà," de Feyfer's "Verhandelng over den Kindermoord," Fuld's "Der Realismus und das Strafrecht," Hamilton's "Scientific Detection of Crime," von Holtzendorff's "Das Irische Gefangnissystem insbesondere die Zwischenanstalten vor der Entlassung der Straflinge," Jardine's "Criminal Trials," Lacassagne's "L'homme criminel compare à l'homme primitif," Llanos y Torriglia's "Ferri y su escuela," Owen Luke's "History of Crime in England," MacFarlane's "Lives and Exploits of Banditti," M'Levy's "Curiosities of Crime in Edinburgh," the "Complete Newgate Calendar," Pomeroy's "German and French Criminal Procedure," Rizzone's "Delinquenza e punibilita," Rosenblatt's "Skizzen aus des Verbrecherwelt," Soury's "Le crime et les criminels," Wey's "Criminal Anthropology," Amadei's "Crani d'assassini," Benedikt's "Der Raubthiertypus am menschlichen Gehirne," Fasini's "Studi su delinquenti femmine," Misl's "Arrested and Aberrant Development and Gyres in the Brain of Paranoiacs and Criminals," de Paoli's "Quattro crani di delinquenti," Zuckerkandl's "Morphologie des Gesichtsschadels," Bergonzoli's "Sui pazzi criminali in Italia," Brierre de Boismont's "Rapports de la folie suicide avec la folie homicide," Buchnet's "The Relation of Madness to Crime," Galucci's "Il jure penale e la freniatria," Davey's "Insanity and Crime,"



Morel's "Le procès Chorinski," Parrot's "Sur la mono-mane homicide," Savage's "Moral Insanity," Teed's "On Mind, Insanity and Criminality," Worckmann's "On Crime and Insanity," Vaucher's "Système préventif des délits et des crimes," Thacker's "Psychology of Vice and Crime," Tarde's "La Criminalité Comparée," Tamassia's "Gli ultimi studi sulla criminalità," Sikes's "Studies of Assassination," Senior's "Remarkable Crimes and Trials in Germany," Savarini's "Vexata Quaestio," Sampson's "Rationale of Crime," Noellner's "Kriminal-psychologische Denkwürdigkeiten," Sighele's "La foule criminelle," and Korsakoff's "Krus psichiatrii."

[20] Dr. Blyth was one of the defence witnesses in the Crippen trial.

[21] Doctor Felix Oppenheimer was then the leading authority on paralysis in America. He has since returned to Germany, where he now holds the chair of neurology at the University of Freiburg.

[22] Hennessey was the detective stationed in the Narcoss Flats to watch the Greene mansion.

[23] It will be remembered that in the famous Molineux poisoning case the cyanide of mercury was administered by way of a similar drug—to wit: Bromo- Seltzer.

[24] Chief Inspector O'Brien, who was in command of the entire Police Department, was, I learned later, an uncle of the Miss O'Brien who was acting officially as nurse at the Greene mansion.

[25] I recalled that Guilfoyle and Mallory were the two men who had been set to watch Tony Skeel in the Canary murder case.

[26] Vance was here referring to the chapter called "The Aesthetic Hypothesis" in Clive Bell's "Art." But, despite the somewhat slighting character of his remark, Vance was an admirer of Bell's criticisms, and had spoken to me with considerable enthusiasm of his "Since Cezanne."

[27] This was the first and only time during my entire friendship with Vance that I ever heard him use a Scriptural expletive.

[28] As I learned later, Doctor Von Blon, who was an ardent amateur photographer, often used half-gramme tablets of cyanide of potassium and there had been three of them in his dark-room when Ada had called. Several days later, when preparing to redevelop a plate, he could only find two, but had thought little of the loss until questioned by Vance.

[29] I later asked Vance to rearrange the items for me in the order of his final sequence. The distribution, which told him the truth, was as follows: 3, 4, 44, 92, 9, 2, 47, 1, 5, 32, 31, 98, 8, 81, 84, 82, 7, 10, 11, 61, 15, 16, 93, 33, 94, 76, 75, 48, 17, 38, 55, 54, 18, 39, 56, 41, 42, 28, 43, 58, 59, 83, 74, 40, 12, 34, 13, 14, 37, 22, 23, 35, 36, 19, 73, 26, 20, 21 45. 25, 46, 27, 29, 30, 57, 77, 24, 78, 79, 51, 50, 52, 53, 49, 95, 80, 85, 86, 87, 88, 60, 62, 64, 63, 66, 65, 96, 89, 67, 71, 69, 68, 70, 97, 90, 91, 72.

[30] An account of the cases of Madeleine Smith and Constance Kent may be found in Edmund Lester Pearson's "Murder at Smutty Nose"; and a record of Marie Boyer's case is included in H. B. Irving's "A Book of Remarkable Criminals." Grete Beyer was the last woman to be publicly executed in Austria.

[31] "Selbstverletzungen kommen nicht selten vor; abgesehen von solchen bei fingierten Raubanfällen, stösst man auf sie dann, wenn Entschädigungen erpresst werden sollen; so geschieht es, dass nach einer harmlosen Balgerie einer der Kämpfenden mit Verletzungen auftritt, die er damals erlitten haben will. Kennlich sind solche Selbstverstümmelungen daran, dass die Betreffenden meistens die Operation wegen der grossen Schmerzen nicht ganz zu Ende führen, und dass es meistens Leute mit uebertrieben pietistischer Färbung und meter einsamen Lebenswandels sind."—H. Gross, "Handbuch für Untersuchungsrichter als System der Kriminalistik," I, pp. 32-34.

[32] "Dass man sich durch den Sitz der Wunde niemals täuschen lassen darf, beweisen zwei Fälle. Im Wiener Prater hatte sich ein Mann in Gegenwart mehrerer Personen getötet, indem er sich mit einem Revolver in den Hinterkopf schoss. Wären nicht die Aussagen der Zeugen vorgelegen, hätte wohl kaum jemand an einen Selbstmord geglaubt. Ein Soldat tötete sich durch einen in den Rücken gehenden Schuss aus einem Militärgewehr, ueber das er nach entsprechender Fixierung sich gelegt hatte; auch her ware aus dem Sitz der Wunde wohl kaum auf Selbstmord geschlossen worden."—Ibid., II, p. 843.

[33] "Es wurde zeitlich morgens dem UR. die Meldung von der Auffindung eines Ermordeten ueberbracht. An Ort und Stelle fand sich der Leichnam eines für wohlhabend geltenden Getreidehändlers M., auf dem Gesichte liegend, mit einer Schusswunde hinter dem rechten Ohre. Die Kugel war ueber dem linken Auge in Stinkknochen stecken geblieben, nachdem sie das Gehirn durchdrungen hatte. Die Fundstelle der Leiche befand sich etwa in der Mitte einer ueber einen ziemlich tiefen Fluss führenden Brücke. Am Schiuss der Lokalerhebungen und als die Leiche eben zur Obduktion fortgebracht werden sollte, fiel es dem UR. zufällig auf dass das (hölzerne und wettergraue) Brückengeländer an der Stelle, wo auf dem Boden der Leichnam lag, eine kleine und sichtlich ganz frische Beschädigung aufwies, so als ob man dort (am oberen Rande) mit einem harten, kantigen Körper heftig angestossen ware. Der Gedanke, dass dieser Umstand mit dem Morde in Zusammenhang stehe, war nicht gut von der Hand zu weisen. Ein Kahn war bald zur Stelle und am Brückenjoch befestigt; nun wurde vom Kahne aus (unter der fraglichen Stelle) der Flussgrund mit Rechen an langen Stielen sorgfältig abgesucht. Nach kurzer Arbeit kam wirklich etwas Seltsames zutage: eine etwa 4 m lange starke Schnur, an deren einem Ende ein grosser Feldstein, an deren anderem Ende eine abgeschossene Pistole befestigt war, in deren Lauf die später aus dem Kopfe des M. genommene Kugel genau passte. Nun war die Sache klarer Selbstmord; der Mann hatte sich mit der aufgefundenen Vorrichtung auf die Brücke begeben, den Stein ueber das Brückengeländer gehängt und sich die Kugel hinter dem rechten Ohre ins Him gejagt. Als er getroffen war, liess er die Pistole infolge des durch den Stein bewirkten Zuges aus und diese wurde von dem schweren Steine an der Schnur ueber das Geländer und in das Wasser gezogen. Hierbei hatte die Pistole, als sie das Geländer passierte, heftig dieses angeschlagen und die betreffende Verletzung erzeugt."—Ibid., pp. 834-836.

[34] "Die Absicht kann dahin gehen, den Verdacht von sich auf jemand anderen zu wälzen, was namentlich dann Sinn hat, wenn der Täter schon im voraus annehmen durfte, dass sich der Verdacht auf ihn lenken werde. In diesem Falle erzeugt er recht auffallende, deutliche Spuren and zwar mit angezogenen Schuhen, die von den seinigen sich wesentlich unterscheiden. Man kann, wie angestellte Versuche beweisen, in dieser Weise recht gute Spuren erzeugen."—Ibid., II, p. 667.

[35] "Ueber Gummiueberschuhe and Galoschen s. Loock; Chem. u. Phot. bei Krim. Forschungen: Düsseldorf, II, p. 56."—Ibid., II, p. 668.

[36] "Die neuesten amerikanischen Schutzvorrichtungen haben direkt mit der Kasse selbst nichts zu tun und können eigentlich an jedem Behältnisse angebracht werden. Sie bestehen aus chemischen Schutzmitteln oder Selbstschüssen und wollen die Anwesenheit eines Menschen, der den Schrank unbefugt geöffnet hat, aus sanitären oder sonst physischen Gründen unmöglich machen. Auch die

juristische Seite der Frage ist zu erwägen, da man den Einbrecher doch nicht ohne weiteres töten oder an der Gesundheit schädigen darf. Nichtsdestoweniger wurde im Jahre 1902 ein Einbrecher in Berlin durch einen solchen Selbstschuss in die Stirne getötet, der an die Panzertüre einer Kasse befestigt war. Derartige Selbstschüsse wurden auch zu Morden verwendet; der Mechaniker G. Z. stellte einen Revolver in einer Kredenz auf, verband den Druecker mit der Türe durch eine Schnur und erschoss auf diese Art seine Frau, während er tatsächlich von seinem Wohnorte abwesend war. R. C. ein Budapester Kaufmann befestigte in einem, seinem Bruder gehörigen Cigarrenkasten, eine Pistole, die beim Öffnen des Deckels seinen Bruder durch einen Unterleibsschuss tödlich verletzte. Der Ruckschlag warf die Kiste von ihrem Standort, sodass der Mördermechanismus zu Tage trat, ehe R. C. denselben bei Seite schaffen konnte."—Ibid., II, p. 943.

## 04. BISHOP

### 1. "WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?"

(Saturday, April 2; noon)

Of all the criminal cases in which Philo Vance participated as an unofficial investigator, the most sinister, the most bizarre, the seemingly most incomprehensible, and certainly the most terrifying, was the one that followed the famous Greene murders.<sup>[1]</sup> The orgy of horror at the old Greene mansion had been brought to its astounding close in December; and after the Christmas holidays Vance had gone to Switzerland for the winter sports. Returning to New York at the end of February he had thrown himself into some literary work he had long had in mind—the uniform translation of the principal fragments of Menander found in the Egyptian papyri during the early years of the present century; and for over a month he had devoted himself sedulously to this thankless task.

Whether or not he would have completed the translations, even had his labors not been interrupted, I do not know; for Vance was a man of cultural ardencies, in whom the spirit of research and intellectual adventure was constantly at odds with the drudgery necessary to scholastic creation. I remember that only the preceding year he had begun writing a life of Xenophon—the result of an enthusiasm inherited from his university days when he had first read the *Anabasis* and the *Memorabilia*—and had lost interest in it at the point where Xenophon's historic march led the Ten Thousand back to the sea. However, the fact remains that Vance's translation of Menander was rudely interrupted in early April; and for weeks he became absorbed in a criminal mystery which threw the entire country into a state of gruesome excitement.

This new criminal investigation, in which he acted as a kind of *amicus curiae* for John F.-X. Markham, the District Attorney of New York, at once became known as the Bishop murder case. The designation—the result of our journalistic instinct to attach labels to every *cause célèbre*—was, in a sense, a misnomer. There was nothing ecclesiastical about that ghoulish saturnalia of crime which set an entire community to reading the "Mother Goose Melodies" with fearful apprehension;<sup>[2]</sup> and no one of the name of Bishop was, as far as I know, even remotely connected with the monstrous events which bore that appellation. But, withal, the word "Bishop" was appropriate, for it was an *alias* used by the murderer for the grimmest of purposes. Incidentally it was this name that eventually led Vance to the almost incredible truth, and ended one of the most ghastly multiple crimes in police history.

The series of uncanny and apparently unrelated events which constituted the Bishop murder case and drove all thought of Menander and Greek monostichs from Vance's mind, began on the morning of April 2, less than five months after the double shooting of Julia and Ada Greene. It was one of those warm luxurious spring days which sometimes bless New York in early April; and Vance was breakfasting in his little roof garden atop his apartment in East 38th Street. It was nearly noon—for Vance worked or read until all hours, and was a late riser—and the sun, beating down from a clear blue sky, cast a mantle of introspective lethargy over the city. Vance sprawled in an easy chair, his breakfast on a low table beside him, gazing with cynical, regretful eyes down at the treetops in the rear yard.

I knew what was in his mind. It was his custom each spring to go to France; and it had long since come to him to think, as it came to George Moore, that Paris and May were one. But the great trek of the post-war American *nouveaux riches* to Paris had spoiled his pleasure in this annual pilgrimage; and, only the day before, he had informed me that we were to remain in New York for the summer.

For years I had been Vance's friend and legal adviser—a kind of monetary steward and agent-companion. I had quitted my father's law firm of Van Dine, Davis & Van Dine to devote myself wholly to his interests—a post I found far more congenial than that of general attorney in a stuffy office—and though my own bachelor quarters were in a hotel on the West Side, I spent most of my time at Vance's apartment.

I had arrived early that morning, long before Vance was up, and, having gone over the first-of-the-month accounts, now sat smoking my pipe idly as he breakfasted.

"Y' know, Van," he said to me, in his emotionless drawl; "the prospect of spring and summer in New York is neither excitin' nor romantic. It's going to be a beastly bore. But it'll be less annoyin' than travelin' in Europe with the vulgar hordes of tourists jostlin' one at every turn. . . . It's very distressin'."

Little did he suspect what the next few weeks held in store for him. Had he known I doubt if even the prospect of an old pre-war spring in Paris would have taken him away; for his insatiable mind liked nothing better than a complicated problem; and even as he spoke to me that morning the gods that presided over his destiny were preparing for him a strange and fascinating enigma—one which was to stir the nation deeply and add a new and terrible chapter to the annals of crime.

Vance had scarcely poured his second cup of coffee when Currie, his old English butler and general factotum, appeared at the French doors bearing a portable telephone.

"It's Mr. Markham, sir," the old man said apologetically. "As he seemed rather urgent, I took the liberty of informing him you were in." He plugged the telephone into a baseboard switch, and set the instrument on the breakfast table.

"Quite right, Currie," Vance murmured, taking off the receiver. "Anything to break this deuced monotony." Then he spoke to Markham. "I say, old man, don't you ever sleep? I'm in the midst of an *omelette aux fines herbes*. Will you join me? Or do you merely crave the music of my voice—?"

He broke off abruptly, and the bantering look on his lean features disappeared. Vance was a marked Nordic type, with a long, sharply chiselled face; gray, wide-set eyes; a narrow aquiline nose; and a straight oval chin. His mouth, too, was firm and clean-cut, but it held a look of cynical cruelty which was more Mediterranean than Nordic. His face was strong and attractive, though not exactly handsome. It was the face of a thinker and recluse; and its very severity—at once studious and introspective—acted as a barrier between him and his fellows.

Though he was immobile by nature and sedulously schooled in the repression of his emotions, I noticed that, as he listened to Markham on the phone that morning, he could not entirely disguise his eager interest in what was being told him. A slight frown ruffled his brow; and his eyes reflected his inner amazement. From time to time he gave vent to a murmured "Amazin'!" or "My word!"

or "Most extr'ordin'ry!"—his favorite expletives—and when at the end of several minutes he spoke to Markham, a curious excitement marked his manner.

"Oh, by all means!" he said. "I shouldn't miss it for all the lost comedies of Menander. . . . It sounds mad. . . . I'll don fitting raiment immediately. . . . *Au revoir*."

Replacing the receiver, he rang for Currie.

"My gray tweeds," he ordered. "A sombre tie, and my black Homburg hat." Then he returned to his omelet with a preoccupied air.

After a few moments he looked at me quizzically.

"What might you know of archery, Van?" he asked.

I knew nothing of archery, save that it consisted of shooting arrows at targets, and I confessed as much.

"You're not exactly revealin', don't y' know." He lighted one of his *Régie* cigarettes indolently. "However, we're in for a little flutter of toxophily, it seems. I'm no leading authority on the subject myself, but I did a bit of potting with the bow at Oxford. It's not a passionately excitin' pastime—much duller than golf and fully as complicated." He smoked a while dreamily. "I say, Van; fetch me Doctor Elmer's tome on archery from the library—there's a good chap."[\[3\]](#)

I brought the book, and for nearly half an hour he dipped into it, tarrying over the chapters on archery associations, tournaments and matches, and scanning the long tabulation of the best American scores. At length he settled back in his chair. It was obvious he had found something that caused him troubled concern and set his sensitive mind to work.

"It's quite mad, Van," he remarked, his eyes in space. "A mediaeval tragedy in modern New York! We don't wear buskins and leathern doublets, and yet—*by Jove!*" He suddenly sat upright. "No—no! It's absurd. I'm letting the insanity of Markham's news affect me. . . ." He drank some more coffee, but his expression told me that he could not rid himself of the idea that had taken possession of him.

"One more favor, Van," he said at length. "Fetch me my German diction'ry and Burton E. Stevenson's 'Home Book of Verse.'"

When I had brought the volumes, he glanced at one word in the dictionary, and pushed the book from him.

"That's that, unfortunately—though I knew it all the time."

Then he turned to the section in Stevenson's gigantic anthology which included the rhymes of the nursery and of childhood. After several minutes he closed that book, too, and, stretching himself out in his chair, blew a long ribbon of smoke toward the awning overhead.

"It can't be true," he protested, as if to himself. "It's too fantastic, too fiendish, too utterly distorted. A fairy tale in terms of blood—a world in anamorphosis—a perversion of all rationality. . . . It's unthinkable, senseless, like black magic and sorcery and thaumaturgy. It's downright demented."

He glanced at his watch and, rising, went indoors, leaving me to speculate vaguely on the cause of his unwonted perturbation. A treatise on archery, a German dictionary, a collection of children's verses, and Vance's incomprehensible utterances regarding insanity and fantasy—what possible connection could these things have? I attempted to find a least common denominator, but without the slightest success. And it was no wonder I failed. Even the truth, when it came out weeks later bolstered up by an array of incontestable evidence, seemed too incredible and too wicked for acceptance by the normal mind of man.

Vance shortly broke in on my futile speculations. He was dressed for the street, and seemed impatient at Markham's delay in arriving.

"Y' know, I wanted something to interest me—a nice fascinatin' crime, for instance," he remarked; "but—my word!—I wasn't exactly longin' for a nightmare. If I didn't know Markham so well I'd suspect him of spoofing."

When Markham stepped into the roof garden a few minutes later it was only too plain that he had been in deadly earnest. His expression was sombre and troubled, and his usual cordial greeting he reduced to the merest curt formality. Markham and Vance had been intimate friends for fifteen years. Though of antipodal natures—the one sternly aggressive, brusque, forthright, and almost ponderously serious; the other whimsical, cynical, debonair, and aloof from the transient concerns of life—they found in each other that attraction of complementaries which so often forms the basis of an inseparable and enduring companionship.

During Markham's year and four months as District Attorney of New York he had often called Vance into conference on matters of grave importance, and in every instance Vance had justified the confidence placed in his judgments. Indeed, to Vance almost entirely belongs the credit for solving the large number of major crimes which occurred during Markham's four years' incumbency. His knowledge of human nature, his wide reading and cultural attainments, his shrewd sense of logic, and his *flair* for the hidden truth beneath misleading exteriors, all fitted him for the task of criminal investigator—a task which he fulfilled unofficially in connection with the cases which came under Markham's jurisdiction.

Vance's first case, it will be remembered, had to do with the murder of Alvin Benson;[\[4\]](#) and had it not been for his participation in that affair I doubt if the truth concerning it would ever have come to light. Then followed the notorious strangling of Margaret Odell[\[5\]](#)—a murder mystery in which the ordinary methods of police detection would inevitably have failed. And last year the astounding Greene murders (to which I have already referred) would undoubtedly have succeeded had not Vance been able to frustrate their final intent.

It was not surprising, therefore, that Markham should have turned to Vance at the very beginning of the Bishop murder case. More and more, I had noticed, he had come to rely on the other's help in his criminal investigations; and in the present instance it was particularly fortunate that he appealed to Vance, for only through an intimate knowledge of the abnormal psychological manifestations of the human mind, such as Vance possessed, could that black, insensate plot have been contravened and the perpetrator unearthed.

"This whole thing may be a mare's-nest," said Markham, without conviction. "But I thought you might want to come along. . . ."

"Oh, quite!" Vance gave Markham a sardonic smile. "Sit down a moment and tell me the tale coherently. The corpse won't run away. And it's best to get our facts in some kind of order before we view the remains.—Who are the parties of the first part, for instance? And why the projection of the District Attorney's office into a murder case within an hour of the deceased's passing? All that you've told me so far resolves itself into the utterest nonsense."

Markham sat down gloomily on the edge of a chair and inspected the end of his cigar.

"Damn it, Vance! Don't start in with a mysteries-of-Udolpho attitude. The crime—if it is a crime—seems clear-cut enough. It's an unusual method of murder, I'll admit; but it's certainly not senseless. Archery has become quite a fad of late. Bows and arrows are in use to-day in practically every city and college in America."

"Granted. But it's been a long time since they were used to kill persons named Robin."

Markham's eyes narrowed, and he looked at Vance searchingly.

"That idea occurred to you, too, did it?"

"Occurred to me? It leapt to my brain the moment you mentioned the victim's name." Vance puffed a moment on his cigarette. "'Who Killed Cock Robin?' And with a bow and arrow! . . . Queer how the doggerel learned in childhood clings to the memory.—By the by, what was the unfortunate Mr. Robin's first name?"

"Joseph, I believe."

"Neither edifyin' nor suggestive. . . . Any middle name?"

"See here, Vance!" Markham rose irritably. "What has the murdered man's middle name to do with the case?"

"I haven't the groggiest. Only, as long as we're going insane we may as well go the whole way. A mere shred of sanity is of no value."

He rang for Currie and sent him for the telephone directory. Markham protested, but Vance pretended not to hear; and when the directory arrived he thumbed its pages for several moments.

"Did the departed live on Riverside Drive?" he asked finally, holding his finger on a name he had found.

"I think he did."

"Well, well." Vance closed the book, and fixed a quizzically triumphant gaze on the District Attorney. "Markham," he said slowly, "there's only one Joseph Robin listed in the telephone direct'ry. He lives on Riverside Drive, and his middle name is—Cochrane!"

"What rot is this?" Markham's tone was almost ferocious. "Suppose his name *WAS* Cochrane: are you seriously suggesting that the fact had anything to do with his being murdered?"

"'Pon my word, old man, I'm suggesting nothing." Vance shrugged his shoulders slightly. "I'm merely jotting down, so to speak, a few facts in connection with the case. As the matter stands now: a Mr. Joseph Cochrane Robin—to wit: Cock Robin—has been killed by a bow and arrow.—Doesn't that strike even your legal mind as deuced queer?"

"No!" Markham fairly spat the negative. "The name of the dead man is certainly common enough; and it's a wonder more people haven't been killed or injured with all this revival of archery throughout the country. Moreover, it's wholly possible that Robin's death was the result of an accident."

"Oh, my aunt!" Vance wagged his head reprovingly. "That fact, even were it true, wouldn't help the situation any. It would only make it queerer. Of the thousands of archery enthusiasts in these fair states, the one with the name of Cock Robin should be accidentally killed with an arrow! Such a supposition would lead us into spiritism and demonology and whatnot. Do you, by any chance, believe in Eblises and Azazels and jinn who go about playing Satanic jokes on mankind?"

"Must I be a Mohammedan mythologist to admit coincidences?" returned Markham tartly.

"My dear fellow! The proverbial long arm of coincidence doesn't extend to infinity. There are, after all, laws of probability, based on quite definite mathematical formulas. It would make me sad to think that such men as Laplace<sup>[6]</sup> and Czuber and von Kries had lived in vain.—The present situation, however, is even more complicated than you suspect. For instance, you mentioned over the phone that the last person known to have been with Robin before his death is named Sperling."

"And what esoteric significance lies in that fact?"

"Perhaps you know what *Sperling* means in German," suggested Vance dulcetly.

"I've been to High School," retorted Markham. Then his eyes opened slightly, and his body became tense.

Vance pushed the German dictionary toward him. "Well, anyway, look up the word. We might as well be thorough. I looked it up myself. I was afraid my imagination was playing tricks on me, and I had a yearnin' to see the word in black and white."

Markham opened the book in silence, and let his eye run down the page. After staring at the word for several moments he drew himself up resolutely, as if fighting off a spell. When he spoke his voice was defiantly belligerent.

"Sperling means 'sparrow.' Any school boy knows that. What of it?"

"Oh, to be sure." Vance lit another cigarette languidly. "And any school boy knows the old nursery rhyme entitled 'The Death and Burial of Cock Robin,' what?" He glanced tantalizingly at Markham, who stood immobile, staring out into the spring sunshine. "Since you pretend to be unfamiliar with that childhood classic, permit me to recite the first stanza."

A chill, as of some unseen spectral presence, passed over me as Vance repeated those old familiar lines:

"Who killed Cock Robin?"

"I," said the sparrow,

"With my bow and arrow.

I killed Cock Robin."

## 2. ON THE ARCHERY RANGE

(Saturday, April 2; 12.30 p.m.)

Slowly Markham brought his eyes back to Vance.

"It's mad," he remarked, like a man confronted with something at once inexplicable and terrifying.

"Tut, tut!" Vance waved his hand airily. "That's plagiarism. I said it first." (He was striving to overcome his own sense of perplexity by a lightness of attitude.) "And now there really should be an *inamorata* to bewail Mr. Robin's passing. You recall, perhaps, the stanza:

"Who'll be chief mourner?  
'I,' said the dove,  
'I mourn my lost love;  
I'll be chief mourner.'"

Markham's head jerked slightly, and his fingers beat a nervous tattoo on the table.

"Good God, Vance! There *is* a girl in the case. And there's a possibility that jealousy lies at the bottom of this thing."

"Fancy that, now! I'm afraid the affair is going to develop into a kind of *tableau-vivant* for grownup kindergartners, what? But that'll make our task easier. All we'll have to do is to find the fly."

"The fly?"

"The *Musca domestica*, to speak pedantically. . . . My dear Markham, have you forgotten?—

"Who saw him die?  
'I,' said the fly,  
'With my little eye;  
I saw him die.'"

"Come down to earth!" Markham spoke with acerbity. "This isn't a child's game. It's damned serious business."

Vance nodded abstractedly.

"A child's game is sometimes the most serious business in life." His words held a curious, far-away tone. "I don't like this thing—I don't at all like it. There's too much of the child in it—the child born old and with a diseased mind. It's like some hideous perversion." He took a deep inhalation on his cigarette, and made a slight gesture of repugnance. "Give me the details. Let's find out where we stand in this topsy-turvy land."

Markham again seated himself.

"I haven't many details. I told you practically everything I know of the case over the phone. Old Professor Dillard called me shortly before I communicated with you—"

"Dillard? By any chance, Professor Bertrand Dillard?"

"Yes. The tragedy took place at his house.—You know him?"

"Not personally. I know him only as the world of science knows him—as one of the greatest living mathematical physicists. I have most of his books.—How did he happen to call you?"

"I've known him for nearly twenty years. I had mathematics under him at Columbia, and later did some legal work for him. When Robin's body was found he phoned me at once—about half past eleven. I called up Sergeant Heath at the Homicide Bureau and turned the case over to him—although I told him I'd come along personally later on. Then I phoned you. The Sergeant and his men are waiting for me now at the Dillard home."

"What's the domestic situation there?"

"The professor, as you probably know, resigned his chair some ten years ago. Since then he's been living in West 75th Street, near the Drive. He took his brother's child—a girl of fifteen—to live with him. She's around twenty-five now. Then there's his protégé, Sigurd Arnesson, who was a classmate of mine at college. The professor adopted him during his junior year. Arnesson is now about forty, an instructor in mathematics at Columbia. He came to this country from Norway when he was three, and was left an orphan five years later. He's something of a mathematical genius, and Dillard evidently saw the makings of a great physicist in him and adopted him."

"I've heard of Arnesson," nodded Vance. "He recently published some modifications of Mie's theory on the electrodynamics of moving bodies. . . . And do these three—Dillard, Arnesson and the girl—live alone?"

"With two servants. Dillard appears to have a very comfortable income. They're not very much alone, however. The house is a kind of shrine for mathematicians, and quite a *cénacle* has developed. Moreover, the girl, who has always gone in for outdoor sports, has her own little social set. I've been at the house several times, and there have always been visitors about—either a serious student or two of the abstract sciences up-stairs in the library, or some noisy young people in the drawing-room below."

"And Robin?"

"He belonged to Belle Dillard's set—an oldish young society man who held several archery records. . . ."

"Yes, I know. I just looked up the name in this book on archery. A Mr. J. C. Robin seems to have made the high scores in several recent championship meets. And I noted, too, that a Mr. Sperling has been the runner-up in several large archery tournaments.—Is Miss Dillard an archer as well?"

"Yes, quite an enthusiast. In fact, she organized the Riverside Archery Club. Its permanent ranges are at Sperling's home in Scarsdale; but Miss Dillard has rigged up a practice range in the side yard of the professor's 75th-Street house. It was on this range that Robin was killed."

"Ah! And, as you say, the last person known to have been with him was Sperling. Where is our sparrow now?"

"I don't know. He was with Robin shortly before the tragedy; but when the body was found he had disappeared. I imagine Heath will have news on that point."

"And wherein lies the possible motive of jealousy you referred to?" Vance's eyelids had drooped lazily, and he smoked with leisurely but precise deliberation—a sign of his intense interest in what was being told him.

"Professor Dillard mentioned an attachment between his niece and Robin; and when I asked him who Sperling was and what his status was at the Dillard house, he intimated that Sperling was also a suitor for the girl's hand. I didn't go into the situation over the phone, but the impression I got was that Robin and Sperling were rivals, and that Robin had the better of it."

"And so the sparrow killed Cock Robin." Vance shook his head dubiously. "It won't do. It's too dashed simple; and it doesn't account for the fiendishly perfect reconstruction of the Cock-Robin rhyme. There's something deeper—something darker and more horrible—in this grotesque business.—Who, by the by, found Robin?"

"Dillard himself. He had stepped out on the little balcony at the rear of the house, and saw Robin lying below on the practice range, with an arrow through his heart. He went down-stairs immediately—with considerable difficulty, for the old man suffers abominably from gout—and, seeing that the man was dead, phoned me.—That's all the advance information I have."

"Not what you'd call a blinding illumination, but still a bit suggestive." Vance got up. "Markham old dear, prepare for something rather bizarre—and damnable. We can rule out accidents and coincidence. While it's true that ordinary target arrows—which are made of soft wood and fitted with little bevelled piles—could easily penetrate a person's clothing and chest wall, even when driven with a medium weight bow, the fact that a man named 'Sparrow' should kill a man named Cochrane Robin, *with a bow and arrow*, precludes any haphazard concatenation of circumstances. Indeed, this incredible set of events proves conclusively that there has been a subtle, diabolical intent beneath the whole affair." He moved toward the door. "Come, let us find out something more about it at what the Austrian police officials eruditely call the *situs criminis*."

We left the house at once and drove up-town in Markham's car. Entering Central Park at Fifth Avenue we emerged through the 72nd-Street gate, and a few minutes later were turning off of West End Avenue into 75th Street. The Dillard house—number 391—was on our right, far down the block toward the river. Between it and the Drive, occupying the entire corner, was a large fifteen-story apartment house. The professor's home seemed to nestle, as if for protection, in the shadow of this huge structure.

The Dillard house was of gray, weather-darkened limestone, and belonged to the days when homes were built for permanency and comfort. The lot on which it stood had a thirty-five-foot frontage, and the house itself was fully twenty-five feet across. The other ten feet of the lot, which formed an areaway separating the house from the apartment structure, was shut off from the street by a ten-foot stone wall with a large iron door in the centre.

The house was of modified Colonial architecture. A short flight of shallow steps led from the street to a narrow brick-lined porch adorned with four white Corinthian pillars. On the second floor a series of casement windows, paned with rectangular laded glass, extended across the entire width of the house. (These, I learned later, were the windows of the library.) There was something restful and distinctly old-fashioned about the place: it appeared like anything but the scene of a gruesome murder.

Two police cars were parked near the entrance when we drove up, and a dozen or so curious onlookers had gathered in the street. A patrolman lounged against one of the fluted columns of the porch, gazing at the crowd before him with bored disdain.

An old butler admitted us and led us into the drawing-room on the left of the entrance hall, where we found Sergeant Ernest Heath and two other men from the Homicide Bureau. The Sergeant, who was standing beside the centre-table smoking, his thumbs hooked in the armholes of his waistcoat, came forward and extended his hand in a friendly greeting to Markham.

"I'm glad you got here, sir," he said; and the worried look in his cold blue eyes seemed to relax a bit. "I've been waiting for you. There's something damn fishy about this case."

He caught sight of Vance, who had paused in the background, and his broad pugnacious features crinkled in a good-natured grin.

"Howdy, Mr. Vance. I had a sneaking idea you'd be lured into this case. What you been up to these many moons?" I could not help comparing this genuine friendliness of the Sergeant's attitude with the hostility of his first meeting with Vance at the time of the Benson case. But much water had run under the bridge since that first encounter in the murdered Alvin's garish living-room; and between Heath and Vance there had grown up a warm attachment, based on a mutual respect and a frank admiration for each other's capabilities.

Vance held out his hand, and a smile played about the corners of his mouth.

"The truth is, Sergeant, I've been endeavorin' to discover the lost glories of an Athenian named Menander, a dramatic rival of Philemon's. Silly, what?"

Heath grunted disdainfully.

"Well, anyhow, if you're as good at it as you are at discovering crooks, you'll probably get a conviction." It was the first compliment I had ever heard pass his lips, and it attested not only to his deep-seated admiration for Vance, but also to his own troubled and uncertain state of mind.

Markham sensed the Sergeant's mental insecurity, and asked somewhat abruptly: "Just what seems to be the difficulty in the present case?"

"I didn't say there was any difficulty, sir," Heath replied. "It looks as though we had the bird who did it dead to rights. But I ain't satisfied, and—oh, hell! Mr. Markham . . . it ain't natural; it don't make sense."

"I think I understand what you mean." Markham regarded the Sergeant appraisingly. "You're inclined to think that Sperling's guilty?"

"Sure, he's guilty," declared Heath with overemphasis. "But that's not what's worrying me. To tell you the truth, I don't like the name of this guy who was croaked—especially as he was croaked with a bow and arrow. . . ." He hesitated, a bit shamefaced. "Don't it strike you as peculiar, sir?"



Markham nodded perplexedly.

"I see that you, too, remember your nursery rhymes," he said, and turned away.

Vance fixed a waggish look on Heath.

"You referred to Mr. Sperling just now as a 'bird,' Sergeant. The designation was most apt. *Sperling*, d' ye see, means 'sparrow' in German. And it was a sparrow, you recall, who killed Cock Robin with an arrow. . . . A fascinat<sup>in</sup>' situation—eh, what?"

The Sergeant's eyes bulged slightly, and his lips fell apart. He stared at Vance with almost ludicrous bewilderment.

"I said this here business was fishy!"

"I'd say, rather, it was avian, don't y' know."

"You *would* call it something nobody'd understand," Heath retorted truculently. It was his wont to become bellicose when confronted with the inexplicable.

Markham intervened diplomatically.

"Let's have the details of the case, Sergeant. I take it you've questioned the occupants of the house."

"Only in a general way, sir." Heath flung one leg over the corner of the centre-table and relit his dead cigar. "I've been waiting for you to show up. I knew you were acquainted with the old gentleman up-stairs; so I just did the routine things. I put a man out in the alley to see that nobody touches the body till Doc Doremus arrives, [7] he'll be here when he finishes lunch.—I phoned the finger-print men before I left the office, and they oughta be on the job any minute now; though I don't see what good they can do. . . ."

"What about the bow that fired the arrow?" put in Vance.

"That was our one best bet; but old Mr. Dillard said he picked it up from the alley and brought it in the house. He probably gummed up any prints it mighta had."

"What have you done about Sperling?" asked Markham.

"I got his address—he lives in a country house up Westchester way—and sent a coupla men to bring him here as soon as they could lay hands on him. Then I talked to the two servants—the old fellow that let you in, and his daughter, a middle-aged woman who does the cooking. But neither of 'em seemed to know anything, or else they're acting dumb.—After that I tried to question the young lady of the house." The Sergeant raised his hands in a gesture of irritated despair. "But she was all broke up and crying; so I thought I'd let *you* have the pleasure of interviewing her.—Snitkin and Burke"—he jerked his thumb toward the two detectives by the front window—"went over the basement and the alley and back yard trying to pick up something; but drew a blank.—And that's all I know so far. As soon as Doremus and the finger-print men get here, and after I've had a heart-to-heart talk with Sperling, then I'll get the ball to rolling and clean up the works."

Vance heaved an audible sigh.

"You're so sanguine, Sergeant! Don't be disappointed if your ball turns out to be a parallelopiped that won't roll. There's something deuced oddish about this nursery extravaganza; and, unless all the omens deceive me, you'll be playing blind-man's-buff for a long time to come."

"Yeh?" Heath gave Vance a look of despondent shrewdness. It was evident he was more or less of the same opinion.

"Don't let Mr. Vance dishearten you, Sergeant," Markham rallied him. "He's permitting his imagination to run away with him." Then with an impatient gesture he turned toward the door. "Let's look over the ground before the others arrive. Later I'll have a talk with Professor Dillard and the other members of the household. And, by the way, Sergeant, you didn't mention Mr. Arnesson. Isn't he at home?"

"He's at the university; but he's expected to return soon."

Markham nodded and followed the Sergeant into the main hall. As we passed down the heavily-carpeted passage to the rear, there was a sound on the staircase, and a clear but somewhat tremulous woman's voice spoke from the semi-darkness above.

"Is that you, Mr. Markham? Uncle thought he recognized your voice. He's waiting for you in the library."

"I'll join your uncle in a very few minutes, Miss Dillard." Markham's tone was paternal and sympathetic. "And please wait with him, for I want to see you, too."

With a murmured acquiescence, the girl disappeared round the head of the stairs.

We moved on to the rear door of the lower hall. Beyond was a narrow passageway terminating in a flight of wooden steps which led to the basement. At the foot of these steps we came into a large, low-ceilinged room with a door giving directly upon the areaway at the west side of the house. This door was slightly ajar, and in the opening stood the man from the Homicide Bureau whom Heath had set to guard the body.

The room had obviously once been a basement storage; but it had been altered and redecorated, and now served as a sort of club-room. The cement floor was covered with fibre rugs, and one entire wall was painted with a panorama of archers throughout the ages. In an oblong panel on the left was a huge illustrated reproduction of an archery range labelled "Ayme for Finsburie Archers—London 1594," showing Bloody House Ridge in one corner, Westminster Hall in the centre, and Welsh Hall in the foreground. There were a piano and a phonograph in the room; numerous comfortable wicker chairs; a varicolored divan; an enormous wicker centre-table littered with all manner of sports magazines; and a small bookcase filled with works on archery. Several targets rested in one corner, their gold discs and concentric chromatic rings making brilliant splashes of color in the sunlight which flooded in from the two rear windows. One wall space near the door was hung with long bows of varying sizes and weights; and near them was a large old-fashioned tool-chest. Above it was suspended a small cupboard, or ascham, strewn with various odds and ends of tackle, such as bracers, shooting-gloves, piles, points of aim, and bow strings. A large oak panel between the door and the west window contained a display of one of the most interesting and varied collections of arrows I had ever seen.

This panel attracted Vance particularly, and adjusting his monocle carefully, he strolled over to it.

"Hunting and war arrows," he remarked. "Most inveiglin'. . . . *Ah!* One of the trophies seems to have disappeared. Taken down with considerable haste, too. The little brass brad that held it in place is shockingly bent."

On the floor stood several quivers filled with target arrows. He leaned over and, withdrawing one, extended it to Markham.

"This frail shaft may not look as if it would penetrate the human breast; but target arrows will drive entirely through a deer at eighty



yards. . . . Why, then, the missing hunting arrow from the panel? An interestin' point."

Markham frowned and compressed his lips; and I realized that he had been clinging to the forlorn hope that the tragedy might have been an accident. He tossed the arrow hopelessly on a chair, and walked toward the outer door.

"Let's take a look at the body and the lie of the land," he said gruffly.

As we emerged into the warm spring sunlight a sense of isolation came over me. The narrow paved areaway in which we stood seemed like a canyon between steep stone walls. It was four or five feet below the street level, which was reached by a short flight of steps leading to the gate in the wall. The blank, windowless rear wall of the apartment house opposite extended upwards for 150 feet; and the Dillard house itself, though only four stories high, was the equivalent of six stories gauged by the architectural measurements of to-day. Though we were standing out of doors in the heart of New York, no one could see us except from the few side windows of the Dillard house and from a single bay window of the house on 76th Street, whose rear yard adjoined that of the Dillard grounds.

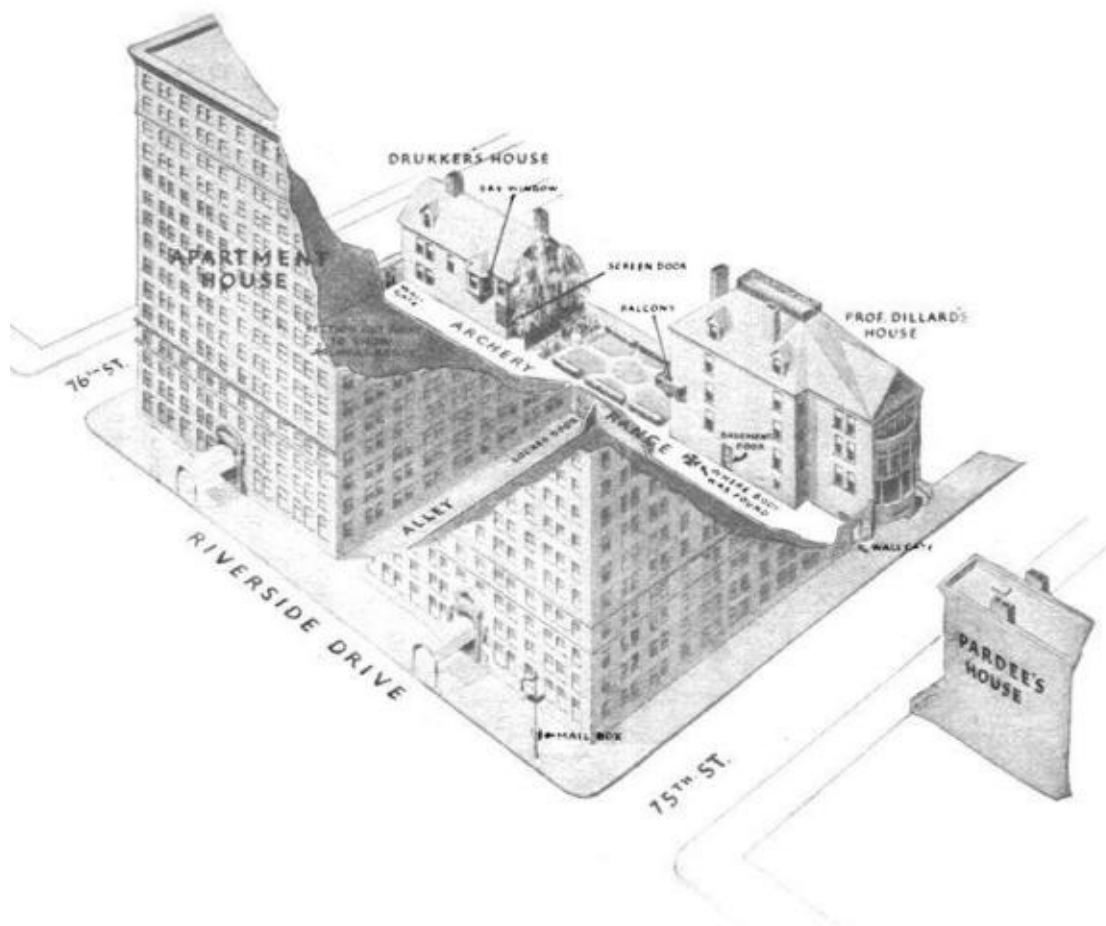
This other house, we were soon to learn, was owned by a Mrs. Drukker; and it was destined to play a vital and tragic part in the solution of Robin's murder. Several tall willow trees acted as a mask to its rear windows; and only the bay window at the side of the house had an unobstructed view of that part of the areaway in which we stood.

I noticed that Vance had his eye on this bay window, and as he studied it I saw a flicker of interest cross his face. It was not until much later that afternoon that I was able to guess what had caught and held his attention.

The archery range extended from the wall of the Dillard lot on 75th Street all the way to a similar street wall of the Drukker lot on 76th Street, where a butt of hay bales had been erected on a shallow bed of sand. The distance between the two walls was 200 feet, which, as I learned later, made possible a sixty-yard range, thus permitting target practice for all the standard archery events, with the one exception of the York Round for men.

The Dillard lot was 135 feet deep, the depth of the Drukker lot therefore being sixty-five feet. A section of the tall ironwork fence that separated the two rear yards had been removed where it had once transected the space now used for the archery range. At the further end of the range, backing against the western line of the Drukker property, was another tall apartment house occupying the corner of 76th Street and Riverside Drive. Between these two gigantic buildings ran a narrow alleyway, the range end of which was closed with a high board fence in which had been set a small door with a lock.

For purposes of clarity I am incorporating in this record a diagram of the entire scene; for the arrangement of the various topographical and architectural details had a very important bearing on the solution of the crime. I would call attention particularly to the following points:—first, to the little second-story balcony at the rear of the Dillard house, which projects slightly over the archery range; secondly, to the bay window (on the second floor) of the Drukker house, whose southern angle has a view of the entire archery range toward 75th Street; and thirdly, to the alleyway between the two apartment houses, which leads from Riverside Drive into the Dillard rear yard.



The body of Robin lay almost directly outside of the archery-room door. It was on its back, the arms extended, the legs slightly drawn up, the head pointing toward the 76th-Street end of the range. Robin had been a man of perhaps thirty-five, of medium height, and with an incipient corpulency. There was a rotund puffiness to his face, which was smooth-shaven except for a narrow blond moustache. He was clothed in a two-piece sport suit of light gray flannel, a pale-blue silk shirt, and tan Oxfords with thick rubber soles. His hat—a pearl-colored felt fedora—was lying near his feet.

Beside the body was a large pool of coagulated blood which had formed in the shape of a huge pointing hand. But the thing which held us all in a spell of fascinated horror was the slender shaft that extended vertically from the left side of the dead man's breast. The arrow protruded perhaps twenty inches, and where it had entered the body there was the large dark stain of the hemorrhage. What made this strange murder seem even more incongruous were the beautifully fletched feathers on the arrow. They had been dyed a bright red; and about the shaftment were two stripes of turquoise blue—giving the arrow a gala appearance. I had a feeling of unreality about the tragedy, as though I were witnessing a scene in a sylvan play for children.

Vance stood looking down at the body with half-closed eyes, his hands in his coat pockets. Despite the apparent indolence of his attitude I could tell that he was keenly alert, and that his mind was busy co-ordinating the factors of the scene before him.

"Dashed queer, that arrow," he commented. "Designed for big game; . . . undoubtedly belongs to that ethnological exhibit we just saw. And a clean hit—directly into the vital spot, between the ribs and without the slightest deflection. Extr'ordin'ry! . . . I say, Markham; such marksmanship isn't human. A chance shot might have done it; but the slayer of this johnny wasn't leaving anything to chance. That powerful hunting arrow, which was obviously wrenched from the panel inside, shows premeditation and design—" Suddenly he bent over the body. "Ah! Very interestin'. The nock of the arrow is broken down,—I doubt if it would even hold a taut string." He turned to Heath. "Tell me, Sergeant: where did Professor Dillard find the bow?—not far from that club-room window, what?"

Heath gave a start.

"Right outside the window, in fact, Mr. Vance. It's in on the piano now, waiting for the finger-print men."

"The professor's sign-manual is all they'll find, I'm afraid." Vance opened his case and selected another cigarette. "And I'm rather inclined to believe that the arrow itself is innocent of prints."

Heath was scrutinizing Vance inquisitively.

"What made you think the bow was found near the window, Mr. Vance?" he asked.

"It seemed the logical place for it, in view of the position of Mr. Robin's body, don't y' know."

"Shot from close range, you mean?"

Vance shook his head.

"No, Sergeant. I was referring to the fact that the deceased's feet are pointing toward the basement door, and that, though his arms are extended, his legs are drawn up. Is that the way you'd say a man would fall who'd been shot through the heart?"

Heath considered the point.

"No-o," he admitted. "He'd likely be more crumpled up; or, if he did fall over back, his legs would be straight out and his arms drawn in."

"Quite.—And regard his hat. If he had fallen backwards it would be behind him, not at his feet."

"See here, Vance," Markham demanded sharply; "what's in your mind?"

"Oh, numberless things. But they all boil down to the wholly irrational notion that this defunct gentleman wasn't shot with a bow and arrow at all."

"Then why, in God's name—"

"Exactly! Why the utter insanity of the elaborate stage-setting?—My word, Markham! This business is ghastly."

As Vance spoke the basement door opened, and Doctor Doremus, shepherded by Detective Burke, stepped jauntily into the areaway. He greeted us breezily and shook hands all round. Then he fixed a fretful eye on Heath.

"By Gad, Sergeant!" he complained, pulling his hat down to an even more rakish angle. "I only spend three hours out of the twenty-four eating my meals; and you invariably choose those three hours to worry me with your confounded bodies. You're ruining my digestion." He looked about him petulantly and, on seeing Robin, whistled softly. "For Gad's sake! A nice fancy murder you picked out for me this time!"

He knelt down and began running his practised fingers over the body.

Markham stood for a moment looking on, but presently he turned to Heath.

"While the doctor's busy with his examination, Sergeant, I'll go up-stairs and have a chat with Professor Dillard." Then he addressed himself to Doremus. "Let me see you before you go, doctor."

"Oh, sure." Doremus did not so much as look up. He had turned the body on one side, and was feeling the base of the skull.

### 3. A PROPHECY RECALLED

(Saturday, April 2; 1.30 p.m.)

*When we reached the main hall Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy, the finger-print experts from Headquarters, were just arriving. Detective Snitkin, who had evidently been watching for them, led them at once toward the basement stairs, and Markham, Vance and I went up to the second floor.*

*The library was a large, luxurious room at least twenty feet deep, occupying the entire width of the building. Two sides of it were lined to the ceiling with great embayed bookcases; and in the centre of the west wall rose a massive bronze Empire fireplace. By the door stood an elaborate Jacobean side-board, and opposite, near the windows which faced on 75th Street, was an enormous carved table-desk, strewn with papers and pamphlets. There were many interesting objets-d'art in the room; and two diagrammatic Dürers looked down on us from the tapestried panels beside the mantel. All the chairs were spacious and covered with dark leather.*

Professor Dillard sat before the desk, one foot resting on a small tufted ottoman; and in a corner near the windows, huddled in a sprawling armchair, was his niece, a vigorous, severely tailored girl with strong, chiselled features of classic cast. The old professor did not rise to greet us, and made no apology for the omission. He appeared to take it for granted that we were aware of his disability. The introductions were perfunctory, though Markham gave a brief explanation of Vance's and my presence there.

"I regret, Markham," the professor said, when we had settled ourselves, "that a tragedy should be the reason for this meeting; but it's always good to see you.—I suppose you will want to cross-examine Belle and me. Well, ask anything you care to."

Professor Bertrand Dillard was a man in his sixties, slightly stooped from a sedentary studious life: clean-shaven, and with a marked brachycephalic head surmounted with thick white hair combed pompadour. His eyes, though small, were remarkably intense and penetrating; and the wrinkles about his mouth held that grim pursed expression which often comes with years of concentration on difficult problems. His features were those of the dreamer and scientist; and, as the world knows, this man's wild dreams of space and time and motion had been actualized into a new foundation of scientific fact. Even now his face reflected an introspective abstraction, as if the death of Robin were but an intrusion upon the inner drama of his thoughts.

Markham hesitated a moment before answering. Then he said with marked deference:

"Suppose, sir, you tell me just what you know of the tragedy. Then I'll put whatever questions I deem essential."

Professor Dillard reached for an old meerschaum pipe on the stand beside him. When he had filled and lighted it he shifted himself more comfortably in his chair.

"I told you practically everything I know over the telephone. Robin and Sperling called this morning about ten o'clock to see Belle. But she had gone to the courts to play tennis, so they waited in the drawing-room down-stairs. I heard them talking there together for half an hour or so before they went to the basement club-room. I remained here reading for perhaps an hour, and then, as the sunshine looked so pleasant, I decided to step out on the balcony at the rear of the house. I had been there about five minutes, I should say, when I chanced to look down on the archery range; and to my horrified amazement I saw Robin lying on his back with an arrow-shaft protruding from his breast. I hastened down as quickly as my gout would permit, but I could see at once that the poor fellow was dead; so I immediately telephoned to you. There was no one in the house at the time but old Pyne—the butler—and myself. The cook had gone marketing; Arnesson had left for the university at nine o'clock; and Belle was still out playing tennis. I sent Pyne to look for Sperling, but he was nowhere about; and I came back to the library here to wait for you. Belle returned shortly before your men arrived, and the cook came in a little later. Arnesson won't be back until after two."

"There was no one else here this morning—no strangers or visitors?"

The professor shook his head.

"Only Drukker,—I believe you met him here once. He lives in the house at our rear. He often drops in—mostly, however, to see Arnesson: they have much in common. He's written a book on 'World Lines in Multidimensional Continua.' The man's quite a genius in his way; has the true scientific mind. . . . But when he found that Arnesson was out he sat for a while with me discussing the Brazilian expedition of the Royal Astronomical Society. Then he went home."

"What time was this?"

"About half past nine. Drukker had already gone when Robin and Sperling called."

"Was it unusual, Professor Dillard," asked Vance, "for Mr. Arnesson to be away on Saturday mornings?"

The old professor looked up sharply, and there was a brief hesitation before he answered.

"Not unusual exactly; although he's generally here on Saturdays. But this morning he had some important research work to do for me in the faculty library. . . . Arnesson," he added, "is working with me on my next book."<sup>[8]</sup>

There was a short silence; then Markham spoke.

"You said this morning that both Robin and Sperling were suitors for Miss Dillard's hand. . . ."

"Uncle!" The girl sat upright in her chair and turned angry, reproachful eyes upon the old professor. "That wasn't fair."

"But it was true, my dear." His voice was noticeably tender.

"It was true—in a way," she admitted. "But there was no need of mentioning it. You know, as well as they did, how I regarded them. We were good friends—that was all. Only last night, when they were here together, I told them—quite plainly—that I wouldn't listen to any more silly talk of marriage from either of them. They were only boys . . . and now one of them's gone. . . . Poor Cock Robin!" She strove bravely to stifle her emotion.

Vance raised his eyebrows and leaned forward.

"Cock Robin?"

"Oh, we all called him that. We did it to tease him, because he didn't like the nickname."

"The sobriquet was inevitable," Vance observed sympathetically. "And it was rather a nice nickname, don't y' know. The original

Cock Robin was loved by 'all the birds of the air,' and they all mourned his passing." He watched the girl closely as he spoke.

"I know," she nodded. "I told him that once.—And every one liked Joseph, too. You couldn't help liking him. He was so—so goodhearted and kind."

Vance again settled back in his chair; and Markham continued his questioning.

"You mentioned, professor, that you heard Robin and Sperling talking in the drawing-room. Could you hear any of their conversation?"

The old man shot a sidelong glance at his niece.

"Does that question really matter, Markham?" he asked, after a moment's hesitation.

"It may have some very vital bearing on the situation."

"Perhaps." The professor drew on his pipe thoughtfully. "On the other hand, if I answer it I may give an erroneous impression, and do a grave injustice to the living."

"Can you not trust me to judge that point?" Markham's voice had become at once grave and urgent.

There was another short silence, broken by the girl.

"Why don't you tell Mr. Markham what you heard, uncle? What harm can it do?"

"I was thinking of you, Belle," the professor answered softly. "But perhaps you are right." He looked up reluctantly. "The fact is, Markham, Robin and Sperling were having some angry words over Belle. I heard only a little, but I gathered that each regarded the other as being guilty of playing unfair—of standing in each other's way. . . ."

"Oh! They didn't mean it," Miss Dillard interpolated vehemently. "They were always ragging each other. There *was* a little jealousy between them; but I wasn't the real cause of it. It was their archery records. You see, Raymond—Mr. Sperling—used to be the better shot; but this last year Joseph beat him at several meets, and at our last annual tournament he became the club's Champion Archer."

"And Sperling thought, perhaps," added Markham, "that he had correspondingly fallen in your estimation."

"That's absurd!" the girl retorted hotly.

"I think, my dear, we can leave the matter safely in Mr. Markham's hands," Professor Dillard said mollifyingly. Then to Markham: "Were there any other questions you cared to ask?"

"I'd like to know anything you can tell me about Robin and Sperling—who they are; their associations; and how long you have known them."

"I think that Belle can enlighten you better than I. Both boys belonged to her set. I saw them only occasionally."

Markham turned inquiringly to the girl.

"I've known both of them for years," she said promptly. "Joseph was eight or ten years older than Raymond, and lived in England up to five years ago, when his father and mother both died. He came to America, and took bachelor quarters on the Drive. He had considerable money, and lived idly, devoting himself to fishing and hunting and other outdoor sports. He went about in society a little, and was a nice, comfortable friend who'd always fill in at a dinner or make a fourth hand at bridge. There was nothing really much to him—in an intellectual way, you understand. . . ."

She paused, as if her remarks were in some way disloyal to the dead, and Markham, sensing her feelings, asked simply:

"And Sperling?"

"He's the son of a wealthy manufacturer of something or other—retired now. They live in Scarsdale in a beautiful country home,—our archery club has its regular ranges there,—and Raymond is a consulting engineer for some firm down-town; though I imagine he works merely to placate his father, for he only goes to the office two or three days a week. He's a graduate of Boston Tech, and I met him when he was a sophomore, home on vacation. Raymond will never set the world afire, Mr. Markham; but he's really an awfully fine type of American young man—sincere, jolly, a little bashful, and perfectly straight."

It was easy to picture both Robin and Sperling from the girl's brief descriptions; and it was correspondingly difficult to connect either of them with the sinister tragedy that had brought us to the house.

Markham sat frowning for a while. Finally he lifted his head and looked straight at the girl.

"Tell me, Miss Dillard: have you any theory or explanation that might, in any way, account for the death of Mr. Robin?"

"No!" The word fairly burst from her. "Who could want to kill Cock Robin? He hadn't an enemy in the world. The whole thing is incredible. I couldn't believe it had happened until I went and—saw for myself. Even then it didn't seem real."

"Still, my dear child," put in Professor Dillard, "the man was killed; so there must have been something in his life that you didn't know or suspect. We're constantly finding new stars that the old-time astronomers didn't believe existed."

"I can't believe Joseph had an enemy," she retorted. "I won't believe it. It's too utterly absurd."

"You think then," asked Markham, "that it's unlikely Sperling was in any way responsible for Robin's death?"

"Unlikely?" The girl's eyes flashed. "It's impossible!"

"And yet, y' know, Miss Dillard,"—it was Vance who now spoke in his lazy casual tone—"Sperling means 'sparrow'."

The girl sat immobile. Her face had gone deathly pale, and her hands tightened over the arms of the chair. Then slowly, and as if with great difficulty, she nodded, and her breast began to rise and fall with her labored breathing. Suddenly she shuddered and pressed her handkerchief to her face.

"I'm afraid!" she whispered.

Vance rose and, going to her, touched her comfortingly on the shoulder.

"Why are you afraid?"

She looked up and met his eyes. They seemed to reassure her, for she forced a pitiful smile.

"Only the other day," she said, in a strained voice, "we were all on the archery range down-stairs; and Raymond was just preparing to shoot a single American Round, when Joseph opened the basement door and stepped out on the range. There really wasn't any danger, but Sigurd—Mr. Arnesson, you know—was sitting on the little rear balcony watching us; and when I cried 'He! He!' jokingly to Joseph, Sigurd leaned over and said: 'You don't know what a chance you're running, young man. You're a Cock Robin, and that archer's a sparrow; and you remember what happened to your namesake when a Mr. Sparrow wielded the bow and arrow'—or

something like that. No one paid much attention to it at the time. But now! . . ." Her voice trailed off into an awed murmur.

"Come, Belle; don't be morbid." Professor Dillard spoke consolingly, but not without impatience. "It was merely one of Sigurd's ill-timed witticisms. You know he's continually sneering and jesting at realities: it's about the only outlet he has from his constant application to abstractions."

"I suppose so," the girl answered. "Of course, it was only a joke. But now it seems like some terrible prophecy.—Only," she hastened to add, "Raymond *couldn't* have done it."

As she spoke the library door opened suddenly, and a tall gaunt figure appeared on the threshold.

"Sigurd!" Belle Dillard's startled exclamation held an undeniable note of relief.

Sigurd Arnesson, Professor Dillard's protégé and adopted son, was a man of striking appearance—over six feet tall, wiry and erect, with a head which, at first view, appeared too large for his body. His almost yellow hair was unkempt, like a schoolboy's; his nose was aquiline; and his jowls were lean and muscular. Though he could not have been over forty, there was a net-work of lines in his face. His expression was sardonically puckish; but the intense intellectual passion that lighted his blue-gray eyes belied any superficiality of nature. My initial reaction to his personality was one of liking and respect. There were depths in the man—powerful potentialities and high capabilities.

As he entered the room that afternoon, his searching eyes took us all in with a swift, inquisitive glance. He nodded jerkily to Miss Dillard, and then fixed the old professor with a look of dry amusement.

"What, pray, has happened in this three-dimensional house? Wagons and populace without: a guardian at the portals . . . and when I finally overcame the Cerberus and was admitted by Pyne, two plainclothes men hustled me up here without ceremony or explanation. Very amusing, but disconcerting. . . . Ah! I seem to recognize the District Attorney. Good morning—or rather, afternoon—Mr. Markham."

Before Markham could return this belated greeting Belle Dillard spoke.

"Sigurd, please be serious.—Mr. Robin has been killed."

"'Cock Robin,' you mean. Well, well! With such a name what could the beggar expect?" He appeared wholly unmoved by the news. "Who, or what, returned him to the elements?"

"As to who it was, we don't know." It was Markham who answered, in a tone of reproach for the other's levity. "But Mr. Robin was killed with an arrow through the heart."

"Most fitting." Arnesson sat down on the arm of a chair and extended his long legs. "What could be more appropriate than that Cock Robin should die from an arrow shot from the bow of—"

"Sigurd!" Belle Dillard cut him short. "Haven't you joked enough about that? You *know* that Raymond didn't do it."

"Of course, sis." The man looked at her somewhat wistfully. "I was thinking of Mr. Robin's ornithological progenitor." He turned slowly to Markham. "So it's a real murder mystery, is it—with a corpse, and clews, and all the trappings? May I be entrusted with the tale?"

Markham gave him a brief outline of the situation, to which he listened with rapt interest. When the account was ended he asked:

"Was there no bow found on the range?"

"Ah!" Vance, for the first time since the man's arrival, roused himself from seeming lethargy, and answered for Markham. "A most pertinent question, Mr. Arnesson.—Yes, a bow was found just outside of the basement window, barely ten feet from the body."

"That of course simplifies matters," said Arnesson, with a note of disappointment. "It's only a question now of taking the fingerprints."

"Unfortunately the bow has been handled," explained Markham. "Professor Dillard picked it up and brought it into the house."

Arnesson turned to the older man curiously.

"What impulse, sir, directed you to do that?"

"Impulse? My dear Sigurd, I didn't analyze my emotions. But it struck me that the bow was a vital piece of evidence, and I placed it in the basement as a precautionary measure until the police arrived."

Arnesson made a wry face and cocked one eye humorously.

"That sounds like what our psychoanalytic friends would call a suppression-censor explanation. I wonder what submerged idea was actually in your mind. . . ."

There was a knock at the door, and Burke put his head inside.

"Doc Doremus is waiting for you down-stairs, Chief. He's finished his examination."

Markham rose and excused himself.

"I sha'n't bother you people any more just at present. There's considerable preliminary routine work to be done. But I must ask you to remain upstairs for the time being. I'll see you again before I go."

Doremus was teetering impatiently on his toes when we joined him in the drawing-room.

"Nothing complicated about it," he began, before Markham had a chance to speak. "Our sporty friend was killed by an arrow with a mighty sharp point entering his heart through the fourth intercostal space. Lot of force behind it. Plenty of hemorrhage inside and out. He's been dead about two hours, I should say, making the time of his death around half past eleven. That's only guesswork, however. No signs of a struggle—no marks on his clothes or abrasions on his hands. Death supervened most likely without his knowing what it was all about. He got a nasty bump, though, where his head hit the rough cement when he fell. . . ."

"Now, that's very interestin'." Vance's drawling voice cut in on the Medical Examiner's staccato report. "How serious a 'bump' was it, Doctor?"

Doremus blinked and eyed Vance with some astonishment.

"Bad enough to fracture the skull. I couldn't feel it, of course; but there was a large haematoma over the occipital region, dried blood in the nostrils and the ears, and unequal pupils, indicating a fracture of the vault. I'll know more about it after the autopsy." He turned back to the District Attorney. "Anything else?"

"I think not, Doctor. Only let us have your *postmortem* report as soon as possible."

"You'll have it to-night. The Sergeant's already phoned for the wagon." And shaking hands with all of us, he hurried away.

Heath had stood glowering in the background.

"Well, that don't get us anywheres, sir," he complained, chewing viciously on his cigar.

"Don't be downhearted, Sergeant," Vance chided him. "That blow on the back of the head is worthy of your profoundest consideration. I'm of the opinion it wasn't entirely due to the fall, don't y' know."

The Sergeant was unimpressed by this observation.

"What's more, Mr. Markham," he went on, "there wasn't any finger-prints on either the bow or the arrow. Dubois says they looked as though they'd both been wiped clean. There were a few smears on the end of the bow where the old gentleman picked it up; but not another sign of a print."

Markham smoked a while in gloomy silence.

"What about the handle on the gate leading to the street? And the knob on the door to the alley between the apartment houses?"

"Nothing!" Heath snorted his disgust. "Both of rough, rusty iron that wouldn't take a print."

"I say, Markham," observed Vance; "you're going at this thing the wrong way. Naturally there'd be no finger-prints. Really, y' know, one doesn't carefully produce a playlet and then leave all the stage props in full view of the audience. What we've got to learn is why this particular impresario decided to indulge in silly theatricals."

"It ain't as easy as all that, Mr. Vance," submitted Heath bitterly.

"Did I intimate it was easy? No, Sergeant; it's deucedly difficult. And it's worse than difficult: it's subtle and obscure and . . . fiendish."

#### 4. A MYSTERIOUS NOTE

(Saturday, April 2; 2 p.m.)

Markham sat down resolutely before the centre-table.

"Suppose, Sergeant, we overhaul the two servants now."

Heath stepped into the hall and gave an order to one of his men. A few moments later a tall, sombre, disjointed man entered and stood at respectful attention.

"This is the butler, sir," explained the Sergeant. "Named Pyne."

Markham studied the man appraisingly. He was perhaps sixty years old. His features were markedly acromegalic; and this distortion extended to his entire figure. His hands were large, and his feet broad and misshapen. His clothes, though neatly pressed, fitted him badly; and his high clerical collar was several sizes too large for him. His eyes, beneath gray, bushy eyebrows, were pale and watery, and his mouth was a mere slit in an unhealthily puffy face. Despite his utter lack of physical prepossession, however, he gave one the impression of shrewd competency.

"So you are the Dillard butler," mused Markham. "How long have you been with the family, Pyne?"

"Going on ten years, sir."

"You came, then, just after Professor Dillard resigned his chair at the university?"

"I believe so, sir." The man's voice was deep and rumbling.

"What do you know of the tragedy that occurred here this morning?" Though Markham put the question suddenly, in the hope, I imagine, of surprising some admission, Pyne received it with the utmost stoicism.

"Nothing whatever, sir. I was unaware that anything had happened until Professor Dillard called to me from the library and asked me to look for Mr. Sperling."

"He told you of the tragedy then?"

"He said: 'Mr. Robin has been murdered, and I wish you'd find Mr. Sperling for me.'—That was all, sir."

"You're sure he said 'murdered,' Pyne?" interjected Vance.

For the first time the butler hesitated, and an added astuteness crept into his look.

"Yes, sir—I'm sure he did. 'Murdered' is what he said."

"And did you see the body of Mr. Robin when you pushed your search?" pursued Vance, his eyes idly tracing a design on the wall. Again there was a brief hesitation.

"Yes, sir. I opened the basement door to look out on the archery range, and there I saw the poor young gentleman. . . ."

"A great shock it must have given you, Pyne," Vance observed drily. "Did you, by any hap, touch the poor young gentleman's body?—or the arrow, perhaps?—or the bow?"

Pyne's watery eyes glistened for a moment. "No—of course not, sir. . . . Why should I, sir?"

"Why, indeed?" Vance sighed wearily. "But you saw the bow?"

The man squinted, as if for purposes of mental visualization.

"I couldn't say, sir. Perhaps, yes; perhaps, no. I don't recall."

Vance seemed to lose all interest in him; and Markham resumed the interrogation.

"I understand, Pyne, that Mr. Drukker called here this morning about half past nine. Did you see him?"

"Yes, sir. He always uses the basement door; and he said good-morning to me as he passed the butler's pantry at the head of the steps."

"He returned the same way he came?"

"I suppose so, sir—though I was up-stairs when he went. He lives in the house at the rear—"

"I know." Markham leaned forward. "I presume it was you who admitted Mr. Robin and Mr. Sperling this morning."

"Yes, sir. At about ten o'clock."

"Did you see them again, or overhear any of their remarks while they waited here in the drawing-room?"

"No, sir. I was busy in Mr. Arnesson's quarters most of the morning."

"Ah!" Vance turned his eyes on the man. "That would be on the second floor rear, wouldn't it?—the room with the balcony?"

"Yes, sir."

"Most interestin'. . . . And it was from that balcony that Professor Dillard first saw Mr. Robin's body.—How could he have entered the room without your knowing it? You said, I believe, that your first intimation of the tragedy was when the professor called you from the library and told you to seek Mr. Sperling."

The butler's face turned a pasty white, and I noticed that his fingers twitched nervously.

"I might have stepped out of Mr. Arnesson's room for a moment," he explained, with effort. "Yes—it's quite likely. In fact, sir, I recall going to the linen-closet. . . ."

"Oh, to be sure." Vance lapsed into lethargy.

Markham smoked a while, his gaze concentrated on the table-top.

"Did any one else call at the house this morning, Pyne?" he asked presently.

"No one, sir."

"And you can suggest no explanation for what happened here?"

The man shook his head heavily, his watery eyes in space.

"No, sir. Mr. Robin seemed a pleasant, well-liked young man. He wasn't the kind to inspire murder—if you understand what I mean." Vance looked up.



*"I can't say that I, personally, understand exactly what you mean, Pyne. How do you know it wasn't an accident?"*

*"I don't, sir," was the unperturbed answer. "But I know a bit about archery—if you'll pardon my saying so—and I saw right away that Mr. Robin had been killed by a hunting arrow."*

*"You're very observin', Pyne," nodded Vance. "And quite correct."*

*It was plain that no direct information was to be got from the butler, and Markham dismissed him abruptly, at the same time ordering Heath to send in the cook.*

*When she entered I noticed at once a resemblance between father and daughter. She was a slatternly woman of about forty, also tall and angular, with a thin, elongated face and large hands and feet. Hyperpituitarism evidently ran in the Pyne family.*

*A few preliminary questions brought out the information that she was a widow, named Beedle, and had, at the death of her husband five years before, come to Professor Dillard as the result of Pyne's recommendation.*

*"What time did you leave the house this morning, Beedle?" Markham asked her.*

*"Right after half past ten." She seemed uneasy and on the alert, and her voice was defensively belligerent.*

*"And what time did you return?"*

*"About half past twelve. That man let me in"—she looked viciously at Heath—"and treated me like I'd been a criminal."*

*Heath grinned. "The time's O. K., Mr. Markham. She got sore because I wouldn't let her go down-stairs."*

*Markham nodded non-committally.*

*"Do you know anything of what took place here this morning?" he went on, studying the woman closely.*

*"How should I know? I was at Jefferson market."*

*"Did you see either Mr. Robin or Mr. Sperling?"*

*"They went down-stairs to the archery-room past the kitchen a little while before I went out."*

*"Did you overhear anything they said?"*

*"I don't listen at keyholes."*

*Markham set his jaw angrily and was about to speak when Vance addressed the woman suavely.*

*"The District Attorney thought that perhaps the door was open, and that you might have overheard some of their conversation despite your commendable effort not to listen."*

*"The door might've been open, but I didn't hear anything," she answered sullenly.*

*"Then you couldn't tell us if there was any one else in the archery-room."*

*Beedle narrowed her eyes and gave Vance a calculating look.*

*"Maybe there was some one else," she said slowly. "In fact, I thought I heard Mr. Drukker." A note of venom came into her voice, and the shadow of a hard smile passed over her thin lips. "He was here to call on Mr. Arnesson early this morning."*

*"Oh, was he, now?" Vance appeared surprised at this news. "You saw him perhaps?"*

*"I saw him come in, but I didn't see him go out—anyway, I didn't notice. He sneaks in and out at all hours."*

*"Sneaks, eh? Fancy that! . . . By the by, which door did you use when you went a-marketing?"*

*"The front door. Since Miss Belle made a clubroom out of the basement, I always use the front door."*

*"Then you didn't enter the archery-room this morning?"*

*"No."*

*Vance raised himself in his chair.*

*"Thanks for your help, Beedle. We won't need you any more now."*

*When the woman had left us Vance rose and walked to the window.*

*"We're expending too much zeal in irrelevant channels, Markham," he said. "We'll never get anywhere by ballyragging servants and questioning members of the household. There's a psychological wall to be battered down before we can begin storming the enemy's trenches. Everybody in this ménage has some pet privacy that he's afraid will leak out. Each person so far has told us either less or more than he knows. Disheartenin', but true. Nothing that we've learned dovetails with anything else; and when chronological events don't fit together, you may rest assured that the serrated points of contact have been deliberately distorted. I haven't found one clean joinder in all the tales that have been poured into our ears."*

*"It's more likely the connections are missing," Markham argued; "and we'll never find them if we don't pursue our questionings."*

*"You're much too trustin'." Vance walked back to the centre-table. "The more questions we ask the farther afield we'll be taken. Even Professor Dillard didn't give us a wholly honest account. There's something he's keeping back—some suspicion he won't voice. Why did he bring that bow indoors? Arnesson put his finger on a vital spot when he asked the same question. Shrewd fella, Arnesson.—Then there's our athletic young lady with the muscular calves. She's entangled in various amat'ry meshes, and is endeavoring to extricate herself and her whole coterie without leaving a blemish on any one. A praiseworthy aim, but not one conducive to the unadulterated truth.—Pyne has ideas, too. That flabby facial mask of his curtains many an entrancin' thought. But we'll never probe his cortex by chivyin' him with questions. Somethin' rum, too, about his matutinal labors. He says he was in Arnesson's room all morning; but he obviously didn't know that the professor took a sunnin' on Arnesson's verandah. And that linen-closet alibi—much too specious.—Also, Markham, let your mind flutter about the widowed Beedle's tale. She doesn't like the over-sociable Mr. Drukker; and when she saw a chance to involve him, she did so. She 'thought' she heard his voice in the archery-room. But did she? Who knows? True, he might have tarried among the slings and javelins on his way home and been joined later by Robin and Sperling. . . . Yes, it's a point we must investigate. In fact, a bit of polite converse with Mr. Drukker is strongly indicated. . . ."*

*Footsteps were heard descending the front stairs, and Arnesson appeared in the archway of the living-room.*

*"Well, who killed Cock Robin?" he asked, with a satyr-like grin.*

*Markham rose, annoyed, and was about to protest at the intrusion; but Arnesson held up his hand.*

*"One moment, please. I'm here to offer my exalted services in the noble cause of justice—mundane justice, I would have you understand. Philosophically, of course, there's no such thing as justice. If there really were justice we'd all be in for a shingling in the cosmic wood-shed." He sat down facing Markham and chuckled cynically. "The fact is, the sad and precipitate departure of Mr. Robin*

appeals to my scientific nature. It makes a nice, orderly problem. It has a decidedly mathematical flavor—no undistributed terms, you understand; clear-cut integers with certain unknown quantities to be determined.—Well, I'm the genius to solve it."

"What would be your solution, Arnesson?" Markham knew and respected the man's intelligence, and seemed at once to sense a serious purpose beneath his attitude of sneering flippancy.

"Ah! As yet I haven't tackled the equation." Arnesson drew out an old briar pipe and fingered it affectionately. "But I've always wanted to do a little detective work on a purely earthly plane—the insatiable curiosity and natural inquisitiveness of the physicist, you understand. And I've long had a theory that the science of mathematics can be advantageously applied to the trivialities of our life on this unimportant planet. There's nothing but law in the universe—unless Eddington is right and there's no law at all—and I see no sufficient reason why the identity and position of a criminal can't be determined just as Leverrier calculated the mass and ephemeris of Neptune from the observed deviations in the orbit of Uranus. You remember how, after his computations, he told Galle, the Berlin astronomer, to look for the planet in a specified longitude of the ecliptic."

Arnesson paused and filled his pipe.

"Now, Mr. Markham," he went on; and I tried to decide whether or not the man was in earnest, "I'd like the opportunity of applying to this absurd muddle the purely rational means used by Leverrier in discovering Neptune. But I've got to have the data on the perturbations of Uranus's orbit, so to speak—that is, I must know all the varying factors in the equation. The favor I've come here to ask is that you take me into your confidence and tell me all the facts. A sort of intellectual partnership. I'll figure out this problem for you along scientific lines. It'll be bully sport; and incidentally I'd like to prove my theory that mathematics is the basis of all truth however far removed from scholastic abstractions." He at last got his pipe going, and sank back in his chair. "Is it a bargain?"

"I'll be glad to tell you whatever we know, Arnesson," Markham replied after a brief pause. "But I can't promise to reveal everything that may arise from now on. It might work against the ends of justice and embarrass our investigation."

Vance had sat with half-closed eyes, apparently bored by Arnesson's astonishing request; but now he turned to Markham with a considerable show of animation.

"I say, y' know; there's really no reason why we shouldn't give Mr. Arnesson a chance to translate this crime into the realm of applied mathematics. I'm sure he'd be discreet and use our information only for scientific purposes. And—one never knows, does one?—we may need his highly trained assistance before we're through with this fascinatin' affair."

Markham knew Vance well enough to realize that his suggestion had not been made thoughtlessly; and I was in no wise astonished when he faced Arnesson and said:

"Very well, then. We'll give you whatever data you need to work out your mathematical formula. Anything special you want to know now?"

"Oh, no. I know the details thus far as well as you; and I'll strip Beedle and old Pyne of their contributions when you're gone. But if I solve this problem and determine the exact position of the criminal, don't pigeon-hole my findings as Sir George Airy did those of poor Adams when he submitted his Neptunian calculations prior to Leverrier's. . . ."

At this moment the front door opened, and the uniformed officer stationed on the porch came in, followed by a stranger.

"This gent here says he wants to see the professor," he announced with radiating suspicion; and turning to the man he indicated Markham with a gesture of the head. "That's the District Attorney. Tell him your troubles."

The newcomer seemed somewhat embarrassed. He was a slender, well-groomed man with an unmistakable air of refinement. His age, I should say, was fifty, though his face held a perennially youthful look. His hair was thin and graying, his nose a trifle sharp, and his chin small but in no way weak. His eyes, surmounted by a high broad forehead, were his most striking characteristic. They were the eyes of a disappointed and disillusioned dreamer—half sad, half resentful, as if life had tricked him and left him unhappy and bitter.

He was about to address Markham when he caught sight of Arnesson.

"Oh, good-morning, Arnesson," he said, in a quiet, well-modulated voice. "I hope there's nothing seriously wrong."

"A mere death, Pardee," the other replied carelessly. "The proverbial tempest in a teapot."

Markham was annoyed at the interruption.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked.

"I trust I am not intruding," the man apologized. "I am a friend of the family;—I live just across the street; and I perceived that something unusual had happened here. It occurred to me I might be of some service."

Arnesson chuckled. "My dear Pardee! Why clothe your natural curiosity in the habiliments of rhetoric?"

Pardee blushed.

"I assure you, Arnesson—" he began; but Vance interrupted him.

"You say you live opposite, Mr. Pardee. You have perhaps been observing this house during the forenoon?"

"Hardly that, sir. My study, however, overlooks 75th Street, and it's true I was sitting at the window most of the morning. But I was busy writing. When I returned to my work from lunch I noticed the crowd and the police cars and also the officer in uniform at the door."

Vance had been studying him from the corner of his eye.

"Did you happen to see any one enter or leave this house this morning, Mr. Pardee?" he asked.

The man shook his head slowly.

"No one in particular. I noticed two young men—friends of Miss Dillard—call at about ten o'clock; and I saw Beedle go out with her market basket. But that's all I recall."

"Did you see either of these young men depart?"

"I don't remember." Pardee knit his brows. "And yet it seems to me one of them left by the range gate. But it's only an impression."

"What time would that have been?"

"Really, I couldn't say. Perhaps an hour or so after his arrival. I wouldn't care to be more specific."

"You recall no other person whatever either coming or going from the house this morning?"

"I saw Miss Dillard return from the tennis courts about half past twelve, just as I was called to lunch. In fact, she waved her racket

to me."

"And no one else?"

"I'm afraid not." *There was unmistakable regret in his quiet response.*

"One of the young men you saw enter here has been killed," Vance told him.

"Mr. Robin—alias Cock Robin," *supplemented Arnesson, with a comic grimace which affected me unpleasantly.*

"Good Heavens! How unfortunate!" Pardee appeared genuinely shocked. "Robin? Wasn't he the Champion Archer of Belle's club?"

"His one claim to immortality.—That's the chap."

"Poor Belle!" Something in the man's manner caused Vance to regard him sharply. "I hope she's not too greatly upset by the tragedy."

"She's dramatizing it, naturally," Arnesson returned. "So are the police, for that matter. Awful pother about nothing in particular. The earth is covered with 'small crawling masses of impure carbohydrates' like Robin—referred to in the aggregate as humanity."

Pardee smiled with tolerant sadness,—he was obviously familiar with Arnesson's cynicisms. Then he appealed to Markham.

"May I be permitted to see Miss Dillard and her uncle?"

"Oh, by all means." It was Vance who answered before Markham could reach a decision. "You'll find them in the library, Mr. Pardee."

The man left the room with a polite murmur of thanks.

"Queer fellow," commented Arnesson, when Pardee was out of hearing. "Cursed with money. Leads an indolent life. His one passion is solving chess problems. . . ."

"Chess?" Vance looked up with interest. "Is he, by any chance, John Pardee, the inventor of the famous Pardee gambit?"

"The same." Arnesson's face crinkled humorously. "Spent twenty years developing a cast-iron offensive that was to add new decimal points to the game. Wrote a book about it. Then went forth proselytizing like a crusader before the gates of Damascus. He's always been a great patron of chess, contributing to tournaments, and scurrying round the world to attend the various chess jousting-bouts. Consequently was able to get his gambit tested. It made a great stir among the infra-champions of the Manhattan Chess Club. Then poor Pardee organized a series of Masters Tournaments. Paid all the expenses himself. Cost him a fortune, by the way. And of course he stipulated that the Pardee gambit be played exclusively. Well, well, it was very sad. When men like Doctor Lasker and Capablanca and Rubinstein and Finn got to combating it, it went to pieces. Almost every player who used it lost. It was disqualified—even worse than the ill-fated Rice gambit. Terrible blow for Pardee. It put snow in his hair, and took all the rubber out of his muscles. Aged him, in short. He's a broken man."

"I know the history of the gambit," murmured Vance, his eyes resting pensively on the ceiling. "I've used it myself. Edward Lasker<sup>[9]</sup> taught it to me. . . ."

The uniformed officer again appeared in the archway and beckoned to Heath. The Sergeant rose with alacrity—the ramifications of chess obviously bored him—and went into the hall. A moment later he returned bearing a small sheet of paper.

"Here's a funny one, sir," he said, handing it to Markham. "The officer outside happened to see it sticking outa the mail-box just now, and thought he'd take a peep at it.—What do you make of it, sir?"

Markham studied it with puzzled amazement, and then without a word handed it to Vance. I rose and looked over his shoulder. The paper was of the conventional typewriter size, and had been folded to fit into the mail-box. It contained several lines of typing done on a machine with élite characters and a faded blue ribbon.

The first line read:

**Joseph Cochrane Robin is dead.**

The second line asked:

**Who Killed Cock Robin?**

Underneath was typed:

**Sperling means sparrow.**

And in the lower right-hand corner—the place of the signature—were the two words, in capitals:

**THE BISHOP.**

## 5. A WOMAN'S SCREAM

(Saturday, April 2; 2.30 p.m.)

Vance, after glancing at the strange message with its even stranger signature, reached for his monocle with that slow deliberation which I knew indicated a keen suppressed interest. Having adjusted the glass he studied the paper intently. Then he handed it to Arnesson.

"Here's a valuable factor for your equation." His eyes were fixed banteringly on the man.

Arnesson regarded the note superciliously, and with a wry grimace laid it on the table.

"I trust the clergy are not involved in this problem. They're notoriously unscientific. One can't attack them with mathematics. 'The Bishop'. . .," he mused. "I'm unacquainted with any gentlemen of the cloth.—I think I'll rule out this abracadabra when making my calculations."

"If you do, Mr. Arnesson," replied Vance seriously, "your equation, I fear, will fall to pieces. That cryptic epistle strikes me as rather significant. Indeed—if you will pardon a mere lay opinion—I believe it is the most mathematical thing that has appeared thus far in the case. It relieves the situation of all haphazardness or accident. It's the *g*, so to speak—the gravitational constant which will govern all our equations."

Heath had stood looking down on the typewritten paper with solemn disgust.

"Some crank wrote this, Mr. Vance," he declared.

"Undoubtedly a crank, Sergeant," agreed Vance. "But don't overlook the fact that this particular crank must have known many interesting and intimate details—to wit, that Mr. Robin's middle name was Cochrane; that the gentleman had been killed with a bow and arrow; and that Mr. Sperling was in the vicinity at the time of the Robin's passing. Moreover, this well-informed crank must have had what amounted to foreknowledge regarding the murder; for the note was obviously typed and inserted in the letter-box before you and your men arrived on the scene."

"Unless," countered Heath doggedly, "he's one of those bimboes out in the street, who got wise to what had happened and then stuck this paper in the box when the officer's back was turned."

"Having first run home and carefully typewritten his communication—eh, what?" Vance shook his head with a rueful smile. "No, Sergeant, I'm afraid your theory won't do."

"Then what in hell does it mean?" Heath demanded truculently.

"I haven't the foggiest idea." Vance yawned and rose. "Come, Markham, let's while away a few brief moments with this Mr. Drukker whom Beedle abhors."

"Drukker!" exclaimed Arnesson, with considerable surprise. "Where does he fit in?"

"Mr. Drukker," explained Markham, "called here this morning to see you; and it's barely possible he met Robin and Sperling before he returned home." He hesitated. "Would you care to accompany us?"

"No, thanks." Arnesson knocked out his pipe and got up. "I've a pile of class papers to look over.—It might be as well, however, to take Belle along. Lady Mae's a bit peculiar. . . ."

"Lady Mae?"

"My mistake. Forgot you didn't know her. We all call her Lady Mae. Courtesy title. Pleases the poor old soul. I'm referring to Drukker's mother. Odd character." He tapped his forehead significantly. "Bit touched. Oh, perfectly harmless. Bright as a whistle, but monominded, as it were. Thinks the sun rises and sets in Drukker. Mothers him as if he were an infant. Sad situation. . . . Yes, you'd better take Belle along. Lady Mae likes Belle."

"A good suggestion, Mr. Arnesson," said Vance. "Will you ask Miss Dillard if she'll be good enough to accompany us?"

"Oh, certainly." Arnesson gave us an inclusive smile of farewell—a smile which seemed at once patronizing and satirical—and went up-stairs. A few moments later Miss Dillard joined us.

"Sigurd tells me you want to see Adolph. He, of course, won't mind; but poor Lady Mae gets so upset over even the littlest things. . . ."

"We sha'n't upset her, I hope." Vance spoke reassuringly. "But Mr. Drukker was here this morning, d'ye see; and the cook says she thought she heard him speaking to Mr. Robin and Mr. Sperling in the archery-room. He may be able to help us."

"I'm sure he will if he can," the girl answered with emphasis. "But be very careful with Lady Mae, won't you?"

There was a pleading, protective note in her voice, and Vance regarded her curiously.

"Tell us something of Mrs. Drukker—or Lady Mae—before we visit her. Why should we be so careful?"

"She's had such a tragic life," the girl explained. "She was once a great singer—oh, not just a second-rate artist, but a prima donna with a marvelous career before her.<sup>[10]</sup> She married a leading critic of Vienna—Otto Drucker<sup>[11]</sup>—and four years later Adolph was born. Then one day in the Wiener Prater, when the baby was two years old, she let him fall; and from that moment on her entire life was changed. Adolph's spine was injured, and he became a cripple. Lady Mae was heartbroken. She held herself to blame for his injury, and gave up her career to devote herself to his care. When her husband died a year later she brought Adolph to America, where she had spent some of her girlhood, and bought the house where she now lives. Her whole life has been centred on Adolph, who grew up a hunchback. She has sacrificed everything for him, and cares for him as though he were a baby. . . ."

A shadow crossed her face. "Sometimes I think—we all think—that she still imagines he's only a child. She has become—well, morbid about it. But it's the sweet, terrible morbidity of a tremendous motherlove—a sort of insanity of tenderness, uncle calls it. During the past few months she has grown very strange—and peculiar. I've often found her crooning old German lullabies and kindergarten songs, with her arms crossed on her breast, as if—oh, it seems so sacred and so terrible!—as if she were holding a baby. . . . And she has become frightfully jealous of Adolph. She's resentful of all other men. Only last week I took Mr. Sperling to see her—

we often drop in to call on her: she seems so lonely and unhappy—and she looked at him almost fiercely, and said: 'Why weren't you a cripple, too?' . . ."

The girl paused and searched our faces.

"Now don't you understand why I asked you to be careful? . . . Lady Mae may think we have come to harm Adolph."

"We sha'n't add unnecessarily to her suffering," Vance assured her sympathetically. Then, as we moved toward the hall, he asked her a question which recalled to my mind his brief intent scrutiny of the Drukker house earlier that afternoon. "Where is Mrs. Drukker's room situated?"

The girl shot him a startled look, but answered promptly:

"On the west side of the house—its bay window overlooks the archery range."

"Ah!" Vance took out his cigarette case, and carefully selected a *Régie*. "Does she sit much at this window?"

"A great deal. Lady Mae always watches us at archery practice—why I don't know. I'm sure it pains her to see us, for Adolph isn't strong enough to shoot. He's tried it several times, but it tired him so he had to give it up."

"She may watch you practising for the very reason that it does torture her—a kind of self-immolation, y' know. Those situations are very distressing." Vance spoke almost with tenderness—which, to one who did not know his real nature, would have sounded strange. "Perhaps," he added, as we emerged into the archery range through the basement door, "it would be best if we saw Mrs. Drukker first for a moment. It might tend to allay any apprehensions our visit might cause her. Could we reach her room without Mr. Drukker's knowledge?"

"Oh, yes." The girl was pleased at the idea. "We can go in the rear way. Adolph's study, where he does his writing, is at the front of the house."

We found Mrs. Drukker sitting in the great bay window on a sprawling old-fashioned chaise-longue, propped up with pillows. Miss Dillard greeted her filially and, bending over her with tender concern, kissed her forehead.

"Something rather awful has happened at our house this morning, Lady Mae," she said; "and these gentlemen wanted to see you. I offered to bring them over. You don't mind, do you?"

Mrs. Drukker's pale, tragic face had been turned away from the door as we entered, but now she stared at us with fixed horror. She was a tall woman, slender to the point of emaciation; and her hands, which lay slightly flexed on the arms of the chair, were sinewy and wrinkled like the talons of fabulous bird-women. Her face, too, was thin and deeply seamed; but it was not an unattractive face. The eyes were clear and alive, and the nose was straight and dominant. Though she must have been well past sixty, her hair was luxuriant and brown.

For several minutes she neither moved nor spoke. Then her hands closed slowly, and her lips parted.

"What do you want?" she asked in a low resonant voice.

"Mrs. Drukker,"—it was Vance who answered—"as Miss Dillard has told you, a tragedy occurred next door this morning, and since your window is the only one directly overlooking the archery range, we thought that you might have seen something that would aid us in our investigation."

The woman's vigilance relaxed perceptibly, but it was a moment or two before she spoke.

"And what did take place?"

"A Mr. Robin was killed.—You knew him perhaps?"

"The archer—Belle's Champion Archer? . . . Yes, I knew him. A strong healthy child who could pull a heavy bow and not get tired.—Who killed him?"

"We don't know." Vance, despite his negligent air, was watching her astutely. "But inasmuch as he was killed on the range, within sight of your window, we hoped you might be able to help us."

Mrs. Drukker's eyelids drooped craftily, and she clasped her hands with a kind of deliberate satisfaction.

"You are sure he was killed on the range?"

"We found him on the range," Vance returned non-committally.

"I see. . . . But what can I do to help you?" She lay back relaxed.

"Did you notice any one on the range this morning?" asked Vance.

"No!" The denial was swift and emphatic. "I saw no one. I haven't looked out on the range all day."

Vance met the woman's gaze steadily, and sighed.

"It's most unfortunate," he murmured. "Had you been looking out of the window this morning, it's wholly possible you might have seen the tragedy. . . . Mr. Robin was killed with a bow and arrow, and there seems to have been no motive whatever for the act."

"You know he was killed with a bow and arrow?" she asked, a tinge of color coming into her ashen cheeks.

"That was the Medical Examiner's report. There was an arrow through his heart when we found him."

"Of course. That seems perfectly natural, doesn't it? . . . An arrow through the Robin's heart!" She spoke with vague aloofness, a distant, fascinated look in her eyes.

There was a strained silence, and Vance moved toward the window.

"Do you mind if I look out?"

With difficulty the woman brought herself back from some far train of thought.

"Oh, no. It isn't much of a view, though. I can see the trees of 76th Street toward the north, and a part of the Dillard yard to the south. But that brick wall opposite is very depressing. Before the apartment house was built I had a beautiful view of the river."

Vance looked for a while down into the archery range.

"Yes," he observed; "if only you had been at the window this morning you might have seen what happened. Your view of the range and the basement door of the Dillard's is very clear. . . . Too bad." He glanced at his watch. "Is your son in, Mrs. Drukker?"

"My son! My baby! What do you want with him?" Her voice rose pitifully, and her eyes fastened on Vance with venomous hatred.

"Nothing important," he said pacifying. "Only, he may have seen some one on the range—"

"He saw no one! He couldn't have seen any one, for he wasn't here. He went out early this morning, and hasn't returned."

Vance looked with pity at the woman.

"He was away all morning?—Do you know where he was?"

"I always know where he is," Mrs. Drukker answered proudly. "He tells me everything."

"And he told you where he was going this morning?" persisted Vance gently.

"Certainly. But I forget for the moment. Let me think. . . ." Her long fingers tapped on the arm of the chair, and her eyes shifted uneasily. "I can't recall. But I'll ask him the moment he returns."

Miss Dillard had stood watching the woman with growing perplexity.

"But, Lady Mae, Adolph was at our house this morning. He came to see Sigurd—"

Mrs. Drukker drew herself up.

"Nothing of the kind!" she snapped, eyeing the girl almost viciously. "Adolph had to go—down-town somewhere. He wasn't near your house—I *know* he wasn't." Her eyes flashed, and she turned a defiant glare on Vance.

It was an embarrassing moment; but what followed was even more painful.

The door opened softly, and suddenly Mrs. Drukker's arms went out.

"My little boy—my baby!" she cried. "Come here, dear."

But the man at the door did not come forward. He stood blinking his beady little eyes at us, like a person waking in strange surroundings. Adolph Drukker was scarcely five feet tall. He had the typical congested appearance of the hunchback. His legs were spindling, and the size of his bulging, distorted torso seemed exaggerated by his huge, dome-like head. But there was intellectuality in the man's face—a terrific passionate power which held one's attention. Professor Dillard had called him a mathematical genius; and one could have no doubts as to his erudition.<sup>[12]</sup>

"What does all this mean?" he demanded in a high-pitched, tremulous voice, looking toward Miss Dillard. "Are these friends of yours, Belle?"

The girl started to speak, but Vance halted her with a gesture.

"The truth is, Mr. Drukker," he explained sombrely, "there has been a tragedy next door. This is Mr. Markham, the District Attorney, and Sergeant Heath of the Police Department; and at our request Miss Dillard brought us here that we might ask your mother whether or not she had noticed anything unusual on the archery range this morning. The tragedy occurred just outside the basement door of the Dillard house."

Drukker thrust his chin forward and squinted.

"A tragedy, eh? What kind of tragedy?"

"A Mr. Robin was killed—with a bow and arrow."

The man's face began to twitch spasmodically.

"Robin killed? *Killed?* . . . What time?"

"Some time between eleven and twelve probably."

"Between eleven and twelve?" Quickly Drukker's gaze shifted to his mother. He seemed to grow excited, and his huge splay fingers worried the hem of his smoking-jacket. "What did you see?" His eyes glinted as he focussed them on the woman.

"What do you mean, son?" The retort was a panic-stricken whisper.

Drukker's face became hard, and the suggestion of a sneer twisted his lips.

"I mean that it was about that time when I heard a scream in this room."

"You didn't! No—no!" She caught her breath, and wagged her head jerkily. "You're mistaken, son. I didn't scream this morning."

"Well, some one did." There was a cold relentlessness in the man's tone. Then, after a pause, he added: "The fact is, I came up-stairs after I heard the scream, and listened at the door here. But you were walking about humming 'Eia Popeia,' so I went back to my work."

Mrs. Drukker pressed a handkerchief to her face, and her eyes closed momentarily.

"You were at your work between eleven and twelve?" Her voice now rang with subdued eagerness. "But I called you several times —"

"I heard you. But I didn't answer. I was too busy."

"So that was it." She turned slowly toward the window. "I thought you were out. Didn't you tell me?"

"I told you I was going to the Dillards'. But Sigurd wasn't there, and I came back a little before eleven."

"I didn't see you come in." The woman's energy was spent, and she lay back listlessly, her eyes on the brick wall opposite. "And when I called and you didn't answer I naturally thought you were still out."

"I left the Dillards' by the street gate, and took a walk in the park." Drukker's voice was irritable. "Then I let myself in by the front door."

"And you say you heard me scream. . . . But why should I scream, son? I've had no pains in my back this morning."

Drukker frowned, and his little eyes moved swiftly from Vance to Markham.

"I heard some one scream—a woman—in this room," he iterated stubbornly. "About half past eleven." Then he sank into a chair and gazed moodily at the floor.

This perplexing verbal intercourse between mother and son had held us all spellbound. Though Vance had stood before an old eighteenth-century print near the door, regarding it with apparent absorption, I knew that no word or inflection had escaped him. Now he swung about and, giving Markham a signal not to interfere, approached Mrs. Drukker.

"We're very sorry, madam, that we've had to trouble you. Forgive us, if you can."

He bowed and turned to Miss Dillard.

"Do you care to pilot us back? Or shall we find our own way down?"

"I'll come with you," the girl said; and going to Mrs. Drukker she put her arm about her. "I'm so sorry, Lady Mae."

As we were passing out into the hall Vance, as if on second thought, paused and looked back at Drukker.

"You'd better come with us, sir," he said, in a casual yet urgent tone. "You knew Mr. Robin, and you may be able to suggest something "

"Don't go with them, son!" cried Mrs. Drukker. She was sitting upright now, her face contorted with anguish and fear. "Don't go! They're the enemy. They want to hurt you. . . ."

Drukker had risen.

"Why shouldn't I go with them?" he retorted petulantly. "I want to find out about this affair. Maybe—as they say—I can help them." And with a gesture of impatience he joined us.

## 6. "'I', SAID THE SPARROW"

(Saturday, April 2; 3 p.m.)

When we were again in the Dillard drawing-room and Miss Dillard had left us to rejoin her uncle in the library, Vance, without preliminaries, proceeded to the business in hand.

"I didn't care to worry your mother, Mr. Drukker, by questioning you in front of her, but inasmuch as you called here this morning shortly before Mr. Robin's death, it is necessary—as a mere routine procedure—that we seek whatever information you can give us."

Drukker had seated himself near the fireplace. He now drew in his head cautiously, but made no answer.

"You came here," continued Vance, "about half past nine, I believe, to call on Mr. Arnesson."

"Yes."

"By way of the archery range and the basement door?"

"I always come that way. Why walk around the block?"

"But Mr. Arnesson was out this morning."

Drukker nodded. "At the university."

"And, finding Mr. Arnesson away, you sat for a while in the library with Professor Dillard, I understand, discussing an astronomical expedition to South America."

"The expedition of the Royal Astronomical Society to Sobral to test the Einsteinian deflection," amplified Drukker.

"How long were you in the library?"

"Less than half an hour."

"And then?"

"I went down to the archery-room, and glanced at one of the magazines. There was a chess problem in it—a *Zugzwang* end-game that came up recently between Shapiro and Marshall—and I sat down and worked it out. . . ."

"Just a moment, Mr. Drukker." A note of suppressed interest came into Vance's voice. "You're interested in chess?"

"To a certain extent. I don't spend much time at it, however. The game is not purely mathematical; and it's insufficiently speculative to appeal to a wholly scientific mind."

"Did you find the Shapiro-Marshall position difficult?"

"Not so difficult as tricky." Drukker was watching Vance shrewdly. "As soon as I discovered that an apparently useless pawn move was the key to the impasse, the solution was simple."

"How long did it take you?"

"Half an hour or so."

"Until about half past ten, shall we say?"

"That would be about right." Drukker settled deeper into his chair, but his covert alertness did not relax.

"Then you must have been in the archery-room when Mr. Robin and Mr. Sperling came there."

The man did not answer at once, and Vance, pretending not to notice his hesitancy, added: "Professor Dillard said they called at the house about ten and, and after waiting a while in the drawing-room here, went down to the basement."

"Where's Sperling now, by the way?" Drukker's eyes darted suspiciously from one to the other of us.

"We expect him here any minute," Vance replied. "Sergeant Heath has sent two of his men to fetch him."

The hunchback's eyebrows lifted. "Ah! So Sperling is being forcibly brought back." He pyramided his spatulate fingers and inspected them musingly. Then he slowly lifted his eyes to Vance. "You asked me if I saw Robin and Sperling in the archery-room.—Yes; they came down-stairs just as I was going."

Vance leaned back and stretched his legs before him.

"Did you get the impression, Mr. Drukker, that they had—as we euphemistically say—been having words?"

The man considered this question for several moments.

"Now that you mention it," he said at length, "I do recall that there seemed to be a coolness between them. I wouldn't, however, care to be too categorical on that point. You see, I left the room almost immediately after they entered."

"You went out the basement door, I think you said, and thence through the wall gate into 75th Street. Is that correct?"

For a moment Drukker seemed loath to answer; but he replied with an effort at unconcern.

"Quite. I thought I'd take a stroll along the river before going back to work. I went to the Drive, then up the bridle path, and turned into the park at 79th Street."

Heath, with his habitual suspicion of all statements made to the police, put the next question.

"Did you meet any one you knew?"

Drukker turned angrily, but Vance quickly stepped into the breach.

"It really doesn't matter, Sergeant. If it's necessary later on to ascertain that point, we can take the matter up again." Then to Drukker: "You returned from your walk a little before eleven, I think you said, and entered your house by the front door."

"That's right."

"You saw nothing, by the by, that was in the least extr'ordin'ry when you were here this morning?"

"I saw nothing except what I've told you."

"And you're quite sure you heard your mother scream at about half past eleven?"

Vance did not move as he asked this question; but a slightly different note had crept into his voice, and it acted on Drukker in a startling manner. He heaved his squat body out of his chair, and stood glaring down on Vance with menacing fury. His tiny round eyes flashed, and his lips worked convulsively. His hands, dangling before him, flexed and unflexed like those of a man in a paroxysm.



"What are you driving at?" he demanded, his voice a shrill falsetto. "I tell you I heard her scream. I don't care a damn whether she admits it or not. Moreover, I heard her walking in her room. *She was in her room*, understand, *and I was in my room*, between eleven and twelve. And you can't prove anything different. Furthermore, I'm not going to be cross-examined by you or any one else as to what I was doing or where I was. It's none of your damned business—do you hear me? . . ."

So insensate was his wrath that I expected any minute to see him hurl himself on Vance. Heath had risen and stepped forward, sensing the potential danger of the man. Vance, however, did not move. He continued to smoke languidly, and when the other's fury had been spent, he said quietly and without a trace of emotion:

"There's nothing more we have to ask you, Mr. Drukker. And really, y' know, there's no need to work yourself up. It merely occurred to me that your mother's scream might help to establish the exact time of the murder."

"What could her scream have to do with the time of Robin's death? Didn't she tell you she saw nothing?" Drukker appeared exhausted, and leaned heavily against the table.

At this moment Professor Dillard appeared in the archway. Behind him stood Arnesson.

"What seems to be the matter?" the professor asked. "I heard the noise here, and came down." He regarded Drukker coldly. "Hasn't Belle been through enough to-day without your frightening her this way?"

Vance had risen, but before he could speak Arnesson came forward and shook his finger in mock reprimand at Drukker.

"You really should learn control, Adolph. You take life with such abominable seriousness. You've worked in interstellar spatial magnitudes long enough to have some sense of proportion. Why attach so much importance to this pin-point of life on earth?"

Drukker was breathing stertorously.

"These swine—" he began.

"Oh, my dear Adolph!" Arnesson cut him short. "The entire human race are swine. Why particularize? . . . Come along. I'll see you home." And he took Drukker's arm firmly and led him downstairs.

"We're very sorry we disturbed you, sir," Markham apologized to Professor Dillard. "The man flew off the handle for some unknown reason. These investigations are not the pleasantest things in the world; but we hope to be through before long."

"Well, make it as brief as you can, Markham. And do try to spare Belle as much as possible.—Let me see you before you go."

When Professor Dillard had returned up-stairs, Markham took a turn up and down the room, his brows knit, his hands clasped behind him.

"What do you make of Drukker?" he asked, halting before Vance.

"Decidedly not a pleasant character. Diseased physically and mentally. A congenital liar. But canny—oh, deuced canny. An abnormal brain—you often find it in cripples of his type. Sometimes it runs to real constructive genius, as with Steinmetz; but too often it takes to abstruse speculation along impractical lines, as with Drukker. Still, our little verbal give-and-take has not been without fruit. He's hiding something that he'd like to tell but doesn't dare."

"That's possible, of course," returned Markham doubtfully. "He's touchy on the subject of that hour between eleven and noon. And he was watching you all the time like a cat."

"A weasel," Vance corrected him. "Yes, I was aware of his flatterin' scrutiny."

"Anyway, I can't see that he's helped us very much."

"No," agreed Vance. "We're not exactly forrader. But we're at least getting some luggage aboard. Our excitable mathematical wizard has opened up some very interestin' lines of speculation. And Mrs. Drukker is fairly teemin' with possibilities. If we knew what both of 'em together know we might find the key to this silly business."

Heath had been sullen for the past hour, and had looked on at the proceedings with bored disdain. But now he drew himself up combatively.

"I'm here to tell you, Mr. Markham, that we're wasting our time. What's the good of all these parleys? Sperling's the boy we want, and when my men bring him in and put him through a little sweating, we'll have enough material for an indictment. He was in love with the Dillard girl and was jealous of Robin—not only on account of the girl, but because Robin could shoot those red sticks straighter than he could. He had a scrap with Robin in this here room—the professor heard 'em at it; and he was down-stairs with Robin, according to the evidence, a few minutes before the murder. . . ."

"And," added Vance ironically, "his name means 'sparrow.' *Quod erat demonstrandum*.—No, Sergeant; it's much too easy. It works out like a game of Canfield with the cards stacked; whereas this thing was planned much too carefully for suspicion to fall directly on the guilty person."

"I can't see any careful planning about it," persisted Heath. "This Sperling gets sore, picks up a bow, grabs an arrow off of the wall, follows Robin outside, shoots him through the heart, and beats it."

Vance sighed.

"You're far too forthright for this wicked world, Sergeant. If only things happened with such naïve dispatch, life would be very simple—and depressin'. But such was not the *modus operandi* of the Robin's murder. First, no archer could shoot at a moving human target and strike just between the ribs over the vital spot of the heart. Secondly, there's that fracture of Robin's skull. He may have acquired it in falling, but it's not likely. Thirdly, his hat was at his feet, where it wouldn't have been if he had fallen naturally. Fourthly, thenock on the arrow is so bruised that I doubt if it would hold a string. Fifthly, Robin was facing the arrow, and during the drawing and aiming of the bow he would have had time to call out and cover himself. Sixthly. . . ."

Vance paused in the act of lighting a cigarette.

"By Jove, Sergeant! I've overlooked something. When a man's stabbed in the heart there's sure to be an immediate flow of blood, especially when the end of the weapon is larger than the shaft and there's no adequate plug for the hole. I say! It's quite possible that you'll find some blood spots on the floor of the archery-room—somewhere near the door most likely."

Heath hesitated, but only momentarily. Experience had long since taught him that Vance's suggestions were not to be treated cavalierly; and with a good-natured grunt he got up and disappeared toward the rear of the house.

"I think, Vance, I begin to see what you mean," observed Markham, with a troubled look. "But, good God! If Robin's apparent death

with a bow and arrow was merely an *ex-post-facto* stage-setting, then we're confronted by something almost too diabolical to contemplate."

"It was the work of a maniac," declared Vance, with unwonted sobriety. "Oh, not the conventional maniac who imagines he's Napoleon, but a madman with a brain so colossal that he has carried sanity to a, humanly speaking, *reductio ad absurdum*—to a point, that is, where humor itself becomes a formula in four dimensions."

Markham smoked vigorously, lost in speculation.

"I hope Heath doesn't find anything," he said at length.

"Why—in Heaven's name?" returned Vance. "If there's no material evidence that Robin met his end in the archery-room, it'll only make the problem more difficult legally."

But the material evidence was forthcoming. The Sergeant returned a few minutes later, crestfallen but excited.

"Damn it, Mr. Vance!" he blurted. "You had the dope all right." He made no attempt to keep the admiration out of his look. "There isn't any actual blood on the floor; but there's a dark place on the cement where somebody's scrubbed it with a wet rag to-day some time. It ain't dry yet; and the place is right near the door, where you said. And what makes it more suspicious is that one of those rugs has been pulled over it.—But that don't let Sperling out altogether," he added pugnaciously. "He mighta shot Robin indoors."

"And then cleaned up the blood, wiped off the bow and arrow, and placed the body and the bow on the range, before making his departure? . . . Why? . . . Archery, to begin with, isn't an indoor sport, Sergeant. And Sperling knows too much about it to attempt murder with a bow and arrow. A hit such as the one that ended Robin's uneventful career would have been a pure fluke. Teucer himself couldn't have achieved it with any degree of certainty—and, according to Homer, Teucer was the champion archer of the Greeks."

As he spoke Pardee passed down the hall on his way out. He had nearly reached the front door when Vance rose suddenly and went to the archway.

"Oh, I say, Mr. Pardee. Just a moment, please." The man turned with an air of gracious compliance.

"There is one other question we'd like to ask you," said Vance. "You mentioned seeing Mr. Sperling and Beedle leave here this morning by the wall gate. Are you sure you saw no one else use the gate?"

"Quite sure. That is, I don't recall any one else."

"I was thinking particularly of Mr. Drukker."

"Oh, Drukker?" Pardee shook his head with mild emphasis. "No, I would have remembered him. But you realize a dozen people might have entered and left this house without my noticing them."

"Quite—quite," Vance murmured indifferently. "How good a chess player, by the by, is Mr. Drukker?"

Pardee showed a flicker of surprise.

"He's not a player in the practical sense at all," he explained with careful precision. "He's an excellent analyst, however, and understands the theory of the game amazingly well. But he's had little practice at actual over-the-board play."

When Pardee had gone Heath cocked a triumphant eye at Vance.

"I notice, sir," he remarked good-naturedly, "that I'm not the only one who'd like to check the hunchback's alibi."

"Ah, but there's a difference between checking an alibi, and demanding that the person himself prove it."

At this moment the front door was thrown open. There were heavy footsteps in the hall, and three men appeared in the archway. Two were obviously detectives, and between them stood a tall, clean-cut youth of about thirty.

"We got him, Sergeant," announced one of the detectives, with a grin of vicious satisfaction. "He beat it straight home from here, and was packing up when we walked in on him."

Sperling's eyes swept the room with angry apprehension. Heath had planted himself before the man, and stood looking him up and down triumphantly.

"Well, young fella, you thought you'd get away, did you?" The Sergeant's cigar bobbed up and down between his lips as he spoke.

The color mounted to Sperling's cheeks, and he set his mouth stubbornly.

"So! You've got nothing to say?" Heath went on, squaring his jaw ferociously. "You're one of these silent lads, are you? Well, we'll make you talk." He turned to Markham. "How about it, sir? Shall I take him to Headquarters?"

"Perhaps Mr. Sperling will not object to answering a few questions here," said Markham quietly.

Sperling studied the District Attorney a moment; then his gaze moved to Vance, who nodded to him encouragingly.

"Answer questions about what?" he asked, with an obvious effort at self-control. "I was preparing to go away for the week-end when these ruffians forced their way into my room; and I was brought here without a word of explanation or even an opportunity to communicate with my family. Now you talk of taking me to Police Headquarters." He gave Heath a defiant glare. "All right, take me to Police Headquarters—and be damned to you!"

"What time did you leave here this morning, Mr. Sperling?" Vance's tone was soft and ingratiating, and his manner reassuring.

"About a quarter past eleven," the man answered. "In time to catch the 11.40 Scarsdale train from Grand Central."

"And Mr. Robin?"

"I don't know what time Robin went. He said he was going to wait for Belle—Miss Dillard. I left him in the archery-room."

"You saw Mr. Drukker?"

"For a minute—yes. He was in the archery-room when Robin and I went down-stairs; but he left immediately."

"Through the wall gate? Or did he walk down the range?"

"I don't remember—in fact, I didn't notice. . . . Say, look here: what's all this about anyway?"

"Mr. Robin was killed this morning," said Vance, "—at some time near eleven o'clock."

Sperling's eyes seemed to start from his head.

"Robin killed? My God! . . . Who—who killed him?" The man's lips were dry, and he wetted them with his tongue.

"We don't know yet," Vance answered. "He was shot through the heart with an arrow."

This news left Sperling stunned. His eyes traveled vaguely from side to side, and he fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette.

Heath stepped nearer to him, and thrust out his chin.

"Maybe *you* can tell us who killed him—with a bow and arrow!"

"Why—why do you—think I know?" Sperling managed to stammer.

"Well," returned the Sergeant relentlessly, "you were jealous of Robin, weren't you? You had a hot argument with him about the girl, right in this room, didn't you? And you were alone with him just before he was croaked, weren't you? And you're a pretty good shot with the bow and arrow, aren't you?—That's why I think that maybe you know something." He narrowed his eyes and drew his upper lip over his teeth. "Say! Come clean. Nobody else but you coulda done it. You had a fight with him over the girl, and you were the last person seen with him—*only a few minutes before he was killed*. And who else woulda shot him with a bow and arrow except a champeen archer—huh? . . . Make it easy for yourself, and spill the story. We've got you."

A strange light had gathered in Sperling's eyes, and his body became rigid.

"Tell me,"—he spoke in a strained, unnatural voice—"did you find the bow?"

"Sure we found it." Heath laughed unpleasantly. "Right where you left it—in the alley."

"What kind of a bow was it?" Sperling's gaze had not moved from some distant point.

"What kind of a bow?" repeated Heath. "A regular bow—"

Vance, who had been watching the youth closely, interrupted.

"I think I understand the question, Sergeant.—It was a woman's bow, Mr. Sperling. About five-feet-six, and rather light—under thirty pounds, I should say."

Sperling drew a slow, deep breath, like a man steeling himself for some bitter resolution. Then his lips parted in a faint, grim smile.

"What's the use?" he asked listlessly. "I thought I'd have time to get away. . . . Yes, I killed him."

Heath grunted with satisfaction, and his belligerent manner at once disappeared.

"You got more sense than I thought you had," he said, in an almost paternal tone, nodding in a businesslike manner to the two detectives. "Take him along, boys. Use my buggy—it's outside. And lock him up without booking him. I'll prefer the charge when I get to the office."

"Come along, bo," ordered one of the detectives, turning toward the hall.

But Sperling did not at once obey. Instead he looked appealingly at Vance.

"Could I—might I—" he began.

Vance shook his head.

"No, Mr. Sperling. It would be best if you didn't see Miss Dillard. No use of harrowin' her feelings just now. . . . Cheerio."

The man turned without another word and went out between his captors.

## 7. VANCE REACHES A CONCLUSION

(Saturday, April 2; 3.30 p.m.)

When we were again alone in the drawing-room Vance rose and, stretching himself, went to the window. The scene that had just been enacted, with its startling climax, had left us all somewhat dazed. Our minds were busy, I think, with the same idea; and when Vance spoke it was as if he were voicing our thoughts.

"We're back in the nursery, it seems. . . .

"I,' said the Sparrow,  
'With my bow and arrow,  
I killed Cock Robin.' . . .

I say, Markham; this is getting a bit thick."

He came slowly back to the centre-table and crushed out his cigarette. From the corner of his eye he looked at Heath.

"Why so pensive, Sergeant? You should be singing roundelays and doing a joyous tarantella. Has not your villain confessed to the dark deed? Does it not fill you with gladness to know that the culprit will soon be languishin' in an oubliette?"

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Vance," Heath admitted sullenly, "I'm not satisfied. That confession came too easy, and—well, I've seen a lot of guys come across, but this one somehow didn't act like he was guilty. And that's a fact, sir."

"At any rate," submitted Markham hopefully, "his preposterous confession will damp the newspapers' curiosity and give us a free field to push our investigation. This case is going to make an ungodly noise; but as long as the reporters think the guilty person is jailed, they won't be bothering us for news of 'developments.'"

"I'm not saying he ain't guilty," asserted Heath pugnaciously, obviously arguing against his own convictions. "We certainly had the goods on him, and he mighta realized it and spilled the works, thinking it would go easier with him at the trial. Maybe he's not so dumb, after all."

"It won't do, Sergeant," said Vance. "The lad's mental workin's were deucedly simple. He knew Robin was waiting to see Miss Dillard, and he also knew she'd non-suited him, so to speak, last night. Sperling evidently didn't have a high opinion of Robin; and when he heard of the gentleman's death at the hands of some one who wielded a short, light bow, he jumped to the conclusion that Robin had overstepped the bounds of propriety in his wooing, and received a righteous shaft through the heart. There was then nothing for our noble, mid-Victorian sparrow to do but slap his own manly bosom and proclaim: '*Ecce homo!*' . . . It's most distressin'."

"Well, anyhow," grumbled Heath, "I'm not going to turn him loose. If Mr. Markham don't want to prosecute, that's up to him."

Markham looked at the Sergeant tolerantly. He realized the strain the man was under, and it was in keeping with his bigness of nature that he took no offence at the other's words.

"Perhaps, however, Sergeant," he said kindly, "you'll not object to continuing the investigation with me, even if I don't decide to prosecute Sperling."

Heath was at once contrite. He got up briskly and, going to Markham, held out his hand.

"You know it, sir!"

Markham took the offered hand, and rose with a gracious smile.

"I'll leave things with you, then, for the time being. I've some work to do at the office, and I told Swacker to wait for me."<sup>[13]</sup> He moved dispiritedly toward the hall. "I'll explain the situation to Miss Dillard and the professor before I go.—Anything special in mind, Sergeant?"

"Well, sir, I think I'll take a good look for that rag that was used to wipe up the floor down-stairs. And while I'm at it I'll go over the archery-room with a fine-tooth comb. Also, I'll put the screws to the cook and the butler again—especially the cook. She musta been mighty close at hand when the dirty work was going on. . . . Then the regular routine stuff—inquiries in the neighborhood and that sorta thing."

"Let me know the results. I'll be at the Stuyvesant Club later to-day and to-morrow afternoon."

Vance had joined Markham in the archway.

"I say, old man," he remarked, as we went toward the stairs; "don't minimize the importance of that cryptic note left in the mail-box. I've a strong psychic suspicion that it may be the key to the nursery. You'd better ask Professor Dillard and his niece if 'Bishop' has any provocative significance for them. That diocesan signature has a meaning."

"I'm not so sure," returned Markham dubiously. "It appears utterly meaningless to me. But I'll follow your suggestion."

Neither the professor nor Miss Dillard, however, could recall any personal association with the word *Bishop*; and the professor was inclined to agree with Markham that the note was without any significant bearing on the case.

"It strikes me," he said, "as a piece of juvenile melodrama. It isn't likely that the person who killed Robin would adopt a vague pseudonym and write notes about his crime. I'm not acquainted with criminals, but such conduct doesn't impress me as logical."

"But the crime itself was illogical," ventured Vance pleasantly.

"One can't speak of a thing being illogical, sir," returned the professor tartly, "when one is ignorant of the very premises of a syllogism."

"Exactly." Vance's tone was studiously courteous. "Therefore, the note itself may not be without logic."

Markham tactfully changed the subject.

"What I came particularly to tell you, professor, is that Mr. Sperling called a short time ago and, when informed of Mr. Robin's death, confessed to having done it himself. . . ."

"Raymond confessed!" gasped Miss Dillard.

Markham looked at the girl sympathetically.

"To be quite frank, I didn't believe Mr. Sperling. Some mistaken idea of chivalry undoubtedly led him to admit the crime."

"Chivalry?" she repeated, leaning forward tensely. "What exactly do you mean by that, Mr. Markham?"

It was Vance who answered.

"The bow that was found on the range was a woman's bow."

"Oh!" The girl covered her face with her hands, and her body shook with sobs.

Professor Dillard regarded her helplessly; and his impotency took the form of irritation.

"What flummery is this, Markham?" he demanded. "Any archer can shoot with a woman's bow. . . . That unutterable young idiot! Why should he make Belle miserable by his preposterous confession! . . . Markham, my friend, do what you can for the boy."

Markham gave his assurances, and we rose to go.

"By the by, Professor Dillard," said Vance, pausing at the door; "I trust you won't misunderstand me, but there's a bare possibility that it was some one with access to this house who indulged in the practical joke of typing that note. Is there, by any chance, a typewriter on the premises?"

It was patent that the professor resented Vance's question, but he answered civilly enough.

"No,—nor has there ever been one to my knowledge. I threw my own machine away ten years ago when I left the university. An agency does whatever typing I need."

"And Mr. Arnesson?"

"He never uses a typewriter."

As we descended the stairs we met Arnesson returning from Drukker's.

"I've placated our local Leipnitz," he announced, with an exaggerated sigh. "Poor old Adolph! The world is too much with him. When he's wallowing in the relativist formulas of Lorentz and Einstein he's serene. But when he's dragged down to actuality he disintegrates."

"It may interest you to know," said Vance casually, "that Sperling has just confessed to the murder."

"Ha!" Arnesson chuckled. "Quite in keeping. 'I,' said the Sparrow. . . . Very neat. Still, I don't know how it'll work out mathematically."

"And, since we agreed to keep you posted," continued Vance, "it may help your calculations to know that we have reason to believe that Robin was killed in the archery-room and placed on the range afterwards."

"Glad to know it." Arnesson became momentarily serious. "Yes, that may affect my problem." He walked with us to the front door. "If there's any way I can be of service to you, call on me."

Vance had paused to light a cigarette, but I knew, by the languid look in his eyes, that he was making a decision. Slowly he turned to Arnesson.

"Do you know if Mr. Drukker or Mr. Pardee has a typewriter?"

Arnesson gave a slight start, and his eyes twinkled shrewdly.

"Aha! That Bishop note. . . . I see. Merely a matter of being thorough. Quite right." He nodded with satisfaction. "Yes; both have typewriters. Drukker types incessantly—thinks to the keyboard, so he says. And Pardee's chess correspondence is as voluminous as a movie hero's. Types it all himself, too."

"Would it be any great trouble to you," asked Vance, "to secure a specimen of the typing of each machine, and also a sample of the paper these two gentlemen use?"

"None whatever." Arnesson appeared delighted with the commission. "Have them for you this afternoon. Where'll you be?"

"Mr. Markham will be at the Stuyvesant Club. You might phone him there, and he can arrange—"

"Why bother to arrange anything? I'll bring my findings to Mr. Markham personally. Only too glad. Fascinating game, being a sleuth."

Vance and I returned home in the District Attorney's car, and Markham continued to the office. At seven o'clock that night the three of us met at the Stuyvesant Club for dinner; and at half past eight we were sitting in Markham's favorite corner of the lounge-room smoking and having our coffee.

During the meal no mention of the case had been made. The late editions of the afternoon papers had carried brief accounts of Robin's death. Heath had evidently succeeded in curbing the reporters' curiosity and clipping the wings of their imagination. The District Attorney's office being closed, the newspaper men were unable to bombard Markham with questions, and so the late press was inadequately supplied with information. The Sergeant had guarded the Dillard house well, for the reporters had not succeeded in reaching any member of the household.

Markham had picked up a late *Sun* on his way from the dining-room, and glanced through it carefully as he sipped his coffee.

"This is the first faint echo," he commented ruefully. "I shudder to think what the morning papers will contain."

"There's nothing to do but bear it," smiled Vance unfeelingly. "The moment some bright journalistic lad awakes to the robin-sparrow-arrow combination the city editors will go mad with joy, and every front page in the country will look like a Mother-Goose hoarding."

Markham lapsed into despondency. Finally he struck the arm of his chair angrily with his fist.

"Damn it, Vance! I won't let you inflame my imagination with this idiocy about nursery rhymes." Then he added, with the ferocity of uncertainty: "It's a sheer coincidence, I tell you. There simply couldn't be anything in it."

Vance sighed. "Convince yourself against your will; you're of the same opinion still—to paraphrase Butler." He reached into his pocket and took out a sheet of paper. "Putting all juvenilia to one side *pro tempore*, here's an edifyin' chronology I drew up before dinner. . . . Edifyin'? Well, it might be if we knew how to interpret it."

Markham studied the paper for several minutes. What Vance had written down was this:

9.00 a.m. Arnesson left house to go to university library.  
 9.15 a.m. Belle Dillard left house for the tennis courts.  
 9.30 a.m. Drukker called at house to see Arnesson.  
 9.50 a.m. Drukker went down-stairs to archery-room.  
 10.00 a.m. Robin and Sperling called at house and remained in drawing-room for half an hour.  
 10.30 a.m. Robin and Sperling went down to archery-room.  
 10.32 a.m. Drukker says he went out for a walk, by the wall gate.  
 10.35 a.m. Beedle went marketing.  
 10.55 a.m. Drukker says he returned to his own house.  
 11.15 a.m. Sperling went away by wall gate.  
 11.30 a.m. Drukker says he heard a scream in his mother's room.  
 11.35 a.m. Professor Dillard went on balcony of Arnesson's room.  
 11.40 a.m. Professor Dillard saw Robin's body on archery range.  
 11.45 a.m. Professor Dillard telephoned to District Attorney's office.  
 12.25 p.m. Belle Dillard returned from tennis.  
 12.30 p.m. Police arrived at Dillard house.  
 12.35 p.m. Beedle returned from market.  
 2.00 p.m. Arnesson returned from university.

Ergo: Robin was killed at some time between 11.15 (when Sperling departed) and 11.40 (when Professor Dillard discovered body).

The only other persons known to have been in the house during this time were Pyne and Professor Dillard.

The disposition of all other persons connected in any way with the murder was as follows (according to statements and evidence now in hand):

1. Arnesson was at the university library between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m.
2. Belle Dillard was at the tennis courts between 9.15 a.m. and 12.25 p.m.
3. Drukker was walking in the park between 10.32 a.m. and 10.55 a.m.; and was in his study from 10.55 a.m. on.
4. Pardee was in his house the entire morning.
5. Mrs. Drukker was in her room the entire morning.
6. Beedle was marketing between 10.35 a.m. and 12.35 p.m.
7. Sperling was on his way to the Grand Central Station between 11.15 a.m. and 11.40 a.m., at which hour he took a train for Scarsdale.

Conclusion: Unless at least one of these seven alibis is shaken, the whole weight of suspicion, and indeed the actual culpability, must rest upon either Pyne or Professor Dillard.

When Markham finished reading the paper, he made a gesture of exasperation.

"Your entire implication is preposterous," he said irritably; "and your conclusion is a *non-sequitur*. The chronology helps set the time of Robin's death, but your assumption that one of the persons we've seen to-day is necessarily guilty is arrant nonsense. You completely ignore the possibility that any outsider could have committed the crime. There were three ways of reaching the range and the archery-room without entering the house—the wall gate on 75th Street, the other wall gate on 76th Street, and the alleyway between the two apartment houses, leading to Riverside Drive."

"Oh, it's highly probable that one of these three entrances was used," returned Vance. "But don't overlook the fact that the most secluded, and therefore the most likely, of these three means of entry—to wit, the alleyway—is guarded by a locked door to which no one would be apt to have a key except some member of the Dillard household. I can't picture a murderer walking into the range from either of the street gates: he would be taking too many chances of being seen."

Vance leaned forward seriously.

"And, Markham, there are other reasons why we may eliminate strangers or casual prowlers. The person who sent Robin to his Maker must have been privy to the exact state of affairs in the Dillard house this morning between a quarter past eleven and twenty minutes to twelve. He knew that Pyne and the old professor were alone there. He knew that Belle Dillard was not roaming about the premises. He knew that Beedle was away and could neither hear him nor surprise him. He knew that Robin—his victim—was there, and that Sperling had departed. Moreover, he knew something of the lie of the land—the situation of the archery-room, for instance; for it's only too plain that Robin was killed in that room. No one who wasn't familiar with all these details would have dared enter the grounds and staged a spectacular murder. I tell you, Markham, it was some one very close to the Dillard ménage—some one who was able to find out just what conditions obtained in that household this morning."

"What about that scream of Mrs. Drukker's?"

"Ah, what about it, indeed? Mrs. Drukker's window may have been a factor that the murderer overlooked. Or perhaps he knew about it and decided to take that one chance of being seen. On the other hand, we don't know whether the lady screamed or not. She says No; Drukker says Yes. They both have an ulterior motive for what they poured into our trustin' ears. Drukker may have told of the scream by way of proving he was at home between eleven and twelve; and Mrs. Drukker may have denied it for fear he wasn't home. It's very much of an *olla podrida*. But it doesn't matter. The main point I'm trying to make is that only an intimate of the Dillard house could have done this devilish business."

"We have too few facts to warrant that conclusion," asserted Markham. "Chance may have played a part—"

"Oh, I say, old man! Chance may work out to a few permutations, but not to twenty.—And there is that note left in the mail-box. The murderer even knew Robin's middle name."

"Assuming, of course, that the murderer wrote the note."

"Do you prefer to assume that some balmy joker found out about the crime through telepathy or crystal-gazing, hied to a typewriter, composed a dithyramb, returned hot-footed to the house, and, for no good reason, took the terrific risk of being seen putting the paper in the mail-box?"

Before Markham could answer Heath entered the lounge room and hurried to our corner. That he was worried and uneasy was obvious. With scarcely a word of greeting he handed a typewritten envelope to Markham.

"That was received by the *World* in the late afternoon mail. Quinan, the police reporter of the *World*, brought it to me a little while ago; and he says that the *Times* and the *Herald* also got copies of it. The letters were stamped at one o'clock to-day, so they were probably posted between eleven and twelve. What's more, Mr. Markham, they were mailed in the neighborhood of the Dillard house, for they went through Post Office Station 'N' on West 69th Street."

Markham withdrew the enclosure from the envelope. Suddenly his eyes opened wide, and the muscles about his mouth tightened. Without looking up he handed the letter to Vance. It consisted of a single sheet of typewriting paper, and the words printed on it were identical to those on the note left in the Dillard mail-box. Indeed, the communication was an exact duplicate of the other:—"Joseph Cochrane Robin is dead. Who Killed Cock Robin? Sperling means sparrow.—THE BISHOP."

Vance scarcely glanced at the paper.

"Quite in keeping, don't y' know," he said indifferently. "The Bishop was afraid the public might miss the point of his joke; so he explained it to the press."

"Joke, did you say, Mr. Vance?" asked Heath bitterly. "It ain't the kind of joke I'm used to. This case gets crazier—"

"Exactly, Sergeant. A crazy joke."

A uniformed boy stepped up to the District Attorney and, bending over his shoulder discreetly, whispered something.

"Bring him here right away," ordered Markham. Then to us: "It's Arnesson. He'll probably have those specimens of typing." A shadow had settled on his face; and he glanced again at the note Heath had brought him. "Vance," he said in a low voice, "I'm beginning to believe that this case may turn out to be as terrible as you think. I wonder if the typing will correspond. . . ."

But when the note was compared with the specimens Arnesson brought, no similarity whatever could be discerned. Not only were the typing and the ink different from those of either Pardee's or Drukker's machine, but the paper did not match any one of the samples that Arnesson had secured.

## 8. ACT TWO

(Monday, April 11; 11.30 a.m.)

There is no need to recall here the nation-wide sensation caused by Robin's murder. Every one remembers how that startling tragedy was featured in the country's press. It was referred to by various designations. Some newspapers called it the Cock Robin murder. Others, more alliterative but less accurate, [14] termed it the Mother Goose murder. But the signature of the typewritten notes appealed strongly to the journalistic sense of mystery; and in time the killing of Robin came to be known as the Bishop murder case. Its strange and fearful combination of horror and nursery jargon inflamed the public's imagination; and the sinister and insane implications of its details affected the entire country like some grotesque nightmare whose atmosphere could not be shaken off.

During the week following the discovery of Robin's body, the detectives of the Homicide Bureau, as well as the detectives connected with the District Attorney's office, were busy night and day pushing their inquiries. The receipt of the duplicate Bishop notes by the leading New York morning papers had dissipated whatever ideas Heath may have held as to Sperling's guilt; and though he refused to put his official imprimatur on the young man's innocence he threw himself, with his usual gusto and pertinacity, into the task of finding another and more plausible culprit. The investigation which he organized and superintended was as complete as had been that of the Greene murder case. No avenue which held the meagrest hope of results was overlooked; and the report he drew up would have given joy even to those meticulous criminologists of the University of Lausanne.

On the afternoon of the day of the murder he and his men had searched for the cloth that had been used to wipe up the blood in the archery-room; but no trace of it was found. Also, a thorough examination of the Dillard basement was made in the hope of finding other clues; but although Heath had put the task in the hands of experts, the result was negative. The only point brought to light was that the fibre rug near the door had recently been moved so as to cover the cleansed spot on the cement floor. This fact, however, merely substantiated the Sergeant's earlier observation.

The *post-mortem* report of Doctor Doremus lent color to the now officially accepted theory that Robin had been killed in the archery-room and then placed on the range. The autopsy showed that the blow on the back of his skull had been a particularly violent one and had been made with a heavy rounded instrument, resulting in a depressed fracture quite different from the fissured fracture caused by striking a flat surface. A search was instituted for the weapon with which the blow had been dealt; but no likely instrument was turned up.

Though Beedle and Pyne were questioned by Heath several times, nothing new was learned from them. Pyne insisted that he had been up-stairs the entire morning in Arnesson's room, except for a few brief absences to the linen-closet and the front door, and clung tenaciously to his denial that he had touched either the body or the bow when sent by Professor Dillard to find Sperling. The Sergeant, however, was not entirely satisfied with the man's testimony.

"That bleary-eyed old cormorant has got something up his sleeve," he told Markham disgustedly. "But it would take the rubber hose and the water cure to make him spill it."

A canvass of all the houses in 75th Street between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive was made in the hope of finding a tenant who had noticed some one entering or emerging from the Dillard wall gate during the forenoon. But nothing was gained by this tedious campaign. Pardee, it seemed, was the only resident within view of the Dillard house who had observed any one in the neighborhood that morning. In fact, after several days of arduous inquiries along this line the Sergeant realized that he would have to proceed without any outside or fortuitous assistance.

The various alibis of the seven persons whom Vance had tabulated in his notation for Markham, were gone into as thoroughly as circumstances would permit. It was obviously impossible to check them completely, for, in the main, they were based solely on the statements of the individuals involved. Moreover the investigation had to be made with the utmost care lest suspicion be aroused. The results of these inquiries were as follows:

1. Arnesson had been seen in the university library by various people, including an assistant librarian and two students. But the time covered by their evidence was neither consecutive nor specific as to the hour.

2. Belle Dillard had played several sets of tennis at the public courts at 119th Street and Riverside Drive, but because there had been more than four in her party she had twice relinquished her place to a friend; and none of the players could state positively that she had remained at the courts during these periods.

3. The time that Drukker departed from the archery-room was definitely determined by Sperling; but no one could be found who had seen him thereafter. He admitted he had met no one he knew in the park, but insisted he had stopped for a few minutes to play with some strange children.

4. Pardee had been alone in his study. His old cook and his Japanese valet had been in the rear of the house, and had not seen him until lunch time. His alibi therefore was purely a negative one.

5. Mrs. Drukker's word had to be accepted as to her whereabouts that morning, for no one had seen her between nine-thirty, when Drukker went to call on Arnesson, and one o'clock, when the cook brought up her luncheon.

6. Beedle's alibi was checked with fairly satisfactory completeness. Pardee had seen her leave the house at 10.35; and she was remembered by several of the hucksters at the Jefferson Market between eleven and twelve.

7. The fact that Sperling had taken the 11.40 train to Scarsdale was verified; therefore he would have had to leave the Dillard house at the time he stated—namely: 11.15. The determination of this point, however, was merely a matter of routine, for he had been practically eliminated from the case. But if, as Heath explained, it had been found that he had not taken the 11.40 train, he would have again become an important possibility.



Pursuing his investigations along more general lines, the Sergeant went into the histories and associations of the various persons involved. The task was not a difficult one. All were well known, and information concerning them was readily accessible; but not one item was unearthed that could be regarded as even remotely throwing any light on Robin's murder. Nothing transpired to give so much as a hint to the motive for the crime; and after a week's intensive inquiry and speculation the case was still cloaked in seemingly impenetrable mystery.

Sperling had not been released. The *prima facie* evidence against him, combined with his absurd confession, made impossible such a step on the part of the authorities. Markham, however, had held an unofficial conference with the attorneys whom Sperling's father had engaged to handle the case, and some sort of a "gentleman's agreement" had, I imagine, been reached; for although the State made no move to apply for an indictment (despite the fact that the Grand Jury was sitting at the time), the defense lawyers did not institute *habeas corpus* proceedings. All the indications pointed to the supposition that both Markham and Sperling's attorneys were waiting for the real culprit to be apprehended.

Markham had had several interviews with the members of the Dillard household, in a persistent effort to bring out some trivial point that might lead to a fruitful line of inquiry; and Pardee had been summoned to the District Attorney's office to make an affidavit as to what he had observed from his window on the morning of the tragedy. Mrs. Drukker had been interrogated again; but not only did she emphatically deny having looked out of her window that morning, but she scoffed at the idea that she had screamed.

Drukker, when re-questioned, modified somewhat his former testimony. He explained that he might have been mistaken as to the source of the scream, and suggested that it could have come from the street or from one of the court windows of the apartment house. In fact, he said, it was highly unlikely that his mother had uttered the scream, for when he went to her door a moment later she was humming an old German nursery song from Humperdinck's "Hänsel and Gretel." Markham, convinced that nothing further was to be learned from either him or Mrs. Drukker, finally concentrated on the Dillard house itself.

Arnesson attended the informal conferences held in Markham's office; but for all his voluble and cynical observations, he appeared to be as much at sea as the rest of us. Vance chaffed him good-naturedly about the mathematical formula that was to solve the case, but Arnesson insisted that a formula could not be worked out until all the factors of the theorem were available. He appeared to regard the entire affair as a kind of Juvenalian lark; and Markham on several occasions gave vent to his exasperation. He reproached Vance for having made Arnesson an unofficial confrère in the investigation, but Vance defended himself on the ground that sooner or later Arnesson would supply some piece of seemingly irrelevant information that could be used as an advantageous *point de départ*.

"His crimino-mathematical theory is of course rubbish," said Vance. "Psychology—not abstract science—will eventually reduce this conundrum to its elements. But we need material to go on, and Arnesson knows the inwardness of the Dillard home better than we can ever know it. He knows the Drukkers, and he knows Pardee; and it goes without saying that a man who has had the academic honors heaped on him that he has, possesses an unusually keen mind. As long as he gives his thought and attention to the case, there's the chance that he'll hit upon something of vital importance to us."

"You may be right," grumbled Markham. "But the man's derisive attitude gets on my nerves."

"Be more catholic," urged Vance. "Consider his ironies in relation to his scientific speculations. What could be more natural than that a man who projects his mind constantly into the vast interplanetary reaches, and deals with light-years and infinities and hyperphysical dimensions, should sniff derisively at the infinitesimals of this life? . . . Stout fella, Arnesson. Not homey and comfortable perhaps, but dashed interestin'."

Vance himself had taken the case with unwonted seriousness. His Menander translations had been definitely put aside. He became moody and waspish—a sure sign that his mind was busy with an absorbing problem. After dinner each night he went into his library and read for hours—not the classic and aesthetic volumes on which he generally spent his time, but such books as Bernard Hart's "The Psychology of Insanity," Freud's "Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten," Coriat's "Abnormal Psychology" and "Repressed Emotions," Lippo's "Komik und Humor," Daniel A. Huebsch's "The Murder Complex," Janet's "Les Obsessions et la Psychasthénie," Donath's "Über Arithmomanie," Riklin's "Wish Fulfillment and Fairy Tales," Leppman's "Die forensische Bedeutung der Zwangsvorstellungen," Kuno Fischer's "Über den Witz," Erich Wulffen's "Kriminalpsychologie," Hollenden's "The Insanity of Genius," and Groos's "Die Spiele des Menschen."

He spent hours going over the police reports. He called twice at the Dillards', and on one occasion visited Mrs. Drukker in company with Belle Dillard. He had a long discussion one night with Drukker and Arnesson on de Sitter's conception of physical space as a Lobatchewskian pseudosphere, his object being, I surmised, to acquaint himself with Drukker's mentality. He read Drukker's book, "World Lines in Multidimensional Continua"; and spent nearly an entire day studying Janowski's and Tarrasch's analyses of the Pardee gambit.

On Sunday—eight days after the murder of Robin—he said to me:

"Eheu, Van! This problem is unbelievably subtle. No ordin'ry investigation will ever probe it. It lies in a strange territ'ry of the brain; and its superficial childishness is its most terrible and bafflin' aspect. Nor is the perpetrator going to be content with a single coup. Cock Robin's death serves no definitive end. The perverted imagination that concocted this beastly crime is insatiable; and unless we can expose the abnormal psychological mechanism back of it there will be more grim jokes to contend with. . . ."

The very next morning his prognostication was verified. We went to Markham's office at eleven o'clock to hear Heath's report and to discuss further lines of action. Though nine days had passed since Robin had been found murdered, no progress had been made in the case, and the newspapers had grown bitter in their criticisms of the police and the District Attorney's office. It was therefore with considerable depression that Markham greeted us that Monday morning. Heath had not yet arrived; but when he came a few minutes later it was obvious that he, too, was discouraged.

"We run up against a brick wall, sir, every way we turn," he repined, when he had outlined the results of his men's activities. "There ain't a sign of a motive, and outside of Sperling there's nobody on the landscape that we can hang anything on. I'm coming to the conclusion that it was some stick-up man who ambled into the archery-room that morning and messed things up."

"Stick-up' men, Sergeant," countered Vance, "are deuced unimaginative, and they're without a sense of humor; whereas the johnny who sent Robin on the long, long trail had both imagination and humor. He wasn't content merely to kill Robin: he had to turn the act

into an insane joke. Then, lest the public wouldn't see the point, he wrote explanat'ry letters to the press.—Does that sound like the procedure of an itinerant thug?"

Heath smoked unhappily for several minutes without speaking, and at length turned a gaze of exasperated dismay upon Markham.

"There's no sense in anything that's breaking round this town lately," he complained. "Just this morning a guy named Sprigg was shot in Riverside Park, up near 84th Street. Money in his pocket—nothing taken. Just shot. Young fella—student at Columbia. Lived with his parents; no enemies. Went out to take his usual walk before going to class. Found dead half an hour later by a bricklayer." The Sergeant chewed viciously on his cigar. "Now we got that homicide to worry about; and we'll probably get hell from the newspapers if we don't clear it up *pronto*. And there's nothing—absolutely nothing—to go on."

"Still, Sergeant," said Vance consolingly, "shooting a man is an ordin'ry event. There are numerous commonplace reasons for that sort of crime. It's the scenic and dramatic appurtenances of Robin's murder that play havoc with all our processes of deduction. If only it wasn't a nursery affair—"

Suddenly he stopped speaking, and his eyelids drooped slightly. Leaning forward he very deliberately crushed out his cigarette.

"Did you say, Sergeant, that this chap's name was Sprigg?"

Heath nodded gloomily.

"And I say,"—despite Vance's effort, there was a note of eagerness in his tone—"what was his first name?"

Heath gave Vance a look of puzzled surprise; but after a brief pause he drew forth his battered notebook and rifled the pages.

"John Sprigg," he answered. "John E. Sprigg."

Vance took out another cigarette, and lighted it with great care.

"And tell me: was he shot with a .32?"

"Huh?" Heath's eyes rounded, and his chin shot forward. "Yes, a .32. . . ."

"And was he shot through the top of his head?"

The Sergeant sprang to his feet, and stared at Vance with ludicrous bewilderment. Slowly his head moved up and down.

"That's right.—But how in hell, sir?"

Vance held up a silencing hand. It was, however, the look on his face, rather than his gesture, that cut short the query.

"Oh, my precious aunt!" He rose like a man in a daze and gazed fixedly before him. Had I not known him so well I would have sworn he was frightened. Then going to the tall window behind Markham's desk he stood looking down on the gray stone walls of the Tombs.

"I can't credit it," he murmured. "It's too ghastly. . . . But of course it's so! . . ."

Markham's impatient voice sounded.

"What's all this mumbling about, Vance? Don't be so damned mysterious! How did you happen to know that Sprigg was shot through the crown with a .32? And what's the point, anyway?"

Vance turned and met Markham's eyes.

"Don't you see?" he asked softly. "It's the second act of this devilish parody! . . . Have you forgotten your 'Mother-Goose'?" And in a hushed voice that brought a sense of unutterable horror into that dingy old office he recited:

"There was a little man,  
And he had a little gun,  
And his bullets were made of lead, lead, lead;

He shot Johnny Sprig  
Through the middle of his wig,  
And knocked it right off of his head, head, head."

## 9. THE TENSOR FORMULA

(Monday, April 11; 11.30 a.m.)

Markham sat staring at Vance like a man hypnotized. Heath stood rigid, his mouth partly open, his cigar held a few inches from his lips. There was something almost comic in the Sergeant's attitude, and I had a nervous inclination to laugh; but for the moment my blood seemed frozen, and all muscular movement was impossible.

Markham was the first to speak. Jerking his head backward, he brought his hand down violently on the desk-top.

"What new lunacy of yours is this?" He was fighting desperately against Vance's dumbfounding suggestion. "I'm beginning to think the Robin case has affected your mind. Can't a man with the commonplace name of Sprigg be shot without your trying to turn it into some grotesque hocus-pocus?"

"Still, you must admit, Markham old dear," returned Vance mildly, "this particular Johnny Sprigg was shot with 'a little gun', through 'the middle of his wig', so to speak."

"What if he was?" A dull flush had crept into Markham's face. "Is that any reason for your going about babbling Mother-Goose rhymes?"

"Oh, I say! I never babble, don't y' know."

Vance had dropped into a chair facing the District Attorney's desk. "I may not be a thrillin' elocutionist; but really, now, I don't babble." He gave Heath an ingratiating smile. "Do I, Sergeant?"

But Heath had no opinion to express. He still held his astonished pose, though his eyes had now become mere slits in his broad, pugnacious face.

"Are you seriously suggesting—?" began Markham; but Vance interrupted him.

"Yes! I'm seriously suggesting that the person who killed Cock Robin with an arrow has vented his grim humor upon the hapless Sprigg. Coincidence is out of the question. Such repetitive parallels would knock the entire foundation out from all sanity and reason. 'Pon my soul, the world is mad enough; but such madness would dissipate all science and rational thinking. Sprigg's death is rather hideous; but it must be faced. And however much you may force yourself to protest against its incredible implications you'll eventually have to accept them."

Markham had risen, and was pacing nervously up and down.

"I'll grant there are inexplicable elements in this new crime." His combativeness had gone, and his tone had moderated. "But if we assume, even tentatively, that some maniac is at large reconstructing the rhymes of his nursery days, I can't see how it will help us. It would practically close all routine lines of investigation."

"I shouldn't say that, don't y' know." Vance was smoking meditatively. "I'm inclined to think that such an assumption would supply us with a definite basis of inquiry."

"Sure!" snapped Heath with ponderous sarcasm. "All we gotta do is to go out and find one bug among six million people. A cinch!"

"Don't let the fumes of discouragement overcome you, Sergeant. Our elusive jester is a rather distinctive entomological specimen. Moreover, we have certain clues as to his exact habitat. . . ."

Markham swung round. "What do you mean by that?"

"Merely that this second crime is related to the first not only psychologically, but geographically. Both murders were committed within a few blocks of each other,—our destructive demon at least has a weakness for the neighborhood in which the Dillard house is situated. Furthermore, the very factors of the two murders preclude the possibility of his having come from afar to give rein to his distorted humor in unfamiliar surroundings. As I learnedly pointed out to you, Robin was translated into the Beyond by some one who knew all the conditions obtaining at the Dillard house at the exact hour the grisly drama was performed; and surely it's obvious that this second crime could not have been so tidily staged had not the impresario been acquainted with Sprigg's ambulatory intentions this morning. Indeed, the entire mechanism of these weird playlets proves that the operator was intimately cognizant of all the circumstances surrounding his victims."

The heavy silence that followed was broken by Heath.

"If you're right, Mr. Vance, then that lets Sperling out." The Sergeant made even this qualified admission reluctantly; but it showed that Vance's argument had not been without its effect on him. He turned desperately to the District Attorney. "What do you think we'd better do, sir?"

Markham was still battling against the acceptance of Vance's theory, and he did not answer. Presently, however, he reseated himself at his desk and drummed with his fingers upon the blotter. Then, without looking up, he asked:

"Who's in charge of the Sprigg case, Sergeant?"

"Captain Pitts. The local men at the 68th-Street Station grabbed it first; but when the news was relayed to the Bureau, Pitts and a couple of our boys went up to look into it. Pitts got back just before I came over here. Says it's a washout. But Inspector Moran<sup>[15]</sup> told him to stay with it."

Markham pressed the buzzer beneath the edge of his desk, and Swacker, his youthful secretary, appeared at the swinging door that led to the clerical room between the District Attorney's private office and the main waiting-room.

"Get Inspector Moran on the wire," he ordered.

When the connection had been made he drew the telephone toward him and spoke for several minutes.

When he had replaced the receiver, he gave Heath a weary smile.

"You're now officially handling the Sprigg case, Sergeant. Captain Pitts will be here presently, and then we'll know where we stand." He began looking through a pile of papers before him. "I've got to be convinced," he added half-heartedly, "that Sprigg and Robin are tied up in the same sack."

Pitts, a short, stocky man, with a lean, hard face and a black tooth-brush moustache, arrived ten minutes later. He was, I learned afterwards, one of the most competent men in the Detective Division. His specialty was "white-collar" gangsters. He shook hands with Markham and gave Heath a companionable leer. When introduced to Vance and me he focussed suspicious eyes on us and bowed grudgingly. But as he was about to turn away his expression suddenly changed.

"Mr. Philo Vance, is it?" he asked.

"Alas! So it seems, Captain," Vance sighed.

Pitts grinned and, stepping forward, held out his hand.

"Glad to meet you, sir. Heard the Sergeant speak of you often."

"Mr. Vance is helping us unofficially with the Robin case, Captain," explained Markham; "and since this man Sprigg was killed in the same neighborhood we thought we'd like to hear your preliminary report on the affair." He took out a box of Corona *Perfectos*, and pushed it across the desk.

"You needn't put the request that way, sir." The Captain smiled, and selecting a cigar held it to his nose with a kind of voluptuous satisfaction. "The Inspector told me you had some ideas about this new case, and wanted to take it on. To tell you the truth, I'm glad to get rid of it." He sat down leisurely, and lighted his cigar. "What would you like to know, sir?"

"Let us have the whole story," said Markham.

Pitts settled himself comfortably.

"Well, I happened to be on hand when the case came through—a little after eight this morning—and I took a couple of the boys and beat it up-town. The local men were on the job, and an assistant Medical Examiner arrived the same time I did. . . ."

"Did you hear his report, Captain?" asked Vance.

"Sure. Sprigg was shot through the top of the head with a .32. No signs of a struggle—no bruises or anything. Nothing fancy. Just a straight shooting."

"Was he lying on his back when found?"

"That's right. Stretched out nice and pretty, right in the middle of the walk."

"And wasn't his skull fractured where he'd fallen on the asphalt?" The question was put negligently.

Pitts took his cigar from his mouth and gave Vance a sly look.

"I guess maybe you fellows over here do know something about this case." He nodded his head sagaciously. "Yes, the back of the guy's skull was all bashed in. He sure had a tough fall. But I guess he didn't feel it—not with that bullet in his brain. . . ."

"Speaking of the shot, Captain, didn't anything about it strike you as peculiar?"

"Well . . . yes," Pitts admitted, rolling his cigar meditatively between his thumb and forefinger. "The top of a guy's head isn't where I'd ordinarily look for a bullet-hole. And his hat wasn't touched,—it must have fallen off before he was potted. You might call those facts peculiar, Mr. Vance."

"Yes, Captain, they're dashed peculiar. . . . And I take it the pistol was held at close range."

"Not more'n a couple of inches away. The hair was singed round the hole." He made a broad gesture of inconsequence. "Still and all, the guy might have seen the other fellow draw the gun, and ducked forward, spilling his hat. That would account for his getting the shot at close range in the top of the head."

"Quite, quite. Except that, in that case, he wouldn't have fallen over back, but would have pitched forward on his face. . . . But go on with the story, Captain."

Pitts gave Vance a look of crafty agreement, and continued.

"The first thing I did was to go through the fellow's pockets. He had a good gold watch on him and about fifteen dollars in bills and silver. So it didn't look like a robbery—unless the guy that shot him got panicky and beat it. But that didn't seem likely, for there's never any one round that part of the park early in the morning; and the walk there dips under a stone bluff, so that the view is cut off. The bird that did the job certainly picked a swell place for it. . . . Anyhow, I left a couple of men to guard the body till the wagon came for it, and went up to Sprigg's house in 93rd Street,—I'd got his name and address from a couple of letters in his pocket. I found out he was a student at Columbia, living with his parents, and that it was his habit to take a walk in the park after breakfast. He left home this morning about half past seven. . . ."

"Ah! It was his habit to promenade in the park each morning," murmured Vance. "Most interestin'."

"Even so, that don't get us anywheres," returned Pitts. "Plenty of fellows take an early constitutional. And there was nothing unusual about Sprigg this morning. He wasn't worried about anything, his folks told me; and was cheerful enough when he said good-bye to 'em.—After that I hopped up to the university and made inquiries; talked to a couple of the students that knew him, and also to one of the instructors. Sprigg was a quiet sort of chap. Didn't make friends and kept pretty much to himself. Serious bird—always working at his studies. Stood high in his classes, and was never seen going around with Janes. Didn't like women, in fact. Wasn't what you'd call sociable. From all reports he was the last man to get in a mess of any kind. That's why I can't see anything special in his getting shot. It must have been an accident of some kind. Might have been taken for somebody else."

"And he was found at what time?"

"About quarter of eight. A bricklayer on the new 79th-Street dock was cutting across the embankment toward the railway tracks, and saw him. He notified one of the post officers on the Drive, who phoned in to the local station."

"And Sprigg left his home in 93rd Street at half past seven." Vance gazed at the ceiling meditatively. "Therefore he would have had just enough time to reach this point in the park before being killed. It looks as if some one who knew his habits was waiting for him. Neatness and dispatch, what? . . . It doesn't appear exactly fortuitous, does it, Markham?"

Ignoring the jibe Markham addressed Pitts.

"Was there nothing found that could possibly be used as a lead?"

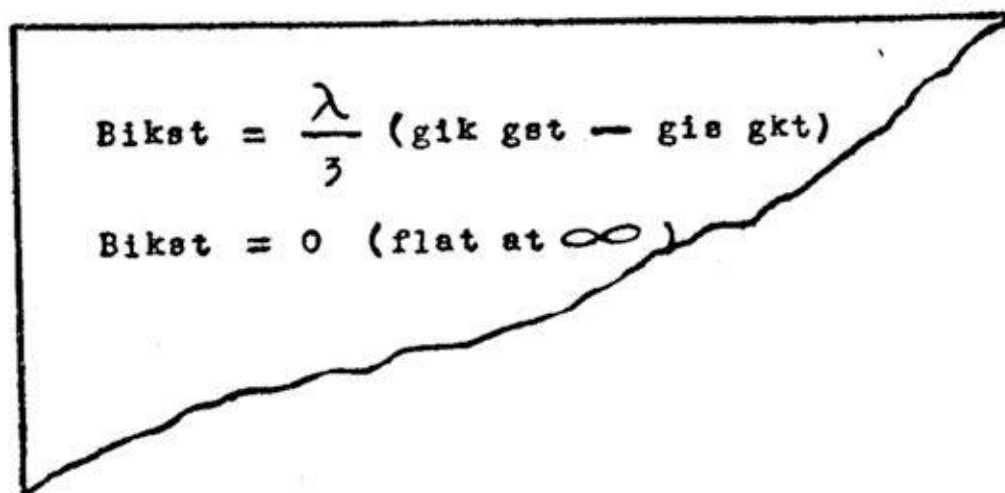
"No, sir. My men combed the spot pretty thoroughly, but nothing showed up."

"And in Sprigg's pockets—among his papers. . . .?"

"Not a thing. I've got all the stuff at the Bureau—a couple of ordinary letters, a few odds and ends of the usual kind. . . ." He paused

as if suddenly remembering something, and pulled out a dog-eared note-book. "There was this," he said unenthusiastically, handing a torn, triangular scrap of paper to Markham. "It was found under the fellow's body. It don't mean anything, but I stuck it in my pocket—force of habit."

The paper was not more than four inches long, and appeared to have been torn from the corner of an ordinary sheet of unruled stationery. It contained part of a typewritten mathematical formula, with the lambda, the equals and the infinity sign marked in with pencil. I reproduce the paper here, for, despite its seeming irrelevancy, it was to play a sinister and amazing part in the investigation of Sprigg's death.


$$\text{Bikst} = \frac{\lambda}{3} (\text{gik get} - \text{gie gkt})$$
$$\text{Bikst} = 0 \text{ (flat at } \infty \text{)}$$

Vance glanced only casually at the exhibit, but Markham held it in his hand frowning at it for several moments. He was about to make some comment when he caught Vance's eye; and, instead, he tossed the paper to the desk carelessly with a slight shrug.

"Is this everything you found?"

"That's all, sir."

Markham rose.

"We're very grateful to you, Captain. I don't know what we'll be able to make out of this Sprigg case, but we'll look into it." He pointed to the box of *Perfectos*. "Put a couple in your pocket before you go."

"Much obliged, sir." Pitts selected the cigars, and placing them tenderly in his waistcoat pocket, shook hands with all of us.

When he had gone Vance got up with alacrity, and bent over the scrap of paper on Markham's desk.

"My word!" He took out his monocle and studied the symbols for several moments. "Most allurin'. Now where have I seen that formula recently? . . . Ah! The Riemann-Christoffel tensor—of course! Drukker uses it in his book for determining the Gaussian curvature of spherical and homaloidal space. . . . But what was Sprigg doing with it? The formula is considerably beyond the college curricula. . . ." He held the paper up to the light. "It's the same stock as that on which the Bishop notes are written. And you probably observed that the typing is also similar."

Heath had stepped forward, and now scrutinized the paper.

"It's the same, all right." The fact seemed to nonplus him. "That's a link anyway between the two crimes."

Vance's eyes took on a puzzled look.

"A link—yes. But the presence of the formula under Sprigg's body appears as irrational as the murder itself. . . ."

Markham moved uneasily.

"You say it is a formula that Drukker uses in his book?"

"Yes. But the fact doesn't necessarily involve him. The tensor is known to all advanced mathematicians. It is one of the technical expressions used in non-Euclidean geometry; and though it was discovered by Riemann in connection with a concrete problem in physics,<sup>[16]</sup> it has now become of widespread importance in the mathematics of relativity. It's highly scientific in the abstract sense, and can have no direct bearing on Sprigg's murder." He sat down again. "Arnesson will be delighted with the find. He may be able to work out some astonishing conclusion from it."

"I see no reason," protested Markham, "to inform Arnesson of this new case. My idea would be to keep it under cover as much as possible."

"The Bishop won't let you, I fear," returned Vance.

Markham set his jaw.

"Good God!" he burst out. "What damnable sort of thing are we facing? I expect every minute to wake up and discover I've been living a nightmare."

"No such luck, sir," growled Heath. He took a resolute breath like a man preparing for combat. "What's on the cards? Where do we

go from here? I need action."

Markham appealed to Vance.

"You seem to have some idea about this affair. What's your suggestion? I frankly admit I'm floundering about in a black chaos."

Vance inhaled deeply on his cigarette. Then he leaned forward as if to give emphasis to his words.

"Markham old man, there's only one conclusion to be drawn. These two murders were engineered by the same brain: both sprang from the same grotesque impulse; and since the first of them was committed by some one intimately familiar with conditions inside the Dillard house, it follows that we must now look for a person who, in addition to that knowledge, had definite information that a man named John Sprigg was in the habit of taking a walk each morning in a certain part of Riverside Park. Having found such a person, we must check up on the points of time, place, opportunity, and possible motive. There's some interrelation between Sprigg and the Dillards. What it is I don't know. But our first move should be to find out. What better starting-point than the Dillard house itself?"

"We'll get some lunch first," said Markham wearily. "Then we'll run out there."

## 10. A REFUSAL OF AID

(Monday, April 11; 2 p.m.)

It was shortly after two o'clock when we reached the Dillard house. Pyne answered our ring; and if our visit caused him any surprise he succeeded admirably in hiding it. In the look he gave Heath, however, I detected a certain uneasiness; but when he spoke his voice had the flat, unctuous quality of the well-trained servant.

"Mr. Arneson has not returned from the university," he informed us.

"Mind-reading, I see," said Vance, "is not your *forte*, Pyne. We called to see you and Professor Dillard."

The man looked ill at ease; but before he could answer Miss Dillard appeared in the archway of the drawing-room.

"I thought I recognized your voice, Mr. Vance." She included us all in a smile of wistful welcome. "Please come in. . . . Lady Mae dropped in for a few minutes,—we're going riding together this afternoon," she explained, as we entered the room.

Mrs. Drukker stood by the centre-table, one bony hand on the back of the chair from which she had evidently just risen. There was fear in her eyes as she stared at us unblinkingly; and her lean features seemed almost contorted. She made no effort to speak, but stood rigidly as if waiting for some dread pronouncement, like a convicted prisoner at the bar about to receive sentence.

Belle Dillard's pleasant voice relieved the tenseness of the situation.

"I'll run up and tell uncle you're here."

She had no sooner quitted the room than Mrs. Drukker leaned over the table and said to Markham in a sepulchral, awe-stricken whisper: "I know why you've come! It's about that fine young man who was shot in the park this morning."

So amazing and unexpected were her words that Markham could make no immediate answer; and it was Vance who replied.

"You have heard of the tragedy, then, Mrs. Drukker? How could the news have come to you so soon?"

A look of canniness came into the woman's expression, giving her the appearance of an evil old witch.

"Every one is talking about it in the neighborhood," she answered evasively.

"Indeed? That's most unfortunate. But why do you assume we have come here to make inquiries about it?"

"Wasn't the young man's name Johnny Sprigg?" A faint, terrible smile accompanied the question.

"So it was. John E. Sprigg. Still, that does not explain his connection with the Dillards."

"Ah, but it does!" Her head moved up and down with a sort of horrible satisfaction. "It's a game—a child's game. First Cock Robin . . . then Johnny Sprig. Children must play—all healthy children must play." Her mood suddenly changed. A softness shone on her face, and her eyes grew sad.

"It's a rather diabolical game, don't you think, Mrs. Drukker?"

"And why not? Isn't life itself diabolical?"

"For some of us—yes." A curious sympathy informed Vance's words as he gazed at this strange tragic creature before us. "Tell me," he went on quickly, in an altered tone; "do you know who the Bishop is?"

"The Bishop?" She frowned perplexedly. "No, I don't know him. Is that another child's game?"

"Something of that kind, I imagine. At any rate, the Bishop is interested in Cock Robin and Johnny Sprig. In fact, he may be the person who is making up these fantastic games. And we're looking for him, Mrs. Drukker. We hope to learn the truth from him."

The woman shook her head vaguely. "I don't know him." Then she glared vindictively at Markham. "But it's not going to do you any good to try to find out who killed Cock Robin and shot Johnny Sprig through the middle of his wig. You'll never learn—never—*never*. . . ." Her voice had risen excitedly, and a fit of trembling seized her.

At this moment Belle Dillard re-entered the room, and going quickly to Mrs. Drukker put her arm about her.

"Come," she said soothingly; "we'll have a long drive in the country, Lady Mae." Reproachfully she turned to Markham, and said coldly: "Uncle wishes you to come to the library." With that she led Mrs. Drukker from the room and down the hall.

"Now that's a queer one, sir," commented Heath, who had stood looking on with bewildered amazement. "She had the dope on this Johnny-Sprig stuff all the time!"

Vance nodded.

"And our appearance here frightened her. Still, her mind is morbid and sensitive, Sergeant; and dwelling as she does constantly on her son's deformity and the early days when he was like other children, it's quite possible she merely hit accidentally upon the Mother-Goose significance of Robin's and Sprigg's death. . . . I wonder." He looked toward Markham. "There are strange undercurrents in this case—incredible and terrifying implications. It's like being lost in the Dovrë-Troll caverns of Ibsen's 'Peer Gynt,' where only monstrosities and abnormalities exist." He shrugged his shoulders, though I knew he had not wholly escaped the pall of horror cast on us by Mrs. Drukker's words. "Perhaps we can find a little solid footing with Professor Dillard."

The professor received us without enthusiasm and with but scant cordiality. His desk was littered with papers, and it was obvious that we had disturbed him in the midst of his labors.

"Why this unexpected visit, Markham?" he asked, after we had seated ourselves. "Have you something to report on Robin's death?" He marked a page in Weyl's "Space, Time and Matter" and, settling back reluctantly, regarded us with impatience. "I'm very busy working on a problem of Mach's mechanics. . . ."

"I regret," said Markham, "I have nothing to report on the Robin case. But there has been another murder in this neighborhood today, and we have reason to believe that it may be connected with Robin's death. What I wanted particularly to ask you, sir, is whether or not the name of John E. Sprigg is familiar to you."

Professor Dillard's expression of annoyance changed quickly.

"Is that the name of the man who was killed?" There was no longer any lack of interest in his attitude.

"Yes. A man named John E. Sprigg was shot in Riverside Park, near 84th Street, this morning shortly after half past seven."

The professor's eyes wandered to the mantelpiece, and he was silent for several moments. He seemed to be debating inwardly some point that troubled him.

"Yes," he said at length, "I—we—do know a young man of that name—though it's wholly unlikely he's the same one."

"Who is he?" Markham's voice was eagerly insistent.

Again the professor hesitated.

"The lad I have in mind is Arnesson's prize student in mathematics—what they'd call at Cambridge a senior wrangler."

"How do you happen to know him, sir?"

"Arnesson has brought him to the house here several times. Wanted me to see him and talk to him. Arnesson was quite proud of the boy; and I must admit he showed unusual talent."

"Then he was known to all the members of the household?"

"Yes. Belle met him, I think. And if by 'the household' you include Pyne and Beedle, I should say the name was probably familiar to them too."

Vance asked the next question.

"Did the Drukkers know Sprigg, Professor Dillard?"

"It's quite possible. Arnesson and Drukker see each other a great deal. . . . Come to think of it, I believe Drukker was here one night when Sprigg called."

"And Pardee: did he also know Sprigg?"

"As to that I couldn't say." The professor tapped impatiently on the arm of his chair, and turned back to Markham. "See here"—his voice held a worried petulance—"what's the point of these questions? What has our knowing a student named Sprigg to do with this morning's affair? Surely you don't mean to tell me that the man who was killed was Arnesson's pupil."

"I'm afraid it's true," said Markham.

There was a note of anxiety—of fear almost, I thought—in the professor's voice when he next spoke.

"Even so, what can that fact have to do with us? And how can you possibly connect his death with Robin's?"

"I admit we have nothing definite to go on," Markham told him. "But the purposelessness of both crimes—the total lack of any motive in either case—seems to give them a curious unity of aspect."

"You mean, of course, that you have found no motive. But if all crimes without apparent motive were assumed to be connected—"

"Also there are the elements of time and proximity in these two cases," Markham amplified.

"Is that the basis of your assumption?" The professor's manner was benevolently contemptuous. "You never were a good mathematician, Markham, but at least you should know that no hypothesis can be built on such a flimsy premise."

"Both names," interposed Vance, "—Cock Robin and Johnny Sprig—are the subjects of well-known nursery rhymes."

The old man stared at him with undisguised astonishment; and gradually an angry flush mounted to his face.

"Your humor, sir, is out of place."

"It is not *my* humor, alas!" replied Vance sadly. "The jest is the Bishop's."

"The Bishop?" Professor Dillard strove to curb his irritation. "Look here, Markham; I won't be played with. That's the second mention of a mysterious Bishop that's been made in this room; and I want to know the meaning of it. Even if a crank did write an insane letter to the papers in connection with Robin's death, what has this Bishop to do with Sprigg?"

"A paper was found beneath Sprigg's body bearing a mathematical formula typed on the same machine as the Bishop notes."

"What!" The professor bent forward. "The same machine, you say? And a mathematical formula? . . . What was the formula?"

Markham opened his pocketbook, and held out the triangular scrap of paper that Pitts had given him.

"The Riemann-Christoffel tensor. . . ." Professor Dillard sat for a long time gazing at the paper; then he handed it back to Markham. He seemed suddenly to have grown older; and there was a weary look in his eyes as he lifted them to us. "I don't see any light in this matter." His tone was one of hopeless resignation. "But perhaps you are right in following your present course.—What do you want of me?"

Markham was plainly puzzled by the other's altered attitude.

"I came to you primarily to ascertain if there was any link between Sprigg and this house; but, to be quite candid, I don't see how that link, now that I have it, fits into the chain.—I would, however, like your permission to question Pyne and Beedle in whatever way I think advisable."

"Ask them anything you like, Markham. You shall never be able to accuse me of having stood in your way." He glanced up appealingly. "But you will, I hope, advise me before you take any drastic steps."

"That I can promise you, sir," Markham rose. "But I fear we are a long way from any drastic measures at present." He held out his hand, and from his manner it was evident he had sensed some hidden anxiety in the old man and wanted to express his sympathy without voicing his feelings.

The professor walked with us to the door.

"I can't understand that typed tensor," he murmured, shaking his head. "But if there's anything I can do. . . ."

"There *is* something you can do for us, Professor Dillard," said Vance, pausing at the door. "On the morning Robin was killed we interviewed Mrs. Drukker—"

"Ah!"

"And though she denied having sat at her window during the forenoon there is a possibility she saw something happen on the archery range between eleven and twelve."

"She gave you that impression?" There was an undertone of suppressed interest in the professor's question.

"Only in a remote way. It was Drukker's statement that he had heard his mother scream, and her denial of having screamed, that led me to believe that she might have seen something she preferred to keep from us. And it occurred to me that you would probably have more influence with her than any one else, and that, if she did indeed witness anything, you might prevail upon her to speak."

"No!" Professor Dillard spoke almost harshly; but he immediately placed his hand on Markham's arm, and his tone changed. "There



are some things you must not ask me to do for you. If that poor harassed woman saw anything from her window that morning, you must find it out for yourself. I'll have no hand in torturing her; and I sincerely hope you'll not worry her either. There are other ways of finding out what you want to know." He looked straight into Markham's eyes. "*She* must not be the one to tell you. You yourself would be sorry afterwards."

"We must find out what we can," Markham answered resolutely but with kindness. "There's a fiend loose in this city, and I cannot stay my hand to save any one from suffering—however tragic that suffering may be. But I assure you I shall not unnecessarily torture any one."

"Have you thought," asked Professor Dillard quietly, "that the truth you seek may be more frightful even than the crimes themselves?"

"That I shall have to risk. But even if I knew it to be a fact, it would not deter me in any degree."

"Certainly not. But, Markham, I'm much older than you. I had gray hair when you were a lad struggling with your logs and antilogs; and when one gets old one learns the true proportions in the universe. The ratios all change. The estimates we once placed on things lose their meaning. That's why the old are more forgiving: they know that no man-made values are of any importance."

"But as long as we must live by human values," argued Markham, "it is my duty to uphold them. And I cannot, through any personal sense of sympathy, refuse to take any avenue that may lead to the truth."

"You are perhaps right," the professor sighed. "But you must not ask me to help you in this instance. If you learn the truth, be charitable. Be sure your culprit is accountable before you demand that he be sent to the electric chair. There are diseased minds as well as diseased bodies; and often the two go together."

When we had returned to the drawing-room Vance lighted a cigarette with more than his usual care.

"The professor," he said, "is not at all happy about Sprigg's death; and, though he won't admit it, that tensor formula convinced him that Sprigg and Robin belong to the same equation. But he was convinced dashed easily. Now, why?—Moreover, he didn't care to admit that Sprigg was known hereabouts. I don't say he has suspicions, but he has fears. . . . Deuced funny, his attitude. He apparently doesn't want to obstruct the legal justice which you uphold with such touchin' zeal, Markham; but he most decidedly doesn't care to abet your crusade where the Drukkers are concerned. I wonder what's back of his consideration for Mrs. Drukker. I shouldn't say, offhand, that the professor was of a sentimental nature.—And what was that platitude about a diseased mind and a diseased body? Sounded like a prospectus for a physical culture class, what? . . . Lackaday! Let's put a few questions to Pyne and kin."

Markham sat smoking moodily. I had rarely seen him so despondent.

"I don't see what we can hope for from them," he commented. "However, Sergeant, get Pyne in here."

When Heath had stepped out Vance gave Markham a waggish look.

"Really, y' know, you shouldn't repine. Let Terence console you:—*Nil tam difficile est, quin quaerendo investigari possit*. And, 'pon my soul, this is a difficult problem. . . ." He became suddenly sober. "We're dealing with unknown quantities here. We're pitted against some strange, abnormal force that doesn't operate according to the accepted laws of conduct. It's at once subtle—oh, no end subtle—and unfamiliar. But at least we know that it emanates from somewhere in the environs of this old house; and we must search in every psychological nook and cranny. Somewhere about us lies the invisible dragon. So don't be shocked at the questions I shall put to Pyne. We must look in the most unlikely places. . . ."

Footsteps were heard approaching the archway, and a moment later Heath entered with the old butler in tow.

## 11. THE STOLEN REVOLVER

(Monday, April 11; 3 p.m.)

"Sit down, Pyne," said Vance, with peremptory kindness. "We have permission from Professor Dillard to question you; and we shall expect answers to all our questions."

"Certainly, sir," the man answered. "I'm sure there's nothing that Professor Dillard has any reason to hide."

"Excellent." Vance lay back lazily. "To begin with, then; what hour was breakfast served here this morning?"

"At half past eight, sir—the same as always."

"Were all the members of the family present?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Who calls the family in the morning? And at what time?"

"I do myself—at half past seven. I knock on the doors—"

"And wait for an answer?"

"Yes, sir—always."

"Now think, Pyne: did every one answer you this morning?"

The man inclined his head emphatically. "Yes, sir."

"And no one was late to breakfast?"

"Every one was on time promptly—as usual, sir."

Vance leaned over and deposited his cigarette ash in the grate.

"Did you happen to see any one leaving the house or returning to it this morning before breakfast?"

The question was put casually, but I noted a slight quiver of surprise in the butler's thin drooping eyelids.

"No, sir."

"Even though you saw no one," pursued Vance, "would it not have been possible for some member of the household to have gone out and returned without your knowing it?"

Pyne for the first time during the interview appeared reluctant to answer.

"Well, sir, the fact is," he said uneasily, "any one might have used the front door this morning without my knowing it, as I was in the dining-room setting table. And, for the matter of that, any one might have used the archery-room door, for my daughter generally keeps the kitchen door closed while preparing breakfast."

Vance smoked thoughtfully a moment. Then in an even, matter-of-fact tone he asked: "Does any one in the house own a revolver?"

The man's eyes opened wide.

"Not that I—know of, sir," he answered haltingly.

"Ever hear of the Bishop, Pyne?"

"Oh, no, sir!" His face blanched. "You mean the man who wrote those letters to the papers?"

"I merely meant the Bishop," said Vance carelessly. "But tell me: have you heard anything about a man being killed in Riverside Park this morning?"

"Yes, sir. The janitor next door was telling me about it."

"You knew young Mr. Sprigg, didn't you?"

"I'd seen him at the house here once or twice, sir."

"Was he here recently?"

"Last week, sir. Thursday I think it was."

"Who else was here at the time?"

Pyne frowned as if trying to remember.

"Mr. Drukker, sir," he said after a moment. "And, as I recall, Mr. Pardee came too. They were together in Mr. Arnesson's room talking until late."

"In Mr. Arnesson's room, eh? Is it custom'ry for Mr. Arnesson to receive callers in his room?"

"No, sir," Pyne explained; "but the professor was working in the library, and Miss Dillard was with Mrs. Drukker in the drawing-room here."

Vance was silent a while.

"That will be all, Pyne," he said at length. "But please send Beedle to us at once."

Beedle came and stood before us with sullen aggressiveness. Vance questioned her along the same lines as he had taken with Pyne. Her answers, for the most part monosyllabic, added nothing to what had already been learned. But at the end of the brief interview Vance asked her if she had happened to look out of the kitchen window that morning before breakfast.

"I looked out once or twice," she answered defiantly. "Why shouldn't I look out?"

"Did you see any one on the archery range or in the rear yard?"

"No one but the professor and Mrs. Drukker."

"No strangers?" Vance strove to give the impression that the fact of Professor Dillard's and Mrs. Drukker's presence in the rear yard that morning was of no importance; but, by the slow, deliberate way in which he reached into his pocket for his cigarette-case, I knew the information had interested him keenly.

"No," the woman replied curtly.

"What time did you notice the professor and Mrs. Drukker?"

"Eight o'clock maybe."

"Were they talking together?"

"Yes.—Anyway," she emended, "they were walking up and down near the arbor."

"Is it custom'ry for them to stroll in the yard before breakfast?"

"Mrs. Drukker often comes out early and walks about the flower beds. And I guess the professor has a right to walk in his own yard any time he wants to."

"I'm not questioning his rights in the matter, Beedle," said Vance mildly. "I was merely wondering if he was in the habit of exercising those rights at such an early hour."

"Well, he was exercising 'em this morning."

Vance dismissed the woman and, rising, went to the front window. He was patently puzzled, and he stood several minutes looking down the street toward the river.

"Well, well," he murmured. "It's a nice day for communin' with nature. At eight this morning the lark was on the wing no doubt, and—who knows?—maybe there was a snail on the thorn. But—my word!—all wasn't right with the world."

Markham recognized the signs of Vance's perplexity.

"What do you make of it?" he asked. "I'm inclined to ignore Beedle's information."

"The trouble is, Markham, we can't afford to ignore anything in this case." Vance spoke softly, without turning. "I'll admit, though, that at present Beedle's revelation is meaningless. We've merely learned that two of the actors in our melodrama were up and about this morning shortly after Sprigg was snuffed out. The al-fresco rendezvous between the professor and Mrs. Drukker may, of course, be just one of your beloved coincidences. On the other hand, it may have some bearing on the old gentleman's sentimental attitude toward the lady. . . . I think we'll have to make a few discreet inquiries of him about his ante-prandial tryst, what? . . ."

He leaned suddenly toward the window.

"Ah! Here comes Arnesson. Looks a bit excited."

A few moments later there was the sound of a key in the front door, and Arnesson strode down the hall. When he saw us he came quickly into the drawing-room and, without a word of greeting, burst forth:

"What's this I hear about Sprigg being shot?" His eager eyes darted from one to the other of us. "I suppose you're here to ask me about him. Well, fire away." He threw a bulky brief-case on the centre-table and sat down abruptly on the edge of a straight chair. "There was a detective up at college this morning asking fool questions and acting like a burlesque sleuth in a comic opera. Very mysterious. . . . Murder—horrible murder! What did we know about a certain John E. Sprigg? And so on. . . . Scared a couple of juniors out of an entire semester's mental growth, and sent a harmless young English instructor into incipient nervous collapse. I didn't see the Dogberry myself—was in class at the time. But he had the cheek to ask what women Sprigg went around with. Sprigg and women! That boy didn't have a thought in his head but his work. Brightest man in senior math. Never missed a class. When he didn't answer roll-call this morning I knew something serious was the matter. At the lunch hour every one was buzzing about murder. . . . What's the answer?"

"We haven't the answer, Mr. Arnesson." Vance had been watching him closely. "However, we have another determinant for your formula. Johnny Sprig was shot this morning with a little gun through the middle of his wig."

Arnesson stared at Vance for some time without moving. Then he threw his head back and gave a sardonic laugh.

"Some more mumbo-jumbo, eh?—like the death of Cock Robin. . . . Read me the rune."

Vance gave him briefly the details of the crime.

"That's all we know at present," he concluded. "Could *you*, Mr. Arnesson, add any suggestive details?"

"Good Lord, no!" The man appeared genuinely amazed. "Not a thing. Sprigg . . . one of the keenest students I ever had. Something of a genius, by Gad! Too bad his parents named him John—plenty of other names. It sealed his doom apparently; got him shot through the head by a maniac. Obviously the same merry-andrew who did Robin in with an arrow." He rubbed his hands together,—the abstract philosopher in him had become uppermost. "A nice problem. You've told me everything? I'll need every known integer. Maybe I'll hit upon a new mathematical method in the process—like Kepler." He chuckled over the conceit. "Remember Kepler's 'Doliometrie'? It became the foundation of Infinitesimal Calculus. He arrived at it trying to construct a cask for his wine—a cask with a minimum amount of wood and a maximum cubical content. Maybe the formulas I work out to solve these crimes will open up new fields of scientific research. Ha! Robin and Sprigg will then become martyrs."

The man's humor, even taking into consideration his life's passion for abstractions, struck me as particularly distasteful. But Vance seemed not to mind his cold-blooded cynicism.

"There's one item," he said, "that I omitted to mention." Turning to Markham he asked for the piece of paper containing the formula, and handed it to Arnesson. "This was found beneath Sprigg's body."

The other scrutinized it superciliously.

"The Bishop, I see, is again involved. Same paper and typing as the notes. . . . But where did he get that Riemann-Christoffel tensor? Now, if it had been some other tensor—like the G-sigma-tau, for instance—any one interested in practical physics might have hit on it. But this one isn't common; and the statement of it here is arbitrary and unusual. Certain terms omitted. . . . *By George!* I was talking to Sprigg about this only the other night. He wrote it down, too."

"Pyne mentioned the fact that Sprigg had called here Thursday night," put in Vance.

"Oh, he did, did he? . . . Thursday—that's right. Pardee was here, too. And Drukker. We had a discussion on Gaussian co-ordinates. This tensor came up—Drukker mentioned it first, I think. And Pardee had some mad notion of applying the higher mathematics to chess. . . ."

"Do you play chess, by the by?" asked Vance.

"Used to. But no more. A beautiful game, though—if it wasn't for the players. Queer crabs, chess players."

"Did you ever make any study of the Pardee gambit?" (At the time I could not understand the seeming irrelevance of Vance's questions; and I noticed that Markham too was beginning to show signs of impatience.)

"Poor old Pardee!" Arnesson smiled unfeelingly. "Not a bad elementary mathematician. Should have been a high-school teacher."

Too much money, though. Took to chess. I told him his gambit was unscientific. Even showed him how it could be beaten. But he couldn't see it. Then Capablanca, Vidman and Tartakower came along and knocked it into a cocked hat. Just as I told him they would. Wrecked his life. He's been fussing around with another gambit for years, but can't make it cohere. Reads Weyl, Silberstein, Eddington and Mach in the hope of getting inspiration."

"That's most interestin'." Vance extended his match-case to Arnesson, who had been filling his pipe as he talked. "Was Pardee well acquainted with Sprigg?"

"Oh, no. Met him here twice—that's all. Pardee knows Drukker well, though. Always asking him about potentials and scalars and vectors. Hopes to hit on something that'll revolutionize chess."

"Was he interested in the Riemann-Christoffel tensor when you discussed it the other night?"

"Can't say that he was. A bit out of his realm. You can't hitch the curvature of space-time to a chess-board."

"What do you make of this formula being found on Sprigg?"

"Don't make anything of it. If it had been in Sprigg's handwriting I'd say it dropped out of his pocket. But who'd go to the trouble of trying to type a mathematical formula?"

"The Bishop apparently."

Arnesson took his pipe from his mouth and grinned.

"Bishop X. We'll have to find him. He's full of whimsies. Perverted sense of values."

"Obviously." Vance spoke languidly. "And, by the by, I almost forgot to ask you: does the Dillard house harbor any revolvers?"

"Oho!" Arnesson chuckled with unrestrained delight. "Sits the wind there? . . . Sorry to disappoint you. No revolvers. No sliding doors. No secret stairways. All open and above-board."

Vance sighed theatrically.

"Sad . . . sad! And I had such a comfortin' theory."

Belle Dillard had come silently down the hall, and now stood in the archway. She had evidently heard Vance's question and Arnesson's answer.

"But there *are* two revolvers in the house, Sigurd," she declared. "Don't you remember the old revolvers I used for target practice in the country?"

"Thought you'd thrown 'em away long ago." Arnesson rose and drew up a chair for her. "I told you when we returned from Hopatcong that summer that only burglars and bandits are allowed to own guns in this benevolent State. . . ."

"But I didn't believe you," the girl protested. "I never know when you're jesting and when you're serious."

"And you kept them, Miss Dillard?" came Vance's quiet voice.

"Why—yes." She shot an apprehensive glance at Heath. "Shouldn't I have done so?"

"I believe it was technically illegal. However"—Vance smiled reassuringly—"I don't think the Sergeant will invoke the Sullivan law against you.—Where are they now?"

"Down-stairs—in the archery-room. They're in one of the drawers of the tool-chest."

Vance rose.

"Would you be so good, Miss Dillard, as to show us where you put them? I have a gnawin' curiosity to see 'em, don't y' know."

The girl hesitated and looked to Arnesson for guidance. When he nodded she turned without a word and led the way to the archery-room.

"They're in that chest by the window," she said.

Going to it she drew out a small deep drawer in one end. At the rear, beneath a mass of odds and ends, was a .38 Colt automatic.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "There's only one here. The other is gone."

"It was a smaller pistol, wasn't it?" asked Vance.

"Yes. . . ."

"A .32?"

The girl nodded and turned bewildered eyes on Arnesson.

"Well, it's gone, Belle," he told her, with a shrug. "Can't be helped. Probably one of your young archers took it to blow out his brains with after he'd fozzled at shooting arrows up the alley."

"Do be serious, Sigurd," she pleaded, a little frightened. "Where could it have gone?"

"Ha! Another dark mystery," scoffed Arnesson. "Strange disappearance of a discarded .32."

Seeing the girl's uneasiness Vance changed the subject.

"Perhaps, Miss Dillard, you'd be good enough to take us to Mrs. Drukker. There are one or two matters we want to speak to her about; and I assume, by your presence here, that the ride in the country has been postponed."

A shadow of distress passed over the girl's face.

"Oh, you mustn't bother her to-day." Her tone was tragically appealing. "Lady Mae is very ill. I can't understand it—she seemed so well when I was talking with her up-stairs. But after she'd seen you and Mr. Markham she changed: she became weak and . . . oh, something terrible seemed to be preying on her mind. After I'd put her to bed she kept repeating in an awful whisper: 'Johnny Sprig, Johnny Sprig.' . . . I phoned her doctor and he came right over. He said she had to be kept very quiet. . . ."

"It's of no importance," Vance assured her. "Of course we shall wait.—Who is her doctor, Miss Dillard?"

"Whitney Barstead. He's attended her as long as I can remember."

"A good man," nodded Vance. "There's no better neurologist in the country. We'll do nothing without his permission."

Miss Dillard gave him a grateful look. Then she excused herself.

When we were again in the drawing-room Arnesson stationed himself before the fireplace and regarded Vance satirically.

"Johnny Sprig, Johnny Sprig.' Ha! Lady Mae got the idea at once. She may be cracked, but certain lobes of her brain are over-active. Unaccountable piece of machinery, the human brain. Some of the greatest mental computers of Europe are morons. And I know a couple of chess masters who need nurses to dress and feed 'em."

Vance appeared not to hear him. He had stopped by a small cabinet near the archway and was apparently absorbed in a set of jade carvings of ancient Chinese origin.

"That elephant doesn't belong there," he remarked casually, pointing to a tiny figure in the collection. "It's a *bunjinga*—decadent, don't y' know. Clever, but not authentic. Probably a copy of a Manchu piece." He stifled a yawn and turned toward Markham. "I say, old man, there's nothing more we can do. Suppose we toddle. We might have a brief word with the professor before we go, though. . . . Mind waiting for us here, Mr. Arnesson?"

Arnesson lifted his eyebrows in some surprise, but immediately crinkled his face into a disdainful smile.

"Oh, no. Go ahead." And he began refilling his pipe.

Professor Dillard was much annoyed at our second intrusion.

"We've just learned," said Markham, "that you were speaking to Mrs. Drukker before breakfast this morning. . . ."

The muscles of Professor Dillard's cheeks worked angrily.

"Is it any concern of the District Attorney's office if I speak to a neighbor in my garden?"

"Certainly not, sir. But I am in the midst of an investigation which seriously concerns your house, and I assumed that I had the privilege of seeking help from you."

The old man spluttered a moment.

"Very well," he acquiesced irritably. "I saw no one except Mrs. Drukker—if that's what you're after."

Vance projected himself into the conversation. "That's not what we came to you for, Professor Dillard. We wanted merely to ask you if Mrs. Drukker gave you the impression this morning that she suspected what had taken place earlier in Riverside Park."

The professor was about to make a sharp retort, but checked himself. After a moment he said simply:

"No, she gave me no such impression."

"Did she appear in any way uneasy or, let us say, excited?"

"She did not!" Professor Dillard rose and faced Markham. "I understand perfectly what you are driving at and I won't have it. I've told you, Markham, that I'll take no part in spying or tale-bearing where this unhappy woman is concerned. That's all I have to say to you." He turned back to his desk. "I regret I'm very busy to-day."

We descended to the main floor and made our adieu to Arnesson. He waved his hand to us cordially as we went out; but his smile held something of contemptuous patronage, as if he had witnessed, and was gloating over, the rebuff we had just received.

When we were on the sidewalk Vance paused to light a fresh cigarette.

"Now for a brief *causerie* with the sad and gentlemanly Mr. Pardee. I don't know what he can tell us, but I have a yearnin' to commune with him."

Pardee, however, was not at home. His Japanese servant informed us that his master was most likely at the Manhattan Chess Club.

"To-morrow will be time enough," Vance said to Markham, as we turned away from the house. "I'll get in touch with Doctor Barstead in the morning and try to arrange to see Mrs. Drukker. We'll include Pardee in the same pilgrimage."

"I sure hope," grumbled Heath, "that we learn more to-morrow than we did to-day."

"You overlook one or two consolin' windfalls, Sergeant," returned Vance. "We've found out that every one connected with the Dillard house was acquainted with Sprigg and could easily have known of his early morning walks along the Hudson. We've also learned that the professor and Mrs. Drukker were ramblin' in the garden at eight o'clock this morning. And we discovered that a .32 revolver has disappeared from the archery-room.—Not an embarrassment of riches, but something—oh, decidedly something."

As we drove down-town Markham roused himself from gloomy abstraction, and looked apprehensively at Vance.

"I'm almost afraid to go on with this case. It's becoming too sinister. And if the newspapers get hold of that Johnny-Sprig nursery rhyme and connect the two murders, I hate to think of the gaudy sensation that'll follow."

"I fear you're in for it, old man," sighed Vance. "I'm not a bit psychic—never had dreams that came true, and don't know what a telepathic seizure feels like—but something tells me that the Bishop is going to acquaint the press with that bit of Mother-Goose verse. The point of his new joke is even obscurer than his Cock-Robin comedy. He'll see to it that no one misses it. Even a grim humorist who uses corpses for his cap-and-bells must have his audience. Therein lies the one weakness of his abominable crimes. It's about our only hope, Markham."

"I'll give Quinan a ring," said Heath, "and find out if anything has been received."

But the Sergeant was saved the trouble. The *World* reporter was waiting for us at the District Attorney's office, and Swacker ushered him in at once.

"Howdy, Mr. Markham." There was a breezy impudence in Quinan's manner, but withal he showed signs of nervous excitement. "I've got something here for Sergeant Heath. They told me at Headquarters that he was handling the Sprigg case, and said he was parleying with you. So I blew over."

He reached in his pocket and, taking out a sheet of paper, handed it to Heath. "I'm being mighty high, wide and handsome with you, Sergeant, and I expect a little inside stuff by way of reciprocity. . . . Cast your eye on that document. Just received by America's foremost family journal."

It was a plain piece of typewriting paper, and it contained the Mother-Goose melody of Johnny Sprig, typed in élite characters with a pale-blue ribbon. In the lower right-hand corner was the signature in capitals: THE BISHOP.

"And here's the envelope, Sergeant." Quinan again dug down into his pocket.

The official cancellation bore the hour of 9 a.m., and, like the first note, it had been mailed in the district of Post Office Station "N."

## 12. A MIDNIGHT CALL

(Tuesday, April 12; 10 a.m.)

The following morning the front pages of the metropolitan press carried sensational stories which surpassed Markham's worst fears. In addition to the *World* two other leading morning journals had received notes similar to the one shown us by Quinan; and the excitement created by their publication was tremendous. The entire city was thrown into a state of apprehension and fear; and though half-hearted attempts were made here and there to dismiss the maniacal aspect of the crimes on the ground of coincidence, and to explain away the Bishop notes as the work of a practical joker, all the newspapers and the great majority of the public were thoroughly convinced that a new and terrible type of killer was preying upon the community.[17]

Markham and Heath were beset by reporters, but a veil of secrecy was sedulously maintained. No intimation was given that there was any reason to believe that the solution lay close to the Dillard household; and no mention was made of the missing .32 revolver. Sperling's status was sympathetically dealt with by the press. The general attitude now was that the young man had been the unfortunate victim of circumstances; and all criticism of Markham's procrastination in prosecuting him was instantly dropped.

On the day that Sprigg was shot Markham called a conference at the Stuyvesant Club. Both Inspector Moran of the Detective Bureau and Chief Inspector O'Brien[18] attended. The two murders were gone over in detail, and Vance outlined his reasons for believing that the answer to the problem would eventually be found either in the Dillard house or in some quarter directly connected with it.

"We are now in touch," he ended, "with every person who could possibly have had sufficient knowledge of the conditions surrounding the two victims to perpetrate the crimes successfully; and our only course is to concentrate on these persons."

Inspector Moran was inclined to agree. "Except," he qualified, "that none of the *dramatis personae* you have mentioned strikes me as a bloodthirsty maniac."

"The murderer is not a maniac in the conventional sense," returned Vance. "He's probably normal on all other points. His brain, in fact, may be brilliant except for this one lesion—too brilliant, I should say. He has lost all sense of proportion through sheer exalted speculation."

"But does even a perverted superman indulge in such hideous jests without a motive?" asked the Inspector.

"Ah, but there is a motive. Some tremendous impetus is back of the monstrous conception of these murders—an impetus which, in its operative results, takes the form of satanic humor."

O'Brien took no part in this discussion. Though impressed by its vague implications, he became nettled by its impractical character.

"That sort of talk," he rumbled ponderously, "is all right for newspaper editorials, but it ain't workable." He shook his fat black cigar at Markham. "What we gotta do is to run down every lead and get some kind of legal evidence."

It was finally decided that the Bishop notes were to be turned over to an expert analyst, and an effort made to trace both the typewriter and the stationery. A systematic search was to be instituted for witnesses who might have seen some one in Riverside Park between seven and eight that morning. Sprigg's habits and associations were to be the subject of a careful report; and a man was to be detailed to question the mail collector of the district in the hope that, when taking the letters from the various boxes, he had noticed the envelopes addressed to the papers and could say in which box they had actually been posted.

Various other purely routine activities were outlined; and Moran suggested that for a time three men be stationed day and night in the vicinity of the murders to watch for any possible developments or for suspicious actions on the part of those involved. The Police Department and the District Attorney's office were to work hand in hand. Markham, of course, in tacit agreement with Heath, assumed command.

"I have already interviewed the members of the Dillard and Drukker homes in connection with the Robin murder," Markham explained to Moran and O'Brien: "and I've talked the Sprigg case over with Professor Dillard and Arnesson. To-morrow I shall see Pardee and the Drukkers."

The next morning Markham, accompanied by Heath, called for Vance a little before ten o'clock.

"This thing can't go on," he declared, after the meagrest of greetings. "If any one knows anything, we've got to find it out. I'm going to put the screws on—and damn the consequences!"

"By all means, chivy 'em." Vance himself appeared despondent. "I doubt if it'll help though. No ordin'ry procedure is going to solve this riddle. However, I've phoned Barstead. He says we may talk with Mrs. Drukker this morning. But I've arranged to see him first. I have a hankerin' to know more of the Drukker pathology. Hunchbacks, d' ye see, are not usually produced by falls."

We drove at once to the doctor's home and were received without delay. Doctor Barstead was a large comfortable man, whose pleasantness of manner impressed me as being the result of schooled effort.

Vance went straight to the point.

"We have reason to believe, doctor, that Mrs. Drukker and perhaps her son are indirectly concerned in the recent death of Mr. Robin at the Dillard house; and before we question either of them further we should like to have you tell us—as far as professional etiquette will permit—something of the neurological situation we are facing."

"Please be more explicit, sir." Doctor Barstead spoke with defensive aloofness.

"I am told," Vance continued, "that Mrs. Drukker regards herself as responsible for her son's kyphosis; but it is my understanding that such malformations as his do not ordinarily result from mere physical injuries."

Doctor Barstead nodded his head slowly.

"That is quite true. Compression paraplegia of the spinal cord may follow a dislocation or injury, but the lesion thus produced is of the focal transverse type. Osteitis or caries of the vertebrae—what we commonly call Pott's disease—is usually of tubercular origin; and this tuberculosis of the spine occurs most frequently in children. Often it exists at birth. True, an injury may precede the onset by

determining the site of infection or exciting a latent focus; and this fact no doubt gives rise to the belief that the injury itself produces the disease. But both Schmaus and Horsley have exposed the true pathological anatomy of spinal caries. Drukker's deformity is unquestionably of tubercular origin. Even his curvature is of the marked rounded type, denoting an extensive involvement of vertebrae; and there is no scoliosis whatever. Moreover, he has all the local symptoms of osteitis."

"You have, of course, explained the situation to Mrs. Drukker."

"On many occasions. But I have had no success. The fact is, a terrific instinct of perverted martyrdom bids her cling to the notion that she is responsible for her son's condition. This erroneous idea has become an *idée fixe* with her. It constitutes her entire mental outlook, and gives meaning to the life of service and sacrifice she had lived for forty years."

"To what extent," asked Vance, "would you say this psychoneurosis has affected her mind?"

"That would be difficult to say; and it is not a question I would care to discuss. I may say this, however: she is undoubtedly morbid; and her values have become distorted. At times there have been—I tell you this in strictest confidence—signs of marked hallucinosis centring upon her son. His welfare has become an obsession with her. There is practically nothing she would not do for him."

"We appreciate your confidence, doctor. . . . And would it not be logical to assume that her upset condition yesterday resulted from some fear or shock connected with his welfare?"

"Undoubtedly. She has no emotional or mental life outside of him. But whether her temporary collapse was due to a real or imaginary fear, one cannot say. She has lived too long on the borderland between reality and fantasy."

There was a short silence, and then Vance asked:

"As to Drukker himself: would you regard him as wholly responsible for his acts?"

"Since he is my patient," returned Doctor Barstead, with frigid reproach, "and since I have taken no steps to sequester him, I consider your question an impertinence."

Markham leaned over and spoke peremptorily.

"We haven't time to mince words, doctor. We're investigating a series of atrocious murders. Mr. Drukker is involved in those murders—to what extent we don't know. But it is our duty to find out."

The doctor's first impulse was to combat Markham; but he evidently thought better of it, for when he answered, it was in an indulgently matter-of-fact voice.

"I have no reason, sir, to withhold any information from you. But to question Mr. Drukker's responsibility is to impute negligence to me in the matter of public safety. Perhaps, however, I misunderstand this gentleman's question." He studied Vance for a brief moment. "There are, of course, degrees of responsibility," he went on, in a professional tone. "Mr. Drukker's mind is overdeveloped, as is often the case with kyphotic victims. All mental processes are turned inward, as it were; and the lack of normal physical reactions often tends to produce inhibitions and aberrancies. But I've noted no indications of this condition in Mr. Drukker. He is excitable and prone to hysteria; but, then, psychokinesia is a common accompaniment of his disease."

"What form do his recreations take?" Vance was politely casual.

Doctor Barstead thought a moment.

"Children's games, I should say. Such recreations are not unusual with cripples. In Mr. Drukker's case it is what we might term a waking wish-fulfilment. Having had no normal childhood, he grasps at whatever will give him a sense of youthful rehabilitation. His juvenile activities tend to balance the monotony of his purely mental life."

"What is Mrs. Drukker's attitude toward his instinct for play?"

"She very correctly encourages it. I've often seen her leaning over the wall above the playground in Riverside Park watching him. And she always presides at the children's parties and dinners which he holds in his home."

We took our leave a few minutes later. As we turned into 76th Street, Heath, as if arousing himself from a bad dream, drew a deep breath and sat upright in the car.

"Did you get that about the kid games?" he asked, in an awe-stricken voice. "Good God, Mr. Vance! What's this case going to turn into?"

A curious sadness was in Vance's eyes as he gazed ahead toward the misty Jersey cliffs across the river.

Our ring at the Drukker house was answered by a portly German woman, who planted herself stolidly before us and informed us suspiciously that Mr. Drukker was too busy to see any one.

"You'd better tell him, however," said Vance, "that the District Attorney wishes to speak to him immediately."

His words produced a strange effect on the woman. Her hands went to her face, and her massive bosom rose and fell convulsively. Then, as though panic-stricken, she turned and ascended the stairs. We heard her knock on a door; there was a sound of voices; and a few moments later she came back to inform us that Mr. Drukker would see us in his study.

As we passed the woman Vance suddenly turned and, fixing his eyes on her ominously, asked:

"What time did Mr. Drukker get up yesterday morning?"

"I—don't know," she stammered, thoroughly frightened. "*Ja, ja*, I know. At nine o'clock—like always."

Vance nodded and moved on.

Drukker received us standing by a large table covered with books and sheets of manuscript. He bowed sombrely, but did not ask us to have chairs.

Vance studied him a moment as if trying to read the secret that lay behind his restless, hollow eyes.

"Mr. Drukker," he began, "it is not our desire to cause you unnecessary trouble; but we have learned that you were acquainted with Mr. John Sprigg, who, as you probably know, was shot near here yesterday morning. Now, could you suggest any reason that any one might have had for killing him?"

Drukker drew himself up. Despite his effort at self-control there was a slight tremor in his voice as he answered.

"I knew Mr. Sprigg but slightly. I can suggest nothing whatever in regard to his death. . . ."

"There was found on his body a piece of paper bearing the Riemann-Christoffel tensor which you introduce in your book in the chapter on the finiteness of physical space." As Vance spoke he moved one of the typewritten sheets of papers on the table toward him,

and glanced at it casually.

Drukker seemed not to notice the action. The information contained in Vance's words had rivetted his attention.

"I can't understand it," he said vaguely. "May I see the notation?"

Markham complied at once with his request. After studying the paper a moment Drukker handed it back; and his little eyes narrowed malevolently.

"Have you asked Arnesson about this? He was discussing this very subject with Sprigg last week."

"Oh, yes," Vance told him carelessly. Mr. Arnesson recalled the incident, but couldn't throw any light on it. We thought perhaps you could succeed where he had failed."

"I regret I can't accommodate you." There was the suggestion of a sneer in Drukker's reply. "Any one might use the tensor. Weyl's and Einstein's works are full of it. It isn't copyrighted. . . ." He leaned over a revolving book case and drew out a thin octavo pamphlet. Here it is in Minkowski's 'Relativitätsprinzip,' only with different symbols—a T for the B, for instance; and Greek letters for the indices." He reached for another volume. "Poincaré also uses it in his 'Hypothèses Cosmogoniques,' with still other symbolic equivalents." He tossed the books on the table contemptuously. "Why come to me about it?"

"It wasn't the tensor formula alone that led our roving footsteps to your door," said Vance lightly. "For instance, we have reason to believe that Sprigg's death is connected with Robin's murder. . . ."

Drukker's long hands caught the edge of the table, and he leaned forward, his eyes glittering excitedly.

"Connected—Sprigg and Robin? You don't believe that newspaper talk, do you? . . . It's a damned lie!" His face had begun to twitch, and his voice rose shrilly. "It's insane nonsense. . . . There's no proof, I tell you—not a shred of proof!"

"Cock Robin and Johnny Sprig, don't y' know," came Vance's soft insistent voice.

"That rot! That crazy rot!—Oh, good God! Has the world gone mad! . . ." He swayed back and forth as he beat on the table with one hand, sending the papers flying in all directions.

Vance looked at him with mild surprise.

"Aren't you acquainted with the Bishop, Mr. Drukker?"

The man stopped swaying and, steadying himself, stared at Vance with terrible intensity. His mouth was drawn back at the corners, resembling the transverse laugh of progressive muscular dystrophy.

"You, too! You've gone mad!" He swept his eyes over us. "You damned, unutterable fools! There's no such person as the Bishop! There wasn't any such person as Cock Robin or Johnny Sprig. And here you are—men grown—trying to frighten me—*me*, a mathematician—with nursery tales! . . ." He began to laugh hysterically.

Vance went to him quickly, and taking his arm led him to his chair. Slowly his laughter died away, and he waved his hand wearily.

"Too bad Robin and Sprigg were killed." His tone was heavy and colorless. "But children are the only persons that matter. . . . You'll probably find the murderer. If you don't, maybe I'll help you. But don't let your imaginations run away with you. Keep to facts . . . facts. . . ."

The man was exhausted, and we left him.

"He's scared, Markham—deuced scared," observed Vance, when we were again in the hall. "I could bear to know what is hidden in that shrewd warped mind of his."

He led the way down the hall to Mrs. Drukker's door.

"This method of visiting a lady doesn't accord with the best social usage. Really, y' know, Markham, I wasn't born to be a policeman. I abhor snooping."

Our knock was answered by a feeble voice. Mrs. Drukker, paler than usual, was lying back on her chaise-longue by the window. Her white prehensile hands lay along the arms of the chair, slightly flexed; and more than ever she recalled to my mind the pictures I had seen of the ravening Harpies that tormented Phineus in the story of the Argonauts.

Before we could speak she said in a strained terrified voice: "I knew you would come—I knew you were not through torturing me. . . ."

"To torture you, Mrs. Drukker," returned Vance softly, "is the furthest thing from our thoughts. We merely want your help."

Vance's manner appeared to alleviate her terror somewhat, and she studied him calculatingly.

"If only I could help you!" she muttered. "But there's nothing to be done—nothing. . . ."

"You might tell us what you saw from your window on the day of Mr. Robin's death," Vance suggested kindly.

"No—no!" Her eyes stared horribly. "I saw nothing—I wasn't near the window that morning. You may kill me, but my dying words would be No—no—*no*!"

Vance did not press the point.

"Beedle tells us," he went on, "that you often rise early and walk in the garden."

"Oh, yes." The words came with a sigh of relief. "I don't sleep well in the mornings. I often wake up with dull boring pains in my spine, and the muscles of my back feel rigid and sore. So I get up and walk in the yard whenever the weather is mild enough."

"Beedle saw you in the garden yesterday morning."

The woman nodded absently.

"And she also saw Professor Dillard with you."

Again she nodded, but immediately afterward she shot Vance a combative inquisitive glance.

"He sometimes joins me," she hastened to explain. "He feels sorry for me, and he admires Adolph; he thinks he's a great genius. And he *is* a genius! He'd be a great man—as great as Professor Dillard—if it hadn't been for his illness. . . . And it was all my fault. I let him fall when he was a baby. . . ." A dry sob shook her emaciated body, and her fingers worked spasmodically.

After a moment Vance asked: "What did you and Professor Dillard talk about in the garden yesterday?"

A sudden wiliness crept into the woman's manner.

"About Adolph mostly," she said, with a too obvious attempt at unconcern.

"Did you see any one else in the yard or on the archery range?" Vance's indolent eyes were on the woman.



"No!" Again a sense of fear pervaded her. "But somebody else was there, wasn't there?—somebody who didn't wish to be seen." She nodded her head eagerly. "Yes! Some one else was there—and they thought I saw them. . . . But I didn't! Oh, merciful God, I didn't! . . ." She covered her face with her hands, and her body shook convulsively. "If only I had seen them! If only I knew! But it wasn't Adolph—it wasn't my little boy. He was asleep—thank God, he was asleep!"

Vance went close to the woman.

"Why do you thank God that it wasn't your son?" he asked gently.

She looked up with some amazement.

"Why, don't you remember? A little man shot Johnny Sprig with a little gun yesterday morning—the same little man that killed Cock Robin with a bow and arrow. It's all a horrible game—and I'm *afraid*. . . . But I mustn't tell—I *can't* tell. The little man might do something awful. Maybe"—her voice became dull with horror—"maybe he has some insane idea that I'm *the old woman who lived in a shoe!* . . ."

"Come, come, Mrs. Drukker." Vance forced a consoling smile. "Such talk is nonsense. You've let these matters prey on your mind. There's a perfectly rational explanation for everything. And I have a feeling that you yourself can help us find that explanation."

"No—no! I can't—I mustn't! I don't understand it myself." She took a deep, resolute inspiration, and compressed her lips.

"Why can't you tell us?" persisted Vance.

"Because I don't know," she cried. "I wish to God I did! I only know that something horrible is going on here—that some awful curse is hanging over this house. . . ."

"How do you know that?"

The woman began to tremble violently, and her eyes roamed distractedly about the room.

"Because"—her voice was barely audible—"because the little man came here last night!"

A chill passed up my spine at this statement, and I heard even the imperturbable Sergeant's sharp intake of breath. Then Vance's calm voice sounded.

"How do you know he was here, Mrs. Drukker? Did you see him?"

"No, I didn't see him; but he tried to get into this room—by that door." She pointed unsteadily toward the entrance to the hallway through which we had just come.

"You must tell us about it," said Vance; "or we will be driven to conclude that you manufactured the story."

"Oh, but I didn't manufacture it—may God be my witness!" There could be no doubt whatever of the woman's sincerity. Something had occurred which filled her with mortal fear. "I was lying in bed, awake. The little clock on the mantel had just struck midnight; and I heard a soft rustling sound in the hall outside. I turned my head toward the door—there was a dim night-light burning on the table here. . . . and then I saw the door-knob turn slowly—silently—as if some one were trying to get in without waking me—"

"Just a moment, Mrs. Drukker," interrupted Vance. "Do you always lock your door at night?"

"I've never locked it until recently—after Mr. Robin's death. I've somehow felt insecure since then—I can't explain why. . . ."

"I quite understand.—Please go on with the story. You say you saw the door-knob move. And then?"

"Yes—yes. It moved softly—back and forth. I lay there in bed, frozen with terror. But after a while I managed to call out—I don't know how loud; but suddenly the door-knob ceased to turn, and I heard footsteps moving rapidly away—down the hall. . . . Then I managed to get up. I went to the door and listened. I was afraid—afraid for Adolph. And I could hear those soft footsteps descending the stairs—"

"Which stairs?"

"At the rear—leading to the kitchen. . . . Then the door of the screen porch shut, and everything was silent again. . . . I knelt with my ear to the keyhole a long time, listening, waiting. But nothing happened, and at last I rose. . . . Something seemed to tell me I must open the door. I was in deadly terror—and yet I knew I had to open the door. . . ."

A shudder swept her body. "Softly I turned the key, and took hold of the knob. As I pulled the door slowly inward, a tiny object that had been poised on the outside knob fell to the floor with a clatter. There was a light burning in the hall—I always keep one burning at night,—and I tried not to look down. I tried—I *tried* . . . but I couldn't keep my eyes away from the floor. And there at my feet—oh, God in Heaven!—there lay *something!* . . ."

She was unable to go on. Horror seemed to paralyze her tongue. Vance's cool, unemotional voice, however, steadied her.

"What was it that lay on the floor, Mrs. Drukker?"

With difficulty the woman rose and, bracing herself for a moment at the foot of the bed, went to the dressing-table. Pulling out a small drawer she reached inside and fumbled among its contents. Then she extended her open hand to us. On the palm lay a small chessman—ebony black against the whiteness of her skin. It was the bishop!

### 13. IN THE BISHOP'S SHADOW

(Tuesday, April 12; 11 a.m.)

Vance took the bishop from Mrs. Drukker and slipped it into his coat pocket.

"It would be dangerous, madam," he said, with impressive solemnity, "if what happened here last night became known. Should the person who played this joke on you find out that you had informed the police, other attempts to frighten you might be made. Therefore, not one word of what you have told us must pass your lips."

"May I not even tell Adolph?" the woman asked distractedly.

"No one! You must maintain a complete silence, even in the presence of your son."

I could not understand Vance's emphasis on this point; but before many days had passed it was all too clear to me. The reason for his advice was revealed with tragic force; and I realized that even at the time of Mrs. Drukker's disclosure his penetrating mind had worked out an uncannily accurate ratiocination, and foreseen certain possibilities unsuspected by the rest of us.

We took our leave a few moments later, and descended the rear stairs. The staircase made a sharp turn to the right at a landing eight or ten steps below the second floor, and led into a small dark passageway with two doors—one on the left, opening into the kitchen, and another, diagonally opposite, giving on the screen porch.

We stepped out immediately to the porch, now flooded in sunshine, and stood without a word trying to shake off the atmosphere cast about us by Mrs. Drukker's terrifying experience.

Markham was the first to speak.

"Do you believe, Vance, that the person who brought that chessman here last night is the killer of Robin and Sprigg?"

"There can be no doubt of it. The purpose of his midnight visit is hideously clear. It fits perfectly with what has already come to light."

"It strikes me merely as a ruthless practical joke," Markham rejoined, "—the act of a drunken fiend."

Vance shook his head.

"It's the only thing in this whole nightmare that doesn't qualify as a piece of insane humor. It was a deadly serious excursion. The devil himself is never so solemn as when covering his tracks. Our particular devil's hand had been forced, and he made a bold play. 'Pon my soul, I almost prefer his jovial mood to the one that prompted him to break in here last night. However, we now have something definite to go on."

Heath, impatient of all theorizing, quickly picked up this last remark.

"And what might that be, sir?"

"Imprimis, we may assume that our chess-playing troubadour was thoroughly familiar with the plan of this house. The night-light in the upper hall may have cast its gleam down the rear stairs as far as the landing, but the rest of the way must have been in darkness. Moreover, the arrangement of the rear of the house is somewhat complicated. Therefore, unless he knew the layout he couldn't have found his way about noiselessly in the dark. Obviously, too, the visitor knew in which room Mrs. Drukker slept. Also, he must have known what time Drukker turned in last night, for he wouldn't have chanced making his call unless he had felt sure that the coast was clear."

"That don't help us much," grumbled Heath. "We've been going on the theory right along that the murderer was wise to everything connected with these two houses."

"True. But one may be fairly intimate with a family and still not know at what hour each of its members retires on a certain night, or just how to effect a surreptitious entry to the house. Furthermore, Sergeant, our midnight caller was some one who knew that Mrs. Drukker was in the habit of leaving her door unlocked at night; for he had every intention of entering her room. His object wasn't merely to leave his little memento outside and then depart. The silent stealthy way he tried the knob proves that."

"He may simply have wanted to waken Mrs. Drukker so she would find it at once," suggested Markham.

"Then why did he turn the knob so carefully—as if trying *not* to waken any one? A rattling of the knob, or a soft tapping, or even throwing the chessman against the door, would have answered that purpose much better. . . . No, Markham; he had a far more sinister object in mind; but when he found himself thwarted by the locked door and heard Mrs. Drukker's cry of fright, he placed the bishop where she would find it, and fled."

"Still and all, sir," argued Heath, "any one mighta known she left her door unlocked at night; and any one coulda learned the lay of the house so's to find their way around in the dark."

"But who, Sergeant, had a key to the rear door? And who could have used it at midnight last night?"

"The door mighta been left unlocked," countered Heath; "and when we check up on the alibis of everybody we may get a lead."

Vance sighed.

"You'll probably find two or three people without any alibi at all. And if last night's visit here was planned, a convincing alibi may have been prepared. We're not dealing with a simpleton, Sergeant. We're playing a game to the death with a subtle and resourceful murderer, who can think as quickly as we can, and who has had long training in the subtleties of logic. . . ."

As if on a sudden impulse he turned and passed indoors, motioning us to follow. He went straight to the kitchen where the German woman who had admitted us earlier sat stolidly by a table preparing the midday meal. She rose as we entered and backed away from us. Vance, puzzled by her demeanor, studied her for several moments without speaking. Then his eyes drifted to the table where a large eggplant had been halved lengthwise and scooped out.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, glancing at the contents of the various dishes standing about. "*Aubergines à la Turque*, what? An excellent dish. But I'd mince the mutton a bit finer, if I were you. And not too much cheese: it detracts from the sauce *espagnole* which I see you're preparing." He looked up with a pleasant smile. "What's your name, by the by?"

His manner astonished the woman greatly, but it also had the effect of alleviating her fears.

"Menzel," she answered in a dull voice. "Grete Menzel."

"And how long have you been with the Drukkers?"

"Going on twenty-five years."

"A long time," Vance commented musingly. "Tell me: why were you frightened when we called here this morning?"

The woman became sullen, and her large hands closed tightly.

"I wasn't frightened. But Mr. Drukker was busy—"

"You thought perhaps we had come to arrest him," Vance broke in.

Her eyes dilated, but she made no answer.

"What time did Mr. Drukker rise yesterday morning?" Vance went on.

"I told you . . . nine o'clock—like always."

"What time did Mr. Drukker rise?" The insistent, detached quality of his voice was far more ominous than any dramatic intonation could have been.

"I told you—"

"Die Wahrheit, Frau Menzel! Um wie viel Uhr ist er aufgestanden?"

The psychological effect of this repetition of the question in German was instantaneous. The woman's hands went to her face, and a stifled cry, like a trapped animal's, escaped her.

"I don't—know," she groaned. "I called him at half past eight, but he didn't answer, and I tried the door. . . . It wasn't locked and—*Du lieber Gott!*—he was gone."

"When did you next see him?" asked Vance quietly.

"At nine. I went up-stairs again to tell him breakfast was ready. He was in the study—at his desk—working like mad, and all excited. He told me to go away."

"Did he come down to breakfast?"

"Ja—ja. He came down—half an hour later."

The woman leaned heavily against the drain-board of the sink, and Vance drew up a chair for her.

"Sit down, Mrs. Menzel," he said kindly. When she had obeyed, he asked: "Why did you tell me this morning that Mr. Drukker rose at nine?"

"I had to—I was told to." Her resistance was gone, and she breathed heavily like a person exhausted. "When Mrs. Drukker came back from Miss Dillard's yesterday afternoon she told me that if any one asked me that question about Mr. Drukker I was to say 'Nine o'clock.' She made me swear I'd say it. . . ." Her voice trailed off, and her eyes took on a glassy stare. "I was afraid to say anything else."

Vance still seemed puzzled. After several deep inhalations on his cigarette he remarked:

"There's nothing in what you've told us to affect you this way. It's not unnatural that a morbid woman like Mrs. Drukker should have taken such a fantastic measure to protect her son from possible suspicion, when a murder had been committed in the neighborhood. You've surely been with her long enough to realize how she might exaggerate every remote possibility where her son is concerned. In fact, I'm surprised you take it so seriously. . . . Have you any other reason to connect Mr. Drukker with this crime?"

"No—no!" The woman shook her head distractedly.

Vance strolled to the rear window, frowning. Suddenly he swung about. He had become stern and implacable.

"Where were you, Mrs. Menzel, the morning Mr. Robin was killed?"

An astounding change came over the woman. Her face paled; her lips trembled; and she clinched her hands with a spasmodic gesture. She tried to take her staring eyes from Vance, but some quality in his gaze held her.

"Where were you, Mrs. Menzel?" The question was repeated sharply.

"I was—here—" she began; then stopped abruptly and cast an agitated glance at Heath, who was watching her fixedly.

"You were in the kitchen?"

She nodded. The power of speech seemed to have deserted her.

"And you saw Mr. Drukker return from the Dillards'?"

Again she nodded.

"Exactly," said Vance. "And he came in the rear way, by the screen porch, and went up-stairs. . . . And he didn't know that you saw him through the kitchen door. . . . And later he inquired regarding your whereabouts at that hour. . . . And when you told him you had been in the kitchen he warned you to keep silent about it. . . . And then you learned of Mr. Robin's death a few minutes before you saw him enter here. . . . And yesterday, when Mrs. Drukker told you to say he had not risen until nine, and you heard that some one else had been killed near here, you became suspicious and frightened. . . . That's correct, is it not, Mrs. Menzel?"

The woman was sobbing audibly in her apron. There was no need for her to reply, for it was obvious that Vance had guessed the truth.

Heath took his cigar from his mouth and glared at her ferociously.

"So! You were holding out on me," he bellowed, thrusting forward his jaw. "You lied to me when I questioned you the other day. Obstructing justice, were you?"

She gave Vance a look of frightened appeal.

"Mrs. Menzel, Sergeant," he said, "had no intention of obstructing justice. And now that she has told us the truth, I think we may overlook her perfectly natural deception in the matter." Then before Heath had time to reply he turned to the woman and asked in a matter-of-fact tone: "Do you lock the door leading to the screen porch every night?"

"Ja—every night." She spoke listlessly: the reaction from her fright had left her apathetic.

"You are sure you locked it last night?"

"At half past nine—when I went to bed."

Vance stepped across the little passageway and inspected the lock.

"It's a snap-lock," he observed, on returning. "Who has a key to the door?"

"I have a key. And Mrs. Drukker—she has one, too."

"You're sure no one else has a key?"

"No one except Miss Dillard. . . ."

"Miss Dillard?" Vance's voice was suddenly resonant with interest. "Why should she have one?"

"She's had it for years. She's like a member of the family—over here two and three times a day. When I go out I lock the back door; and her having a key saves Mrs. Drukker the trouble of coming down and letting her in."

"Quite natural," Vance murmured. Then: "We sha'n't bother you any more, Mrs. Menzel." He strolled out on the little rear porch.

When the door had been closed behind us he pointed to the screen door that opened into the yard.

"You'll note that this wire mesh has been forced away from the frame, permitting one to reach inside and turn the latch. Either Mrs. Drukker's key or Miss Dillard's—probably the latter—was used to open the door of the house."

Heath nodded: this tangible aspect of the case appealed to him. But Markham was not paying attention. He stood in the background smoking with angry detachment. Presently he turned resolutely and was about to re-enter the house when Vance caught his arm.

"No—no, Markham! That would be abominable technique. Curb your ire. You're so dashed impulsive, don't y' know."

"But, damn it, Vance!" Markham shook off the other's hand. "Drukker lied to us about going out the Dillard gate before Robin's murder—"

"Of course he did. I've suspected all along that the account he gave us of his movements that morning was a bit fanciful. But it's useless to go upstairs now and hector him about it. He'll simply say that the cook is mistaken."

Markham was unconvinced.

"But what about yesterday morning? I want to know where he was when the cook called him at half past eight. Why should Mrs. Drukker be so anxious to have us believe he was asleep?"

"She, too, probably went to his room and saw that he was gone. Then when she heard of Sprigg's death her febrile imagination became overheated, and she proceeded to invest him with an alibi. But you're only inviting trouble when you plan to chivy him about the discrepancies in his tale."

"I'm not so sure." Markham spoke with significant gravity. "I may be inviting a solution to this hideous business."

Vance did not reply at once. He stood gazing down at the quivering shadows cast on the lawn by the willow trees. At length he said in a low voice:

"We can't afford to take that chance. If what you're thinking should prove to be true, and you should reveal the information you've just received, the little man who was here last night might prowl about the upper hall again. And this time he might not be content to leave his chessman *outside the door!*"

A look of horror came into Markham's eyes.

"You think I might be jeopardizing the cook's safety if I used her evidence against him at this time?"

"The terrible thing about this affair is that, until we know the truth, we face danger at every turn." Vance's voice was heavy with discouragement. "We can't risk exposing any one. . . ."

The door leading to the porch opened, and Drukker appeared on the threshold, his little eyes blinking in the sunlight. His gaze came to rest on Markham, and a crafty, repulsive smile contorted his mouth.

"I trust I am not disturbing you," he apologized, with a menacing squint; "but the cook has just informed me that she told you she saw me enter here by the rear door on the morning of Mr. Robin's unfortunate death."

"Oh, my aunt!" murmured Vance, turning away and busying himself with the selection of a fresh cigarette. "That tears it."

Drukker shot him an inquisitive look, and drew himself up with a kind of cynical fortitude.

"And what about it, Mr. Drukker?" demanded Markham.

"I merely desired to assure you," the man replied, "that the cook is in error. She has obviously confused the date,—you see, I come and go so often by this rear door. On the morning of Mr. Robin's death, as I explained to you, I left the range by the 75th-Street gate and, after a brief walk in the park, returned home by the front way. I have convinced Grete that she is mistaken."

Vance had been listening to him closely. Now he turned and met the other's smile with a look of bland ingenuousness.

"Did you convince her with a chessman, by any chance?"

Drukker jerked his head forward and sucked in a rasping breath. His twisted frame became taut; the muscles about his eyes and mouth began to twitch; and the ligaments of his neck stood out like whipcord. For a moment I thought he was going to lose his self-control; but with a great effort he steadied himself.

"I don't understand you, sir." There was the vibrancy of an intense anger in his words. "What has a chessman to do with it?"

"Chessmen have various names," suggested Vance softly.

"Are *you* telling *me* about chess?" A venomous contempt marked Drukker's manner, but he managed to grin. "Various names, certainly. There's the king and queen, the rook, the knight—" He broke off. "*The bishop!* . . ." He lay his head against the casement of the door and began to cackle mirthlessly. "So! That's what you mean? *The bishop!* . . . You're a lot of imbecile children playing a nonsense game."

"We have excellent reason to believe," said Vance, with impressive calmness, "that the game is being played by some one else—with the chess bishop as the principal symbol."

Drukker sobered.

"Don't take my mother's vagaries too seriously," he admonished. "Her imagination often plays tricks on her."

"Ah! And why do you mention your mother in this connection?"

"You've just been talking to her, haven't you? And your comments, I must say, sound very much like some of her harmless hallucinations."

"On the other hand," Vance rejoined mildly, "your mother may have perfectly good grounds for her beliefs."

Drukker's eyes narrowed, and he looked swiftly at Markham.

"Rot!"

"Ah, well," sighed Vance; "we sha'n't debate the point." Then in an altered tone he added: "It might help us though, Mr. Drukker, if we knew where you were between eight and nine yesterday morning."

The man opened his mouth slightly as if to speak, but quickly his lips closed again, and he stood staring calculatingly at Vance. At length he answered in a high-pitched insistent voice.

"I was working—in my study—from six o'clock until half past nine." He paused, but evidently felt that further explanation was desirable. "For several months I've been working on a modification of the ether-string theory to account for the interference of light, which the quantum theory is unable to explain. Dillard told me I couldn't do it";—a fanatical light came into his eyes—"but I awoke early yesterday morning with certain factors of the problem clarified; and I got up and went to my study. . . ."

"So that's where you were." Vance spoke carelessly. "It's of no great importance. Sorry we discommoded you to-day." He beckoned with his head to Markham, and moved toward the screen door. As we stepped upon the range he turned back and, smiling, said almost dulcetly: "Mrs. Menzel is under our protection. It would pain us deeply if anything should happen to her."

Drukker looked after us with a sort of hypnotized fascination.

The moment we were out of hearing Vance moved to Heath's side.

"Sergeant," he said in a troubled voice, "that forthright German *Hausfrau* may have put her head unwittingly in a noose. And—my word!—I'm afraid. You'd better have a good man watch the Drukker house to-night—from the rear, under those willow trees. And tell him to break in at the first scream or call. . . . I'll sleep better if I know there's a plain-clothes angel guarding Frau Menzel's slumbers."

"I get you, sir." Heath's face was grim. "There won't be no chess players worrying her to-night."

## 14. A GAME OF CHESS

(Tuesday, April 12; 11:30 a.m.)

As we walked slowly toward the Dillard house it was decided that immediate inquiries should be made regarding the whereabouts the night before of every person connected in any way with this gruesome drama.

"We must be careful, however, to drop no hint of what befell Mrs. Drukker," warned Vance. "Our midnight bishop-bearer did not intend that we should learn of his call. He believed that the poor lady would be too frightened to tell us."

"I'm inclined to think," objected Markham, "that you're attaching too much importance to the episode."

"Oh, my dear fellow!" Vance stopped short and put both hands on the other's shoulders. "You're much too effete—that's your great shortcomin'. You don't feel—you are no child of nature. The poetry of your soul has run to prose. Now I, on the other hand, give my imagination full sway; and I tell you that the leaving of that bishop at Mrs. Drukker's door was no Hallowe'en prank, but the desperate act of a desperate man. It was meant as a warning."

"You think she knows something?"

"I think she saw Robin's body placed on the range. And I think she saw something else—something she would give her life not to have seen."

In silence we moved on. It was our intention to pass through the wall gate into 75th Street and present ourselves at the Dillards' front door; but as we passed the archery-room the basement door opened, and Belle Dillard confronted us anxiously.

"I saw you coming down the range," she said, with troubled eagerness, addressing her words to Markham. "For over an hour I've been waiting to get in touch with you—phoning your office. . . ." Her manner became agitated. "Something strange has happened. Oh, it may not mean anything . . . but when I came through the archery-room here this morning, intending to call on Lady Mae, some impulse made me go to the tool-chest again and look in the drawer,—it seemed so—so queer that the little revolver should have been stolen. . . . And there it lay—in plain sight—beside the other pistol!" She caught her breath. "Mr. Markham, some one returned it to the drawer last night!"

This information acted electrically on Heath.

"Did you touch it?" he asked excitedly.

"Why—no. . . ."

He brushed past her unceremoniously and, going to the tool-chest, yanked open the drawer. There, beside the larger automatic that we had seen the day before, lay a small pearl-handled .32. The Sergeant's eyes glistened as he ran his pencil through the trigger-guard and lifted it gingerly. He held it to the light and sniffed at the end of the barrel.

"One empty chamber," he announced, with satisfaction. "And it's been shot off recently. . . . This oughta get us somewheres." He wrapped the revolver tenderly in a handkerchief and placed it in his coat pocket. "I'll get Dubois busy on this for finger-prints; and I'll have Cap Hagedorn[19] check up on the bullets."

"Really now, Sergeant," said Vance banteringly; "do you imagine that the gentleman we're looking for would wipe a bow and arrow clean and then leave his digital monogram on a revolver?"

"I haven't got your imagination, Mr. Vance," returned Heath surlily. "So I'm going ahead doing the things that oughta be done."

"You're quite right." Vance smiled with good-natured admiration at the other's dogged thoroughness. "Forgive me for trying to damp your zeal."

He turned to Belle Dillard.

"We came here primarily to see the professor and Mr. Arnesson. But there's also a matter we'd like to speak about to you.—We understand you have a key to the rear door of the Drukker house."

She gave him a puzzled nod.

"Yes; I've had one for years. I run back and forth so much; and it saves Lady Mae a lot of bother. . . ."

"Our only interest in the key is that it might have been used by some one who had no right to it."

"But that's impossible. I've never lent it to any one. And I always keep it in my hand-bag."

"Is it generally known you have a key to the Drukkes?"

"Why—I suppose so." She was obviously perplexed. "I've never made a secret of it. The family certainly know about it."

"And you may perhaps have mentioned or revealed the fact when there were outsiders present?"

"Yes—though I can't recall any specific instance."

"Are you sure you have the key now?"

She gave Vance a startled look, and without a word picked up a small lizard-skin hand-bag which lay on the wicker table. Opening it she felt swiftly in one of its inner compartments.

"Yes!" she announced, with relief. "It's where I always keep it. . . . Why do you ask me about it?"

"It's important that we know who had access to the Drukker house," Vance told her. Then, before she could question him further, he asked: "Could the key possibly have left your possession last night?—that is, could it have been extracted from your bag without your knowledge?"

A look of fright came into her face.

"Oh, what has happened?" she began; but Vance interrupted her.

"Please, Miss Dillard! There's nothing for you to worry about. We're merely striving to eliminate certain remote possibilities in connection with our investigation.—Tell me: could any one have taken your key last night?"

"No one," she answered uneasily. "I went to the theatre at eight o'clock, and had my bag with me the entire time."

"When did you last make use of the key?"

"After dinner last night. I ran over to see how Lady Mae was and to say good-night."

Vance frowned slightly. I could see that this information did not square with some theory he had formed.

"You made use of the key after dinner," he recapitulated, "and kept it with you in your hand-bag the rest of the evening, without letting it once go out of your sight.—Is that right, Miss Dillard?"

The girl nodded.

"I even held the bag in my lap during the play," she amplified.

Vance regarded the hand-bag thoughtfully.

"Well," he said lightly, "so ends the romance of the key.—And now we're going to bother your uncle again. Do you think you'd better act as our *avant-courier*; or shall we storm the citadel unannounced?"

"Uncle is out," she informed us. "He went for a walk along the Drive."

"And Mr. Arnesson, I suppose, has not yet returned from the university."

"No; but he'll be here for lunch. He has no classes Tuesday afternoons."

"In the meantime, then, we'll confer with Beedle and the admirable Pyne.—And I might suggest that it would do Mrs. Drukker no end of good if you'd pay her a visit."

With a troubled smile and a little nod the girl passed out through the basement door.

Heath at once went in search of Beedle and Pyne and brought them to the drawing-room, where Vance questioned them about the preceding night. No information, however, was obtained from them. They had both gone to bed at ten o'clock. Their rooms were on the fourth floor at the side of the house; and they had not even heard Miss Dillard when she returned from the theatre. Vance asked them about noises on the range, and intimated that the screen-porch door of the Drukkers might have slammed shut at about midnight. But apparently both of them had been asleep at that hour. Finally they were dismissed with a warning not to mention to any one the questions that had just been asked them.

Five minutes later Professor Dillard came in. Though surprised to see us, he greeted us amiably.

"For once, Markham, you've chosen an hour for your visit when I am not absorbed in work.—More questions, I suppose. Well, come along to the library for the inquisition. It'll be more comfortable there." He led the way up-stairs, and when we were seated he insisted that we join him in a glass of port which he himself served from the sideboard.

"Drukker should be here," he remarked. "He has a fondness for my 'Ninety-six,' though he'll drink it only on rare occasions. I tell him he should take more port; but he imagines it's bad for him, and points to my gout. But there's no connection between gout and port—the notion is sheer superstition. Sound port is the most wholesome of wines. Gout is unknown in Oporto. A little physical stimulation of the right kind would be good for Drukker. . . . Poor fellow. His mind is like a furnace that's burning his body up. A brilliant man, Markham. If he had sufficient bodily energy to keep pace with his brain, he'd be one of the world's great physicists."

"He tells me," commented Vance, "that you twitted him on his inability to work out a modification of the quantum theory in regard to light-interference."

The old man smiled ruefully.

"Yes. I knew that such a criticism would spur him to a maximum effort. The fact is, Drukker is on the track of something revolutionary. He has already worked out some very interesting theorems. . . . But I'm sure this isn't what you gentlemen came here to discuss. What can I do for you, Markham? Or, perhaps you came to give me news."

"Unfortunately we have no news. We have come to solicit aid again. . . ." Markham hesitated as if uncertain how to proceed; and Vance assumed the rôle of questioner.

"The situation has changed somewhat since we were here yesterday. One or two new matters have arisen, and there is a possibility that our investigation would be facilitated if we knew the exact movements of the members of your household last night. These movements, in fact, may have influenced certain factors in the case."

The professor lifted his head in some surprise, but made no comment. He said merely: "That information is very easily given. To what members do you refer?"

"To no member specifically," Vance hastened to assure him.

"Well, let me see. . . ." He took out his old meerschaum pipe and began filling it. "Belle and Sigurd and I had dinner alone at six o'clock. At half past seven Drukker dropped in, and a few minutes later Pardee called. Then at eight Sigurd and Belle went to the theatre, and at half past ten Drukker and Pardee went away. I myself turned in shortly after eleven, after locking up the house—I'd let Pyne and Beedle go to bed early.—And that's about all I can tell you."

"Do I understand that Miss Dillard and Mr. Arnesson went to the theatre together?"

"Yes. Sigurd rarely patronizes the theatre, but whenever he does he takes Belle along. He attends Ibsen's plays, for the most part. He's a devout disciple of Ibsen's, by the way. His American upbringing hasn't in the least tempered his enthusiasm for things Norwegian. At heart he's quite loyal to his native country. He's as well grounded in Norwegian literature as any professor at the University of Oslo; and the only music he really cares for is Grieg's. When he goes to concerts or the theatre you're pretty sure to find that the programs are liberally Norwegian."

"It was an Ibsen play, then, he attended last night?"

"'Rosmersholm,' I believe. There's a revival of Ibsen's dramas at present in New York."

Vance nodded. "Walter Hampden's doing them.—Did you see either Mr. Arnesson or Miss Dillard after they returned from the theatre?"

"No; they came in rather late, I imagine. Belle told me this morning they went to the Plaza for supper after the play. However, Sigurd will be here at any minute, and you can learn the details from him." Though the professor spoke with patience, it was plain that he was annoyed by the apparently irrelevant nature of the interrogation.

"Will you be good enough, sir," pursued Vance, "to tell us the circumstances connected with Mr. Drukker's and Mr. Pardee's visit here after dinner?"

"There was nothing unusual about their call. They often drop in during the evening. The object of Drukker's visit was to discuss with

me the work he had done on his modification of the quantum theory; but when Pardee appeared the discussion was dropped. Pardee is a good mathematician, but advanced physics is beyond his depth."

"Did either Mr. Drukker or Mr. Pardee see Miss Dillard before she went to the theatre?"

Professor Dillard took his pipe slowly from his mouth, and his expression became resentful.

"I must say," he replied testily, "that I can see no valid object in my answering such questions.—However," he added, in a more indulgent tone, "if the domestic trivia of my household can be of any possible assistance to you, I will of course be glad to go into detail." He regarded Vance a moment. "Yes, both Drukker and Pardee saw Belle last night. All of us, including Sigurd, were together in this room for perhaps half an hour before theatre time. There was even a casual discussion about Ibsen's genius, in which Drukker annoyed Sigurd greatly by maintaining Hauptmann's superiority."

"Then at eight o'clock, I gather, Mr. Arnesson and Miss Dillard departed, leaving you and Mr. Pardee and Mr. Drukker alone here."

"That is correct."

"And at half past ten, I think you said, Mr. Drukker and Mr. Pardee went away. Did they go together?"

"They went down-stairs together," the professor answered, with more than a suggestion of tartness. "Drukker, I believe, went home; but Pardee had an appointment at the Manhattan Chess Club."

"It seems a bit early for Mr. Drukker to have gone home," mused Vance, "especially as he had come to discuss an important matter with you and had had no adequate opportunity to do so up to the time of his departure."

"Drukker is not well." The professor's voice was again studiously patient. "As I've told you, he tires easily. And last night he was unusually played out. In fact, he complained to me of his fatigue and said he was going immediately to bed."

"Yes . . . quite in keeping," murmured Vance. "He told us a little while ago that he was up working at six yesterday morning."

"I'm not surprised. Once a problem has posed itself in his mind he works on it incessantly. Unfortunately he has no normal reactions to counterbalance his consuming passion for mathematics. There have been times when I've feared for his mental stability."

Vance, for some reason, steered clear of this point.

"You spoke of Mr. Pardee's engagement at the Chess Club last night," he said, when he had carefully lighted a fresh cigarette. "Did he mention the nature of it to you?"

Professor Dillard smiled with patronizing lenity.

"He talked about it for fully an hour. It appears that a gentleman named Rubinstein—a genius of the chess world, I understand, who is now visiting this country—had taken him on for three exhibition games. The last one was yesterday. It began at two o'clock, and was postponed at six. It should have been played off at eight, but Rubinstein was the lion of some dinner down-town; so the hour set for the play-off was eleven, Pardee was on tenter-hooks, for he had lost the first game and drawn the second; and if he could have won last night's game he would have broken even with Rubinstein. He seemed to think he had an excellent chance according to the way the game stood at six o'clock; although Drukker disagreed with him. . . . He must have gone directly from here to the club, for it was fully half past ten when he and Drukker went out."

"Rubinstein's a strong player," observed Vance. A new note of interest, which he strove to conceal, had come into his voice. "He's one of the grand masters of the game. He defeated Capablanca at San Sebastian in 1911, and between 1907 and 1912 was considered the logical contender for the world's title held by Doctor Lasker.<sup>[20]</sup> . . . Yes, it would have been a great feather in Pardee's cap to have beaten him. Indeed, it was no small compliment to him that he should have been matched with Rubinstein. Pardee, despite the fame of his gambit, has never been ranked as a master.—Have you heard the result of last night's game, by the by?"

Again I noted a faint tolerant smile at the corners of the professor's mouth. He gave the impression of looking down benevolently on the foolish capers of children from some great intellectual height.

"No," he answered; "I didn't inquire. But my surmise is that Pardee lost; for when Drukker pointed out the weakness of his adjourned position, he was more positive than usual. Drukker by nature is cautious, and he rarely expresses a definite opinion on a problem without having excellent grounds for so doing."

Vance raised his eyebrows in some astonishment.

"Do you mean to tell me that Pardee analyzed his unfinished game with Drukker and discussed the possibilities of its ending? Not only is such a course unethical, but any player would be disqualified for doing such a thing."

"I'm unfamiliar with the punctilio of chess," Professor Dillard returned acidly; "but I am sure Pardee would not be guilty of a breach of ethics in that regard. And, as a matter of fact, I recall that when he was engaged with the chessmen at the table over there and Drukker stepped up to look on, Pardee requested him to offer no advice. The discussion of the position took place some time later, and was kept entirely to generalities. I don't believe there was a mention of any specific line of play."

Vance leaned slowly forward and crushed out his cigarette with that taut deliberation which I had long since come to recognize as a sign of repressed excitement. Then he rose carelessly and moved to the chess table in the corner. He stood there, one hand resting on the exquisite marquetry of the alternating squares.

"You say that Mr. Pardee was analyzing his position on this board when Mr. Drukker came over to him?"

"Yes, that is right." Professor Dillard spoke with forced politeness. "Drukker sat down facing him and studied the layout. He started to make some remark, and Pardee requested him to say nothing. A quarter of an hour or so later Pardee put the men away; and it was then that Drukker told him that his game was lost—that he had worked himself into a position which, though it looked favorable, was fundamentally weak."

Vance had been running his fingers aimlessly over the board; and he had taken two or three of the men from the box and tossed them back, as if toying with them.

"Do you remember just what Mr. Drukker said?" he asked without looking up.

"I didn't pay very close attention—the subject was not exactly one of burning moment to me." There was an unescapable note of irony in the answer. "But, as nearly as I can recall, Drukker said that Pardee could have won provided it had been a rapid-transit game, but that Rubinstein was a notoriously slow and careful player and would inevitably find the weak spot in Pardee's position."

"Did Pardee resent this criticism?" Vance now strolled back to his chair and selected another cigarette from his case; but he did not



sit down again.

"He did—very much. Drukker has an unfortunately antagonistic manner. And Pardee is hypersensitive on the subject of his chess. The fact is, he went white with anger at Drukker's strictures. But I personally changed the subject; and when they went away the incident had apparently been forgotten."

We remained but a few minutes longer. Markham was profuse in his apologies to the professor and sought to make amends for the patent annoyance our visit had caused him. He was not pleased with Vance for his seemingly garrulous insistence on the details of Pardee's chess game, and when we had descended to the drawing-room he expressed his displeasure.

"I could understand your questions relating to the whereabouts of the various occupants of this house last night, but I could see no excuse for your harping on Pardee's and Drukker's disagreement over a game of chess. We have other things to do besides gossip."

"A hate of gossip parlance also crown'd Tennyson's Isabel thro' all her placid life," Vance returned puckishly. "But—my word, Markham!—our life is not like Isabel's. Speakin' seriously, there was method in my gossip. I prattled—and I learned."

"You learned what?" Markham demanded sharply.

With a cautious glance into the hall Vance leaned forward and lowered his voice.

"I learned, my dear Lycurgus, that a black bishop is missing from that set in the library, and that the chessman left at Mrs. Drukker's door matches the other pieces up-stairs!"

## 15. AN INTERVIEW WITH PARDEE

(Tuesday, April 12; 12.30 p.m.)

This piece of news had a profound effect on Markham. As was his habit when agitated, he rose and began pacing back and forth, his hands clasped behind him. Heath, too, though slower to grasp the significance of Vance's revelation, puffed vigorously on his cigar—an indication that his mind was busy with a difficult adjustment of facts.

Before either had formulated any comment the rear door of the hall opened and light footsteps approached the drawing-room. Belle Dillard, returning from Mrs. Drukker's, appeared in the archway. Her face was troubled, and letting her eyes rest on Markham, she asked:

"What did you say to Adolph this morning? He's in an awful state of funk. He's going about testing all the door-locks and window-catches as if he feared burglars; and he has frightened poor Grete by telling her to be sure to bolt herself in at night."

"Ah! He has warned Mrs. Menzel, has he?" mused Vance. "Very interestin'."

The girl's gaze turned swiftly to him.

"Yes; but he will give me no explanation. He's excited and mysterious. And the strangest thing about his attitude is that he refuses to go near his mother. . . . What does it mean, Mr. Vance? I feel as though something terrible were impending."

"I don't know just what it does mean." Vance spoke in a low, distressed voice. "And I'm afraid even to try to interpret it. If I should be wrong. . . ." He became silent for a moment. "We must wait and see. To-night perhaps we'll know.—But there's no cause for alarm on your part, Miss Dillard." He smiled comfortingly. "How did you find Mrs. Drukker?"

"She seemed much better. But there's still something worrying her; and I think it has to do with Adolph, for she talked about him the whole time I was there, and kept asking me if I'd noticed anything unusual in his manner lately."

"That's quite natural in the circumstances," Vance returned. "But you mustn't let her morbid attitude affect you.—And now, to change the subject: I understand that you were in the library for half an hour or so last night just before you went to the theatre. Tell me, Miss Dillard: where was your hand-bag during that time?"

The question startled her; but after a momentary hesitation she answered: "When I came into the library I placed it with my wrap on the little table by the door."

"It was the lizard-skin bag containing the key?"

"Yes. Sigurd hates evening dress, and when we go out together I always wear my day clothes."

"So you left the bag on the table during that half-hour, and then kept it with you the rest of the evening.—And what about this morning?"

"I went out for a walk before breakfast and carried it with me. Later I put it on the hat-rack in the hall for an hour or so; but when I started for Lady Mae's at about ten I took it with me. It was then I discovered that the little pistol had been returned, and I postponed my call. I left the bag down-stairs in the archery-room until you and Mr. Markham came; and I've had it with me ever since."

Vance thanked her whimsically.

"And now that the peregrinations of the bag have been thoroughly traced, please try to forget all about it." She was on the point of asking a question, but he anticipated her curiosity and said quickly: "You went to the Plaza for supper last night, your uncle told us. You must have been late in getting home."

"I never stay out very late when I go anywhere with Sigurd," she answered, with a maternal note of complaint. "He has a constitutional aversion to any kind of night life. I begged him to stay out longer, but he looked so miserable I hadn't the heart to remain. We actually got home at half past twelve."

Vance rose with a gracious smile.

"You've been awfully good to bear with our foolish questions so patiently. . . . Now we're going to drop in on Mr. Pardee and see if he has any illuminatin' suggestions to offer. He's generally in at this time, I believe."

"I'm sure he's in now." The girl walked with us to the hall. "He was here only a little while before you came, and he said he was returning home to attend to some correspondence."

We were about to go out when Vance paused.

"Oh, I say, Miss Dillard; there's one point I forgot to ask you about. When you came home last night with Mr. Arnesson, how did you know it was just half past twelve? I notice you don't wear a watch."

"Sigurd told me," she explained. "I was rather mean to him for bringing me home so early, and as we entered the hall here I asked him spitefully what time it was. He looked at his watch and said it was half past twelve. . . ."

At that moment the front door opened and Arnesson came in. He stared at us in mock astonishment; then he caught sight of Belle Dillard.

"Hallo, sis," he called to her pleasantly. "In the hands of the *gendarmerie*, I see." He flashed us an amused look. "Why the conclave? This house is becoming a regular police station. Hunting for clews of Sprigg's murderer? Ha! Bright youth done away with by his jealous professor, and that sort of thing, eh? . . . Hope you chaps haven't been putting Diana the Huntress through a third degree."

"Nothing of the kind," the girl spoke up. "They've been most considerate. And I've been telling them what an old fogey you are—bringing me home at half past twelve."

"I think I was very indulgent," grinned Arnesson. "Much too late for a child like you to be out."

"It must be terrible to be senile and—and mathematically inclined," she retorted with some heat, and ran up-stairs.

Arnesson shrugged his shoulders and looked after her until she had disappeared. Then he fixed a cynical eye on Markham.

"Well, what glad tidings do you bring? Any news about the latest victim?" He led the way back to the drawing-room. "You know, I miss that lad. He'd have gone far. Rotten shame he had to be named Johnny Sprigg. Even 'Peter Piper' would have been safer. Nothing

happened to Peter Piper aside from the pepper episode; and you couldn't very well work that up into a murder. . . ."

"We have nothing to report, Arnesson," Markham broke in, nettled by the man's flippancy. "The situation remains unchanged."

"Just dropped in for a social call, I presume. Staying for lunch?"

"We reserve the right," said Markham coldly, "to investigate the case in whatever manner we deem advisable. Nor are we accountable to you for our actions."

"So! Something *has* happened that irks you." Arnesson spoke with sarcasm. "I thought I had been accepted as a coadjutor; but I see I am to be turned forth into the darkness." He sighed elaborately and took out his pipe. "Dropping the pilot!—Bismarck and me. Alas!"

Vance had been smoking dreamily near the archway, apparently oblivious of Arnesson's complaining. Now he stepped into the room.

"Really, y' know, Markham, Mr. Arnesson is quite right. We agreed to keep him posted; and if he's to be of any help to us he must know all the facts."

"It was you yourself," protested Markham, "who pointed out the possible danger of mentioning last night's occurrence. . . ."

"True. But I had forgotten at the time our promise to Mr. Arnesson. And I'm sure his discretion can be relied on." Then Vance related in detail Mrs. Drukker's experience of the night before.

Arnesson listened with rapt attention. I noticed that his sardonic expression gradually disappeared, and that in its place came a look of calculating sombreness. He sat for several minutes in contemplative silence, his pipe in his hand.

"That's certainly a vital factor in the problem," he commented at length. "It changes our constant. I can see that this thing has got to be calculated from a new angle. The Bishop, it appears, is in our midst. But why should he come to haunt Lady Mae?"

"She is reported to have screamed at almost the exact moment of Robin's death."

"Aha!" Arnesson sat up. "I grasp your implication. She saw the Bishop from her window on the morning of Cock Robin's dissolution, and later he returned and perched on her door-knob as a warning for her to keep mum."

"Something like that, perhaps. . . . Have you enough integers now to work out your formula?"

"I'd like to cast an eye on this black bishop. Where is it?"

Vance reached in his pocket, and held out the chessman. Arnesson took it eagerly. His eyes glittered for a moment. He turned the piece over in his hand, and then gave it back.

"You seem to recognize this particular bishop," said Vance dulcetly. "You're quite correct. It was borrowed from your chess set in the library."

Arnesson nodded a slow affirmative.

"I believe it was." Suddenly he turned to Markham, and an ironic leer came over his lean features. "Was that why I was to be kept in the dark? Under suspicion, am I? Shades of Pythagoras! What penalty attaches to the heinous crime of distributing chessmen among one's neighbors?"

Markham got up and walked toward the hall.

"You are not under suspicion, Arnesson," he answered, with no attempt to conceal his ill-humor. "The bishop was left at Mrs. Drukker's at exactly midnight."

"And I was half an hour too late to qualify. Sorry to have disappointed you."

"Let us hear if your formula works out," said Vance, as we passed out of the front door. "We've a little visit to pay to Mr. Pardee now."

"Pardee? Oho! Calling in a chess expert on the subject of bishops, eh? I see your reasoning—it at least has the virtue of being simple and direct. . . ."

He stood on the little porch and watched us, like a japish gargoyle, as we crossed the street.

Pardee received us with his customary quiet courtesy. The tragic, frustrated look which was a part of his habitual expression was even more pronounced than usual; and when he drew up chairs for us in his study his manner was that of a man whose interest in life had died, and who was merely going through the mechanical motions of living.

"We have come here, Mr. Pardee," Vance began, "to learn what we can of Sprigg's murder in Riverside Park yesterday morning. We have excellent reasons for every question we are about to ask you."

Pardee nodded resignedly.

"I shall not be offended at any line of interrogation you take. After reading the papers I realize just how unusual a problem you are facing."

"First, then, please inform us where you were yesterday morning between seven and eight."

A faint flush overspread Pardee's face, but he answered in a low, even voice.

"I was in bed. I did not rise until nearly nine."

"Is it not your habit to take a walk in the park before breakfast?" (I knew this was sheer guesswork on Vance's part, for the subject of Pardee's habits had not come up during the investigation.)

"That is quite true," the man replied, without a moment's hesitation. "But yesterday I did not go,—I had worked rather late the night before."

"When did you first hear of Sprigg's death?"

"At breakfast. My cook repeated the gossip of the neighborhood. I read the official account of the tragedy in the early edition of the evening *Sun*."

"And you saw the reproduction of the Bishop note, of course, in this morning's paper.—What is your opinion of the affair, Mr. Pardee?"

"I hardly know." For the first time his lacklustre eyes showed signs of animation. "It's an incredible situation. The mathematical chances are utterly opposed to such a series of interrelated events being coincidental."

"Yes," Vance concurred. "And speaking of mathematics: are you at all familiar with the Riemann-Christoffel tensor?"

"I know of it," the man admitted. "Drukker uses it in his book on world lines. My mathematics, however, are not of the physicist's

type. Had I not become enamored of chess"—he smiled sadly—"I would have been an astronomer. Next to manoeuvring the factors in a complicated chess combination, the greatest mental satisfaction one can get, I think, is plotting the heavens and discovering new planets. I even keep a five-inch equatorial telescope in a pent-house on my roof for amateur observations."

Vance listened to Pardee with close attention; and for several minutes discussed with him Professor Pickering's recent determination of the trans-Neptunian *O*,<sup>[2]</sup> much to Markham's bewilderment and to the Sergeant's annoyance. At length he brought the conversation back to the tensor formula.

"You were, I understand, at the Dillards' last Thursday when Mr. Arnesson was discussing this tensor with Drukker and Sprigg."

"Yes, I recall that the subject came up then."

"How well did you know Sprigg?"

"Only casually. I had met him with Arnesson once or twice."

"Sprigg, also, it seems, was in the habit of walking in Riverside Park before breakfast," observed Vance negligently. "Ever run into him there, Mr. Pardee?"

The man's eyelids quivered slightly, and he hesitated before answering.

"Never," he said finally.

Vance appeared indifferent to the denial. He rose and, going to the front window, looked out.

"I thought one might be able to see into the archery range from here. But I note that the angle cuts off the view entirely."

"Yes, the range is quite private. There's even a vacant lot opposite the wall, so that no one can see over it. . . . Were you thinking of a possible witness to Robin's death?"

"That, and other things." Vance returned to his chair. "You don't go in for archery, I take it."

"It's a trifle too strenuous for me. Miss Dillard once tried to interest me in the sport, but I was not a very promising acolyte. I've been to several tournaments with her, however."

An unusually soft note had crept into Pardee's voice, and for some reason which I could not exactly explain I got the feeling that he was fond of Belle Dillard. Vance, too, must have received the same impression, for after a brief pause he said:

"You will realize, I trust, that it is not our intention to pry unnecessarily into any one's private affairs; but the question of motive in the two murders we are investigating still remains obscure, and as Robin's death was at first superficially attributed to a rivalry for Miss Dillard's affections, it might help us to know, in a general way, what the true situation is concerning the young lady's preference. . . . As a friend of the family you probably know; and we'd appreciate your confidence in the matter."

Pardee's gaze travelled out of the window, and the suggestion of a sigh escaped him.

"I've always had the feeling that she and Arnesson would some day be married. But that is only conjecture. She once told me quite positively that she was not going to consider matrimony until she was thirty." (One could easily guess in what connection Belle Dillard had made this pronouncement to Pardee. His emotional, as well as his intellectual life, had apparently met with failure.)

"You do not believe then," pursued Vance, "that her heart is seriously concerned with young Sperling?"

Pardee shook his head. "However," he qualified, "martyrdom such as he is undergoing at present has a tremendous sentimental appeal for women."

"Miss Dillard tells me you called on her this morning."

"I generally drop over during the day." He was obviously uncomfortable and, I thought, a little embarrassed.

"Do you know Mrs. Drukker well?"

Pardee gave Vance a quick, inquisitive look.

"Not particularly," he said. "I've naturally met her several times."

"You've called at her house?"

"On many occasions, but always to see Drukker. I've been interested for years in the relation of mathematics to chess. . . ."

Vance nodded.

"How did your game with Rubinstein come out last night, by the by? I didn't see the papers this morning."

"I resigned on the forty-fourth move." The man spoke hopelessly. "Rubinstein found a weakness in my attack which I had entirely overlooked when I sealed my move at the adjournment."

"Drukker, Professor Dillard tells us, foresaw the outcome when you and he were discussing the situation last night."

I could not understand why Vance referred so pointedly to this episode, knowing as he did how sore a point it was with Pardee. Markham, also, frowned at what appeared to be an unforgivably tactless remark on Vance's part.

Pardee colored, and shifted in his chair.

"Drukker talked too much last night." The statement was not without venom. "Though he's not a tournament player, he should know that such discussions are taboo during unfinished games. Frankly, though, I put little stock in his prophecy. I thought my sealed move had taken care of the situation, but Drukker saw farther ahead than I did. His analysis was uncannily profound." There was the jealousy of self-pity in his tone, and I felt that he hated Drukker as bitterly as his seemingly mild nature would permit.

"How long did the game last?" Vance asked casually.

"It was over a little after one o'clock. There were only fourteen moves in last night's session."

"Were there many spectators?"

"An unusually large number, considering the late hour."

Vance put out his cigarette and got up. When we were in the lower hall on our way to the front door he halted suddenly and, fixing Pardee with a gaze of sardonic amusement, said:

"Y' know, the black bishop was at large again last night around midnight."

His words produced an astonishing effect. Pardee drew himself up as if he had been struck in the face; and his cheeks went chalky white. For a full half-minute he stared at Vance, his eyes like live coals. His lips moved with a slight tremor, but no word came from them. Then, as if with superhuman effort, he turned stiffly away and went to the door. Jerking it open he held it for us to pass out.

As we walked up Riverside Drive to the District Attorney's car, which had been left in front of the Drukker house in 76th Street,

Markham questioned Vance sharply in regard to the final remark he had made to Pardee.

"I was in hopes," explained Vance, "of surprising some look of recognition or understanding from him. But, 'pon my soul, Markham, I didn't expect any effect like the one I produced. Astonishin' how he reacted. I don't grasp it—I don't at all grasp it. . . ."

He became engrossed in his thoughts. But as the car swung into Broadway at 72nd Street he roused himself and directed the chauffeur to the Sherman Square Hotel.

"I have a gaspin' desire to know more of that chess game between Pardee and Rubinstein. No reason for it—sheer vagary on my part. But the idea has been workin' in me ever since the professor mentioned it. . . . From eleven until past one—that's a deuced long time to play off an unfinished game of only forty-four moves."

We had drawn up to the curb at the corner of Amsterdam Avenue and 71st Street, and Vance disappeared into the Manhattan Chess Club. It was fully five minutes before he returned. In his hand he carried a sheet of paper filled with notations. There was, however, no sign of jubilation in his expression.

"My far-fetched but charmin' theory," he said, with a grimace, "has run aground on base prosaic facts. I just talked to the secret'ry of the club; and last night's session consumed two hours and nineteen minutes. It seems to have been a coruscatin' battle, full of esoteric quirks and strategical soul-searchin's. Along about half past eleven the onlooking genii had Pardee picked for the winner; but Rubinstein then staged a masterly piece of sustained analysis, and proceeded to tear Pardee's tactics to smithereens—just as Drukker had prognosticated. Astonishin' mind, Drukker's. . . ."

It was plain that even now he was not entirely satisfied with what he had learned; and his next words voiced his dissatisfaction.

"I thought while I was at it I'd take a page from the Sergeant's book, so to speak, and indulge in a bit of routine thoroughness. So I borrowed the score sheet of last night's game and copied down the moves. I may run over the game some day when time hangs heavy."

And, with what I thought unusual care, he folded the score and placed it in his wallet.

## 16. ACT THREE

(Tuesday, April 12—Saturday, April 16.)

After lunch at the Elysée Markham and Heath continued down-town. A hard afternoon lay before them. Markham's routine work had accumulated; and the Sergeant, having taken on the Sprigg case in addition to the Robin investigation, had to keep two separate machines working, co-ordinate all his reports, answer innumerable questions from his superiors, and attempt to satisfy the voraciousness of an army of reporters. Vance and I went to an exhibition of modern French art at Knoedler's, had tea at the St. Regis, and met Markham at the Stuyvesant Club for dinner. Heath and Inspector Moran joined us at half past eight for an informal conference; but though it lasted until nearly midnight nothing of a tangible nature came out of it.

Nor did the following day bring anything but discouragement. The report from Captain Dubois stated that the revolver given him by Heath contained no sign of a finger-print. Captain Hagedorn identified the weapon as the one used in the shooting of Sprigg; but this merely substantiated our already positive belief. The man set to guard the rear of the Drukker residence spent an uneventful night. No one had entered or departed from the house; and by eleven o'clock every window had been dark. Nor had a sound of any kind come from the house until the next morning when the cook set about her chores for the day. Mrs. Drukker had appeared in the garden a little after eight; and at half past nine Drukker went out the front door and sat for two hours in the park reading.

Two days went by. A watch was kept on the Dillard house; Pardee was put under strict surveillance; and a man was stationed each night under the willow trees behind the Drukker house. But nothing unusual happened; and, despite the Sergeant's tireless activities, all promising lines of investigation seemed to be automatically closed. Both Heath and Markham were deeply worried. The newspapers were outdoing themselves in gaudy rhetoric; and the inability of the Police Department and the District Attorney's office to make the slightest headway against the mystery of the two spectacular murders was rapidly growing into a political scandal.

Vance called on Professor Dillard and discussed the case along general lines. He also spent over an hour on Thursday afternoon with Arnesson in the hope that the working out of the proposed formula had brought to light some detail that could be used as a starting-point for speculation. But he was dissatisfied with the interview, and complained to me that Arnesson had not been wholly frank with him. Twice he dropped in at the Manhattan Chess Club and attempted to lead Pardee into conversation; but each time he was met with the reticence of cold courtesy. I noticed that he made no effort to communicate with either Drukker or Mrs. Drukker; and when I asked him his reason for ignoring them, he answered:

"The truth cannot be learned from them now. Each is playing a game; and both are thoroughly frightened. Until we have some definite evidence, more harm than good will result from any attempt to cross-examine them."

This definite evidence was to come the very next day from a most unexpected quarter; and it marked the beginning of the last phase of our investigation—a phase fraught with such sinister, soul-stirring tragedy and unspeakable horror, with such wanton cruelty and monstrous humor, that even now, years later, as I set down this reportorial record of it, I find it difficult to believe that the events were not, after all, a mere grotesque dream of fabulous wickedness.

Friday afternoon Markham, in a mood of desperation, called another conference. Arnesson asked permission to attend; and at four o'clock we all met, including Inspector Moran, in the District Attorney's private room in the old Criminal Courts Building. Arnesson was unwontedly silent during the discussion, and not once did he indulge in his usual flippancy. He listened with close attention to all that was said, and seemed purposely to avoid expressing an opinion, even when directly appealed to by Vance.

We had been in conference perhaps half an hour when Swacker entered quietly and placed a memorandum on the District Attorney's desk. Markham glanced at it and frowned. After a moment he initialed two printed forms and handed them to Swacker.

"Fill these in right away and give them to Ben," [22] he ordered. Then when the man had gone out through the outer-hall door, he explained the interruption. "Sperling has just sent a request to speak to me. He says he has information that may be of importance. I thought, in the circumstances, it might be well to see him now."

Ten minutes later Sperling was brought in by a deputy sheriff from the Tombs. He greeted Markham with a friendly boyish smile, and nodded pleasantly to Vance. He bowed—a bit stiffly, I thought—to Arnesson, whose presence seemed both to surprise and disconcert him. Markham motioned him to a chair, and Vance offered him a cigarette.

"I wanted to speak to you, Mr. Markham," he began, a bit diffidently, "about a matter which may be of help to you. . . . You remember, when you were questioning me about my being in the archery-room with Robin, you wanted to know which way Mr. Drukker went when he left us. I told you I didn't notice, except that he went out by the basement door. . . . Well, sir, I've had a lot of time to think lately; and I've naturally gone over in my mind all that happened that morning. I don't know just how to explain it, but everything has become a lot clearer now. Certain—what you might call impressions—have come back to me. . . ."

He paused and looked down at the carpet. Then lifting his head, he went on:

"One of these impressions has to do with Mr. Drukker—and that's why I wanted to see you. Just this afternoon I was—well, sort of pretending I was in the archery-room again, talking to Robin; and all of a sudden the picture of the rear window flashed across my mind. And I remembered that when I had glanced out of the window that morning to see how the weather was for my trip, I had seen Mr. Drukker sitting in the arbor behind the house. . . ."

"At what time was this?" Markham demanded brusquely.

"Only a few seconds before I went to catch my train."

"Then you imply that Mr. Drukker, instead of leaving the premises, went to the arbor and remained there until you departed."

"It looks that way, sir." Sperling was reluctant to make the admission.

"You're quite sure you saw him?"

"Yes, sir. I remember distinctly now. I even recall the peculiar way he had his legs drawn up under him."

"You would swear to it," asked Markham gravely, "knowing that a man's life might rest on your testimony?"

"I'd swear to it, sir," Sperling returned simply.

When the sheriff had escorted his prisoner from the room, Markham looked at Vance.

"I think that gives us a foothold."

"Yes. The cook's testimony was of little value, since Drukker merely denied it; and she's the type of loyal stubborn German who'd back up his denial if any real danger threatened him. Now we're armed with an effective weapon."

"It seems to me," Markham said, after a few moments of speculative silence, "that we have a good circumstantial case against Drukker. He was in the Dillard yard only a few seconds before Robin was killed. He could easily have seen when Sperling went away; and, as he had recently come from Professor Dillard, he knew that the other members of the family were out. Mrs. Drukker denied she saw any one from her window that morning, although she screamed at the time of Robin's death and then went into a panic of fear when we came to question Drukker. She even warned him against us and called us 'the enemy.' My belief is she saw Drukker returning home immediately after Robin's body had been placed on the range.—Drukker was not in his room at the time Sprigg was killed, and both he and his mother have been at pains to cover up the fact. He has become excited whenever we broached the subject of the murders, and has ridiculed the idea that they were connected. In fact, many of his actions have been highly suspicious. Also, we know he is abnormal and unbalanced, and that he is given to playing children's games. It's quite possible—in view of what Doctor Barstead told us—that he has confused fantasy and reality, and perpetrated these crimes in a moment of temporary insanity. The tensor formula is not only familiar to him, but he may have associated it in some crazy way with Sprigg as a result of Arnesson's discussion with Sprigg about it.—As for the Bishop notes, they may have been part of the unreality of his insane games,—children all want an approving audience when they invent any new form of amusement. His choice of the word 'bishop' was probably the result of his interest in chess—a playful signature intended to confuse. And this supposition is further borne out by the actual appearance of a chess bishop on his mother's door. He may have feared that she saw him that morning, and thus sought to silence her without openly admitting to her that he was guilty. He could easily have slammed the screen-porch door from the inside, without having had a key, and thereby given the impression that the bearer of the bishop had entered and departed by the rear door. Furthermore, it would have been a simple matter for him to take the bishop from the library the night Pardee was analyzing his game. . . ."

Markham continued for some time building up his case against Drukker. He was thorough and detailed, and his summation accounted for practically all of the evidence that had been adduced. The logical and relentless way in which he pieced his various factors together was impressively convincing; and a long silence followed his résumé.

Vance at length stood up, as if to break the tension of his thoughts, and walked to the window.

"You may be right, Markham," he admitted. "But my chief objection to your conclusion is that the case against Drukker is too good. I've had him in mind as a possibility from the first; but the more suspiciously he acted and the more the indications pointed toward him, the more I felt inclined to dismiss him from consideration. The brain that schemed these abominable murders is too competent, too devilishly shrewd, to become entangled in any such net of circumstantial evidence as you've drawn about Drukker. Drukker has an amazing mentality—his intelligence and intellect are supernormal, in fact; and it's difficult to conceive of him, if guilty, leaving so many loopholes."

"The law," returned Markham with acerbity, "can hardly be expected to throw out cases because they're too convincing."

"On the other hand," pursued Vance, ignoring the comment, "it is quite obvious that Drukker, even if not guilty, knows something that has a direct and vital bearing on the case; and my humble suggestion is that we attempt to prise this information out of him. Sperling's testimony has given us the lever for the purpose. . . . I say, Mr. Arnesson, what's your opinion?"

"Haven't any," the man answered. "I'm a disinterested onlooker. I'd hate, however, to see poor Adolph in durance vile." Though he would not commit himself it was plain that he agreed with Vance.

Heath thought, characteristically, that immediate action was advisable, and expressed himself to that effect.

"If he's got anything to tell he'll tell it quick enough after he's locked up."

"It's a difficult situation," Inspector Moran demurred, in a soft judicial voice. "We can't afford to make an error. If Drukker's evidence should convict some one else, we'd be a laughing-stock if we had arrested the wrong man."

Vance looked toward Markham and nodded agreement.

"Why not have him on the tapis first, and see if he can't be persuaded to unburden his soul. You might dangle a warrant over his head, don't y' know, as a kind of moral inducement. Then, if he remains coy and reticent, bring out the gyves and have the doughty Sergeant escort him to the bastille."

Markham sat tapping indecisively on the desk, his head enveloped in smoke as he puffed nervously on his cigar. At last he set his chin firmly and turned to Heath.

"Bring Drukker here at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. You'd better take a wagon and a John-Doe warrant in case he offers any objection." His face was grim and determined. "Then I'll find out what he knows—and act accordingly."

The conference broke up immediately. It was after five o'clock, and Markham and Vance and I rode up-town together to the Stuyvesant Club. We dropped Arnesson at the subway, and he took leave of us with scarcely a word. His garrulous cynicism seemed entirely to have deserted him. After dinner Markham pleaded fatigue, and Vance and I went to the Metropolitan and heard Geraldine Farrar in "Louise."<sup>[23]</sup>

The next morning broke dark and misty. Currie called us at half past seven, for Vance intended to be present at the interview with Drukker; and at eight o'clock we had breakfast in the library before a light grate fire. We were held up in the traffic on our way down-town, and though it was quarter after nine when we reached the District Attorney's office, Drukker and Heath had not yet arrived.

Vance settled himself comfortably in a large leather-upholstered chair and lighted a cigarette.

"I feel rather bucked this morning," he remarked. "If Drukker tells his story, and if the tale is what I think it is, we'll know the combination to the lock."

His words had scarcely been uttered when Heath burst into the office and, facing Markham without a word of greeting, lifted both arms and let them fall in a gesture of hopeless resignation.

"Well, sir, we ain't going to question Drukker this morning—or no other time," he blurted. "He fell off a that high wall in Riverside

Park right near his house last night, and broke his neck. Wasn't found till seven o'clock this morning. His body's down at the morgue now. . . . Fine breaks we get!" He sank disgustedly into a chair.

Markham stared at him unbelievably.

"You're sure?" he asked, with startled futility.

"I was up there before they removed the body. One of the local men phoned me about it just as I was leaving the office. I stuck around and got all the dope I could."

"What did you learn?" Markham was fighting against an overwhelming sense of discouragement.

"There wasn't much to find out. Some kids in the park found the body about seven o'clock this morning—lots of kids around, it being Saturday; and the local men hopped over and called a police surgeon. The doc said Drukker musta fallen off the wall about ten o'clock last night—killed instantly. The wall at that spot—right opposite 76th Street—is all of thirty feet above the playground. The top of it runs along the bridle path; and it's a wonder more people haven't broke their necks there. Kids are all the time walking along the stone ledge."

"Has Mrs. Drukker been notified?"

"No. I told 'em I'd attend to it. But I thought I'd come here first and see what you wanted done about it."

Markham leaned back dejectedly.

"I don't see that there's much of anything we can do."

"It might be well," suggested Vance, "to inform Arnesson. He'll probably be the one who'll have to look after things. . . . My word, Markham! I'm beginning to think that this case is a nightmare, after all. Drukker was our principal hope, and at the very moment when there's a chance of our forcing him to speak, he tumbles off of a wall—" Abruptly he stopped. "Off of a wall! . . ." As he repeated these words he leapt to his feet. "*A hunchback falls off of a wall! . . . A hunchback! . . .*"

We stared at him as if he had gone out of his mind; and I admit that the look on his face sent a chill over me. His eyes were fixed, like those of a man gazing at a malignant ghost. Slowly he turned to Markham, and said in a voice that I hardly recognized:

"It's another mad melodrama—another Mother-Goose rhyme. . . . 'Humpty Dumpty' this time!"

The astonished silence that followed was broken by a strained harsh laugh from the Sergeant.

"That's stretching things, ain't it, Mr. Vance?"

"It's preposterous!" declared Markham, studying Vance with genuine concern. "My dear fellow, you've let this case prey on your mind too much. Nothing has happened except that a man with a hump has fallen from the coping of a wall in the park. It's unfortunate, I know; and it's doubly unfortunate at just this time." He went to Vance and put his hand on his shoulder. "Let the Sergeant and me run this show—we're used to these things. Take a trip and get a good rest. Why not go to Europe as you generally do in the spring?"

"Oh, quite—quite." Vance sighed and smiled wearily. "The sea air would do me worlds of good, and all that. Bring me back to normal, what?—build up the wreck of this once noble brain. . . . I give up! The third act in this terrible tragedy is played almost before your eyes, and you serenely ignore it."

"Your imagination has got the better of you," Markham returned, with the patience of a deep affection. "Don't worry about it any more. Have dinner with me to-night. We'll talk it over then."

At this moment Swacker looked in, and spoke to the Sergeant.

"Quinan of the *World* is here. Wants to see you."

Markham swung about.

"Oh, my God! . . . Bring him in here!"

Quinan entered, waved us a cheery salutation, and handed the Sergeant a letter.

"Another *billet-doux*—received this morning.—What privileges do I get for being so big-hearted?"

Heath opened the letter as the rest of us looked on. At once I recognized the paper and the faint blue characters of the élite type. The note read:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;  
All the king's horses and all the king's men  
Cannot put Humpty Dumpty together again.

Then came that ominous signature, in capitals: THE BISHOP.



## 17. AN ALL-NIGHT LIGHT

(Saturday, April 16; 9.30 a.m.)

When Heath had got rid of Quinan with promises such as would have gladdened any reporter's heart,<sup>[24]</sup> there were several minutes of tense silence in the office. "The Bishop" had been at his grisly work again; and the case had now become a terrible triplicate affair, with the solution apparently further off than ever. It was not, however, the insolubility of these incredible crimes that primarily affected us; rather was it the inherent horror that emanated, like a miasma, from the acts themselves.

Vance, who was pacing sombrely up and down, gave voice to his troubled emotions.

"It's damnable, Markham—it's the essence of unutterable evil. . . . Those children in the park—up early on their holiday in search of dreams—busy with their play and make-believe . . . and then the silencing reality—the awful, overpowering disillusion. . . . Don't you see the wickedness of it? Those children found Humpty Dumpty—their Humpty Dumpty, with whom they had played—lying dead at the foot of the famous wall—a Humpty Dumpty they could touch and weep over, broken and twisted and never more to be put together. . . ."

He paused by the window and looked out. The mist had lifted, and a faint diffusion of spring sunlight lay over the gray stones of the city. The golden eagle on the New York Life Building glistened in the distance.

"I say; one simply mustn't get sentimental," he remarked with a forced smile, turning back to the room. "It decomposes the intelligence and stultifies the dialectic processes. Now that we know Drukker was not the capricious victim of the law of gravity, but was given a helpin' hand in his departure from this world, the sooner we become energetic, the better, what?"

Though his change of mood was an obvious *tour de force*, it roused the rest of us from our gloomy apathy. Markham reached for the telephone and made arrangements with Inspector Moran for Heath to handle the Drukker case. Then he called the Medical Examiner's office and asked for an immediate *post-mortem* report. Heath got up vigorously, and after taking three cups of ice-water, stood with legs apart, his derby pulled far down on his forehead, waiting for the District Attorney to indicate a line of action.

Markham moved restlessly.

"Several men from your department, Sergeant, were supposed to be keeping an eye on the Drukker and Dillard houses. Did you talk to any of them this morning?"

"I didn't have time, sir; and, anyway, I figured it was only an accident. But I told the boys to hang around until I got back."

"What did the Medical Examiner have to say?"

"Only that it looked like an accident; and that Drukker had been dead about ten hours. . . ."

Vance interpolated a question.

"Did he mention a fractured skull in addition to the broken neck?"

"Well, sir, he didn't exactly say the skull was fractured, but he did state that Drukker had landed on the back of his head." Heath nodded understandingly. "I guess it'll prove to be a fracture all right—same like Robin and Sprigg."

"Undoubtedly. The technique of our murderer seems to be simple and efficacious. He strikes his victims on the vault, either stunning them or killing them outright, and then proceeds to cast them in the rôles he has chosen for them in his puppet-plays. Drukker was no doubt leaning over the wall, perfectly exposed for such an attack. It was misty, and the setting was somewhat obscured. Then came the blow on the head, a slight heave, and Drukker fell noiselessly over the parapet—the third sacrificial offering on the altar of old Mother Goose."

"What gets me," declared Heath with surly anger, "is why Guilfoyle,<sup>[25]</sup> the fellow I set to watch the rear of the Drukker house, didn't report the fact that Drukker was out all night. He returned to the Bureau at eight o'clock, and I missed him.—Don't you think, sir, it might be a good idea to find out what he knows before we go up-town?"

Markham agreed, and Heath bawled an order over the telephone. Guilfoyle made the distance between Police Headquarters and the Criminal Courts Building in less than ten minutes. The Sergeant almost pounced on him as he entered.

"What time did Drukker leave the house last night?" he bellowed.

"About eight o'clock—right after he'd had dinner." Guilfoyle was ill at ease, and his tone had the wheedling softness of one who had been caught in a dereliction of duty.

"Which way did he go?"

"He came out the back door, walked down the range, and went into the Dillard house through the archery-room."

"Paying a social visit?"

"It looked that way, Sergeant. He spends a lot of time at the Dillards'."

"Huh! And what time did he come back home?"

Guilfoyle moved uneasily.

"It don't look like he came back home, Sergeant."

"Oh, it don't?" Heath's retort was ponderous with sarcasm. "I thought maybe after he'd broke his neck he mighta come back and passed the time of day with you."

"What I meant was, Sergeant—"

"You meant that Drukker—the bird you were supposed to keep an eye on—went to call on the Dillards at eight o'clock, and then you set down in the arbor, most likely, and took a little beauty nap. . . ." What time did you wake up?"

"Say, listen!" Guilfoyle bristled. "I didn't take no nap. I was on the job all night. Just because I didn't happen to see this guy come back home don't mean I was laying down on the watch."

"Well, if you didn't see him come back, why didn't you phone in that he was spending his week-end out of town or something?"

"I thought he musta come in by the front door."

"Thinking again, were you? Ain't your brain worn out this morning?"

"Have a heart, Sergeant. My job wasn't to tail Drukker. You told me to watch the house and see who went in and out, and that if there was any sign of trouble to bust in.—Now, here's what happened. Drukker went to the Dillards' at eight o'clock, and I kept my eye on the windows of the Drukker house. Along about nine o'clock the cook goes up-stairs and turns on the light in her room. Half an hour later the light goes out, and says I: 'She's put to bed.' Then along about ten o'clock the lights are turned on in Drukker's room—"

"What's this?"

"Yeh—you heard me. The lights go on in Drukker's room about ten o'clock; and I can see a shadow of somebody moving about.—Now, I ask you, Sergeant: wouldn't you yourself have took it for granted that the hunchback had come in by the front door?"

Heath grunted.

"Maybe so," he admitted. "You're sure it was ten o'clock?"

"I didn't look at my watch; but I'm here to tell you it wasn't far off of ten."

"And what time did the lights go out in Drukker's room?"

"They didn't go out. They stayed on all night. He was a queer bird. He didn't keep regular hours, and twice before his lights were on till nearly morning."

"That's quite understandable," came Vance's lazy voice. "He has been at work on a difficult problem lately.—But tell us, Guilfoyle: what about the light in Mrs. Drukker's room?"

"Same as usual. The old dame always keeps a light burning in her room all night."

"Was there any one on guard in front of the Drukker house last night?" Markham asked Heath.

"Not after six o'clock, sir. We've had a man tailing Drukker during the day, but he goes off duty at six when Guilfoyle takes up his post in the rear."

There was a moment's silence. Then Vance turned to Guilfoyle.

"How far away were you last night from the door of the alleyway between the two apartment houses?"

The man paused to visualize the scene.

"Forty or fifty feet, say."

"And between you and the alleyway were the iron fence and some tree branches."

"Yes, sir. The view was more or less cut off, if that's what you mean."

"Would it have been possible for any one, coming from the direction of the Dillard house, to have gone out and returned by that door without your noticing him?"

"It mighta been done," the detective admitted; "provided, of course, the guy didn't want me to see him. It was foggy and dark last night, and there's always a lot of traffic noises from the Drive that woulda drowned out his movements if he was being extra cautious."

When the Sergeant had sent Guilfoyle back to the Bureau to await orders, Vance gave voice to his perplexity.

"It's a dashed complicated situation. Drukker called on the Dillards at eight o'clock, and at ten o'clock he was shoved over the wall in the park. As you observed, the note that Quinan just showed us was postmarked 11 p.m.—which means that it was probably typed *before the crime*. The Bishop therefore had planned his comedy in advance and prepared the note for the press. The audacity of it is amazin'. But there's one assumption we can tie to—namely, that the murderer was some one who knew of Drukker's exact whereabouts and proposed movements between eight and ten."

"I take it," said Markham, "your theory is that the murderer went and returned by the apartment-house alley."

"Oh, I say! I have no theory. I asked Guilfoyle about the alley merely in case we should learn that no one but Drukker was seen going to the park. In that event we could assume, as a tentative hypothesis, that the murderer had managed to avoid detection by taking the alleyway and crossing to the park in the middle of the block."

"With that possible route open to the murderer," Markham observed gloomily, "it wouldn't matter much who was seen going out with Drukker."

"That's just it. The person who staged this farce may have walked boldly into the park under the eyes of an alert myrmidon, or he may have hied stealthily through the alley."

Markham nodded an unhappy agreement.

"The thing that bothers me most, however," continued Vance, "is that light in Drukker's room all night. It was turned on at about the time the poor chap was tumbling into eternity. And Guilfoyle says that he could see some one moving about there after the light went on—"

He broke off, and stood for several seconds in an attitude of concentration.

"I say, Sergeant; I don't suppose you know whether or not Drukker's front-door key was in his pocket when he was found."

"No, sir; but I can find out in no time. The contents of his pockets are being held till after the autopsy."

Heath stepped to the telephone, and a moment later he was talking to the desk sergeant of the 68th-Street Precinct Station. Several minutes of waiting passed; then he grunted and banged down the receiver.

"Not a key of any kind on him."

"Ah!" Vance drew a deep puff on his cigarette and exhaled the smoke slowly. "I'm beginnin' to think that the Bishop purloined Drukker's key and paid a visit to his room after the murder. Sounds incredible, I know; but, for that matter, so does everything else that's happened in this fantastic business."

"But what, in God's name, would have been his object?" protested Markham incredulously.

"We don't know yet. But I have an idea that when we learn the motive of these astonishin' crimes, we'll understand why that visit was paid."

Markham, his face set austerely, took his hat from the closet.

"We'd better be getting out there."

But Vance made no move. He remained standing by the desk smoking abstractedly.

"Y' know, Markham," he said, "it occurs to me that we should see Mrs. Drukker first. There was tragedy in that house last night:

something strange took place there that needs explaining; and now perhaps she'll tell us the secret that has been locked up in her brain. Moreover, she hasn't been notified of Drukker's death, and with all the rumor and gossip in the neighborhood, word of some kind is sure to leak through to her before long. I fear the result of the shock when she hears the news. In fact, I'd feel better if we got hold of Barstead right away and took him with us. What do you say to my phoning him?"

Markham assented, and Vance briefly explained the situation to the doctor.

We drove up-town immediately, called for Barstead, and proceeded at once to the Drukker house. Our ring was answered by Mrs. Menzel, whose face showed plainly that she knew of Drukker's death. Vance, after one glance at her, led her into the drawing-room away from the stairs, and asked in a low tone:

"Has Mrs. Drukker heard the news?"

"Not yet," she answered, in a frightened, quavering voice. "Miss Dillard came over an hour ago, but I told her the mistress had gone out. I was afraid to let her up-stairs. Something's wrong. . . ." She began to tremble violently.

"What's wrong, Mrs. Menzel?" Vance placed a quieting hand on her arm.

"I don't know. But she hasn't made a sound all morning. She didn't come down for breakfast . . . and I'm afraid to go and call her."

"When did you hear of the accident?"

"Early—right after eight o'clock. The paper boy told me; and I saw all the people down on the Drive."

"Don't be frightened," Vance consoled her. "We have the doctor here, and we'll attend to everything."

He turned back to the hall and led the way upstairs. When we came to Mrs. Drukker's room he knocked softly and, receiving no answer, opened the door. The room was empty. The night-light still burned on the table, and I noticed that the bed had not been slept in.

Without a word Vance retraced his steps down the hall. There were only two other main doors, and one of them, we knew, led to Drukker's study. Unhesitatingly Vance stepped to the other and opened it without knocking. The window shades were drawn, but they were white and semi-transparent, and the gray daylight mingled with the ghastly yellow radiation from the old-fashioned chandelier. The lights which Guilfoyle had seen burning all night had not been extinguished.

Vance halted on the threshold, and I saw Markham, who was just in front of me, give a start.

"Mother o' God!" breathed the Sergeant, and crossed himself.

On the foot of the narrow bed lay Mrs. Drukker, fully clothed. Her face was ashen white; her eyes were set in a hideous stare; and her hands were clutching her breast.

Barstead sprang forward and leaned over. After touching her once or twice he straightened up and shook his head slowly.

"She's gone. Been dead probably most of the night." He bent over the body again and began making an examination. "You know, she's suffered for years from chronic nephritis, arteriosclerosis, and hypertrophy of the heart. . . . Some sudden shock brought on an acute dilatation. . . . Yes, I'd say she died about the same time as Drukker . . . round ten o'clock."

"A natural death?" asked Vance.

"Oh, undoubtedly. A shot of adrenalin in the heart might have saved her if I'd been here at the time. . . ."

"No signs of violence?"

"None. As I told you, she died from dilatation of the heart brought on by shock. A clear case—true to type in every respect."

## 18. THE WALL IN THE PARK

(Saturday, April 16; 11 a.m.)

When the doctor had straightened Mrs. Drukker's body on the bed and covered it with a sheet, we returned down-stairs. Barstead took his departure at once after promising to send the death certificate to the Sergeant within an hour.

"It's scientifically correct to talk of natural death from shock," said Vance, when we were alone; "but our immediate problem, d' ye see, is to ascertain the cause of that sudden shock. Obviously it's connected with Drukker's death. Now, I wonder. . . ."

Turning impulsively, he entered the drawing-room. Mrs. Menzel was sitting where we had left her, in an attitude of horrified expectancy. Vance went to her and said kindly:

"Your mistress died of heart failure during the night. And it's much better that she should not have outlived her son."

"Gott geb' ihr die ewige Ruh'!" the woman murmured piously. "*Ja*, it is best. . . ."

"The end came at about ten last night.—Were you awake at that time, Mrs. Menzel?"

"All night I was awake." She spoke in a low, awed voice.

Vance contemplated her with eyes half shut.

"Tell us what you heard?"

"Somebody came here last night!"

"Yes, some one came at about ten o'clock—by the front door. Did you hear him enter?"

"No; but after I had gone to bed I heard voices in Mr. Drukker's room."

"Was it unusual to hear voices in his room at ten o'clock at night?"

"But it wasn't *him*! He had a high voice, and this one was low and gruff." The woman looked up in bewildered fright. "And the other voice was Mrs. Drukker's . . . and she never went in Mr. Drukker's room at night!"

"How could you hear so plainly with your door shut?"

"My room is right over Mr. Drukker's," she explained. "And I was worried—what with all these awful things going on; so I got up and listened at the top of the steps."

"I can't blame you," said Vance. "What did you hear?"

"At first it was like as though the mistress was moaning, but right away she began to laugh, and then the man spoke angry-like. But pretty soon I heard him laugh, too. After that it sounded like the poor lady was praying—I could hear her saying 'Oh, God—oh, God!' Then the man talked some more—very quiet and low. . . . And in a little while it seemed like the mistress was—reciting—a poem. . . ."

"Would you recognize the poem if you heard it again? . . . Was it

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall;  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. . . ."

"Bei Gott, das ist's! It sounded just like that!" A new horror came into the woman's expression. "And Mr. Drukker fell from the wall last night. . . ."

"Did you hear anything else, Mrs. Menzel?" Vance's matter-of-fact voice interrupted her confused correlation of Drukker's death to the verse she had heard.

Slowly she shook her head.

"No. Everything was quiet after that."

"Did you hear any one leave Mr. Drukker's room?"

She gave Vance a panic-stricken nod.

"A few minutes later some one opened and shut the door, very soft; and I heard steps moving down the hall in the dark. Then the stairs creaked, and pretty soon the front door shut."

"What did you do after that?"

"I listened a little while, and then I went back to bed. But I couldn't sleep. . . ."

"It's all over now, Mrs. Menzel," Vance told her comfortingly. "There's nothing for you to fear.—You'd best go to your room and wait till we need you."

Reluctantly the woman went up-stairs.

"I think now," said Vance, "we can make a pretty close guess as to what happened here last night. The murderer took Drukker's key and let himself in by the front door. He knew Mrs. Drukker's quarters were at the rear, and he no doubt counted on accomplishing his business in Drukker's room and departing as he had come. But Mrs. Drukker heard him. It may be she associated him with 'the little man' who had left the black bishop at her door, and feared that her son was in danger. At any rate, she went at once to Drukker's room. The door may have been slightly open, and I think she saw the intruder and recognized him. Startled and apprehensive, she stepped inside and asked him why he was there. He may have answered that he had come to inform her of Drukker's death—which would account for her moans and her hysterical laughter. But that was only a prelimin'ry on his part—a play for time. He was devising some means of meeting the situation—he was planning how he would kill her! Oh, there can be no doubt of that. He couldn't afford to let her leave that room alive. Maybe he told her so in as many words—he spoke 'angry-like,' you recall. And then he laughed. He was torturing her now—perhaps telling her the whole truth in a burst of insane egoism; and she could say only 'Oh God—oh God!' He explained how he had pushed Drukker over the wall. And did he mention Humpty Dumpty? I think he did; for what more appreciative audience could he have had for his monstrous jest than the victim's own mother? That last revelation proved too much for her hypersensitive brain. She repeated the nursery rhyme in a spell of horror; and then the accumulated shock dilated her heart. She fell

across the bed, and the murderer was saved the necessity of sealing her lips with his own hands. He saw what had happened, and went quietly away."

Markham took a turn up and down the room.

"The least comprehensible part of last night's tragedy," he said, "is why this man should have come here after Drukker's death."

Vance was smoking thoughtfully.

"We'd better ask Arnesson to help us explain that point. Maybe he can throw some light on it."

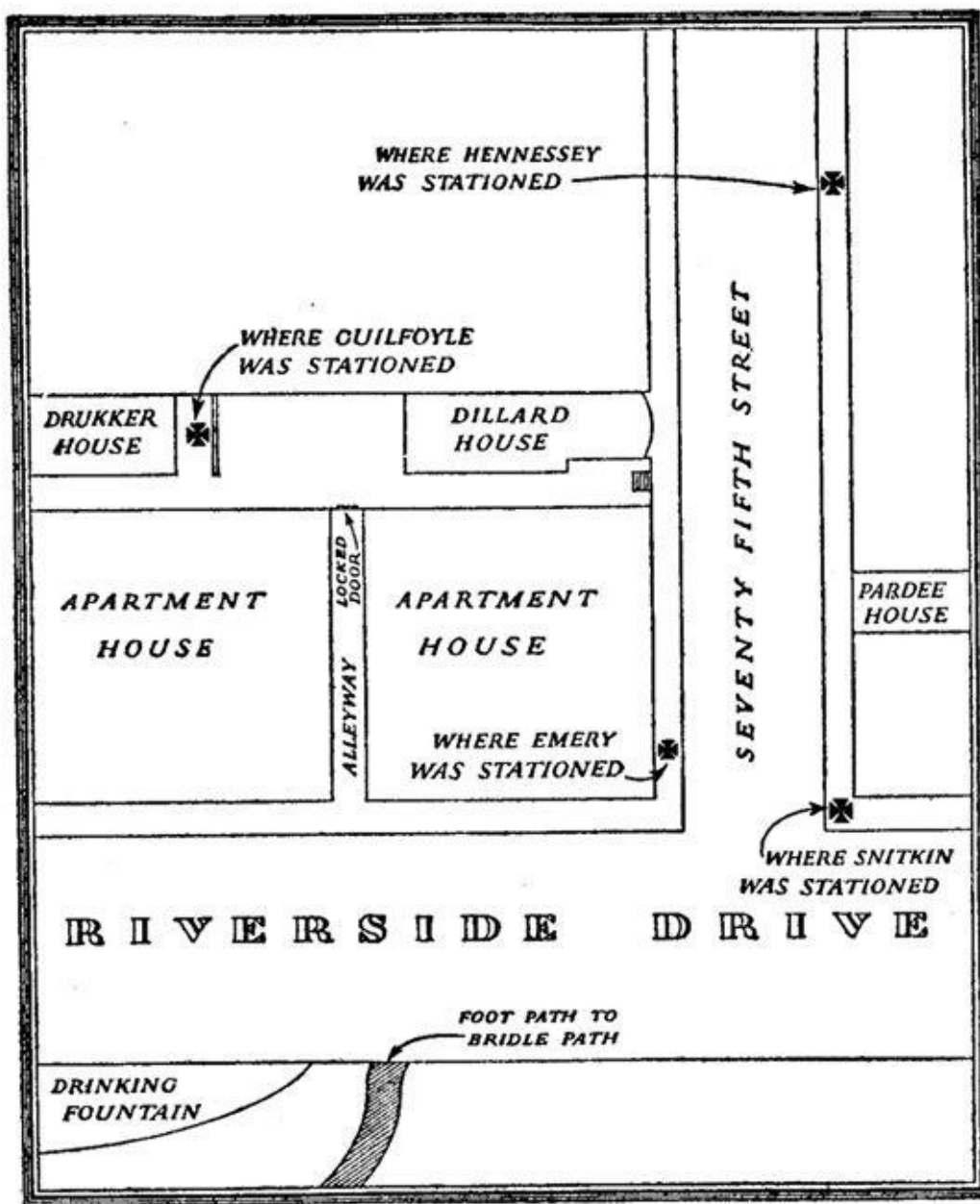
"Yeh, maybe he can," chimed in Heath. Then after rolling his cigar between his lips for a moment, he added sulkily: "There's several people around here, I'm thinking, that could do some high-class explaining."

Markham halted before the Sergeant.

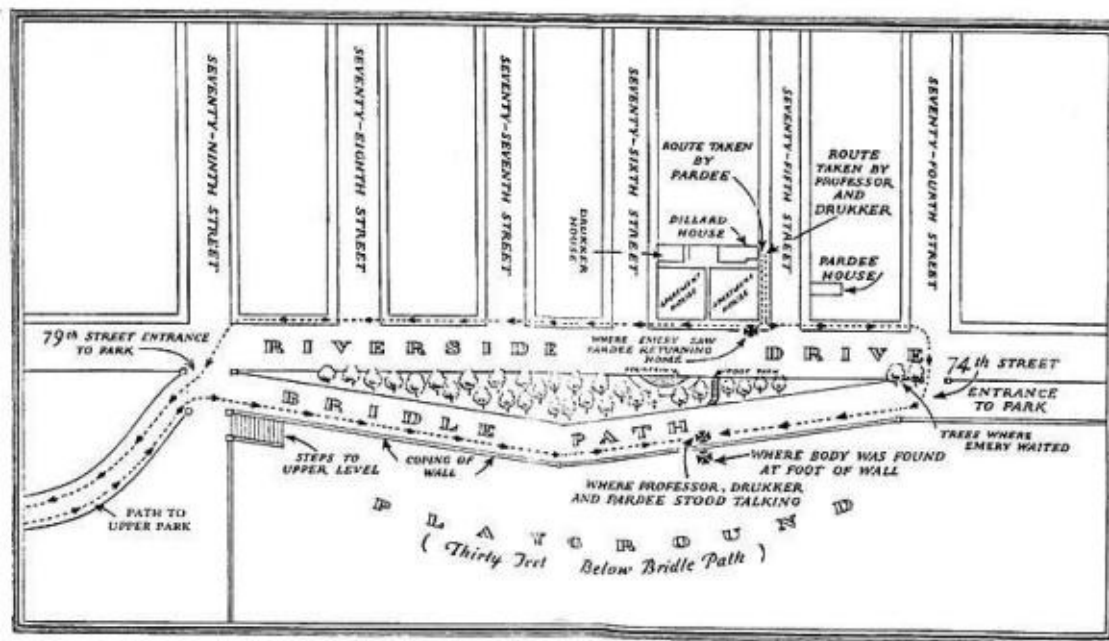
"The first thing we'd better do is to find out what your men know about the movements of the various persons hereabouts last night. Suppose you bring them here and let me question them.—How many were there, by the way?—and what were their posts?"

The Sergeant had risen, alert and energetic.

"There were three, sir, besides Guilfoyle. Emery was set to tail Pardee; Snitkin was stationed at the Drive and 75th Street to watch the Dillard house; and Hennessey was posted on 75th Street up near West End Avenue.—They're all waiting down at the place where Drukker was found. I'll get 'em up here pronto."



He disappeared through the front door, and in less than five minutes returned with the three detectives. I recognized them all, for each had worked on one or more of the cases in which Vance had figured.[26] Markham questioned Snitkin first as the one most likely to have information bearing directly on the previous night's affair. The following points were brought out by his testimony:



Pardee had emerged from his house at 6.30 and gone straight to the Dillards'.

At 8.30 Belle Dillard, in an evening gown, had got into a taxi and been driven up West End Avenue. (Arnesson had come out of the house with her and helped her into the taxicab, but had immediately returned indoors.)

At 9.15 Professor Dillard and Drukker had left the Dillard house and walked slowly toward Riverside Drive. They had crossed the Drive at 74th Street, and turned up the bridle path.

At 9.30 Pardee had come out of the Dillard house, walked down to the Drive, and turned up-town.

At a little after 10.00 Professor Dillard had returned to his house alone, recrossing the Drive at 74th Street.

At 10.20 Pardee had returned home, coming from the same direction he had taken when going out.

Belle Dillard had been brought home at 12.30 in a limousine filled with young people.

Hennessey was interrogated next; but his evidence merely substantiated Snitkin's. No one had approached the Dillard house from the direction of West End Avenue; and nothing of a suspicious nature had happened.

Markham then turned his attention to Emery, who reported that, according to Santos whom he had relieved at six, Pardee had spent the early part of the afternoon at the Manhattan Chess Club and had returned home at about four o'clock.

"Then, like Snitkin and Hennessey said," Emery continued, "he went to the Dillards' at half past six, and stayed till half past nine. When he came out I followed, keeping half a block or so behind him. He walked up the Drive to 79th Street, crossed to the upper park, and walked round the big grass bowl, past the rocks, and on up toward the Yacht Club. . . ."

"Did he take the path where Sprigg was shot?" Vance asked.

"He had to. There ain't any other path up that way unless you walk along the Drive."

"How far did he go?"

"The fact is, he stopped right about where Sprigg was bumped off. Then he came back the same way he'd gone and turned into the little park with the playground on the south side of 79th Street. He went slowly down the walk under the trees along the bridle path; and as he passed along the top of the wall under the drinking fountain, who should he run into but the old man and the hunchback, resting up against the ledge and talking. . . ."

"You say he met Professor Dillard and Drukker at the very spot where Drukker fell over the wall?" Markham leaned forward hopefully.

"Yes, sir. Pardee stopped to visit with them; and I naturally kept on going. As I passed 'em I heard the hunchback say: 'Why ain't you practising chess this evening?' And it sounded to me like he was sore at Pardee for stopping, and was hinting that he wasn't wanted. Anyhow, I ambled along the wall till I got to 74th Street where there was a couple of trees to hide under. . . ."

"How well could you see Pardee and Drukker after you'd reached 74th Street?" interrupted Markham.

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I couldn't see 'em at all. It was getting pretty misty about that time, and there isn't any lamp-post at that part of the walk where they were confabulating. But I figured Pardee would be along pretty soon, so I waited for him."

"This must have been well on toward ten o'clock."

"About a quarter of, I should say, sir."

"Were there any people on the walk at that time?"

"I didn't see anybody. The fog musta driven 'em indoors—it wasn't no warm balmy evening. And it was on account of there being nobody around that I went as far ahead as I did. Pardee's nobody's fool, and I'd already caught him looking at me once or twice as though he suspected I was tailing him."

"How long was it before you picked him up again?"

Emery shifted his position.

"My figuring wasn't so good last night," he confessed, with a weak grin. "Pardee musta gone back the way he came and recrossed the Drive at 79th Street; for a half-hour or so later I saw him heading home in front of the apartment-house light on the corner of 75th Street."

"But," interposed Vance; "if you were at the 74th Street entrance to the park until a quarter past ten you must have seen Professor Dillard pass you. He returned home about ten o'clock by that route."

"Sure, I saw him. I'd been waiting for Pardee about twenty minutes when the professor came strolling along all alone, crossed the Drive, and went home. I naturally thought Pardee and the hunchback were still gabbing,—that's why I took it easy and didn't go back to check up."

"Then, as I understand, about fifteen minutes after Professor Dillard passed you, you saw Pardee returning home from the opposite direction along the Drive."

"That's right, sir. And, of course, I took up my post again on 75th Street."

"You realize, Emery," said Markham gravely, "that it was during the time you waited at 74th Street that Drukker fell over the wall."

"Yes, sir. But you're not blaming me, are you? Watching a man on a foggy night on an open path when there ain't anybody around to screen you, is no easy job. You gotta take a few chances and do a little figuring if you don't want to get spotted."

"I realize your difficulty," Markham told him; "and I'm not criticizing you."

The Sergeant dismissed the three detectives gruffly. He was obviously dissatisfied with their reports.

"The farther we go," he complained, "the more gummed up this case gets."

"Sursum corda, Sergeant," Vance exhorted him. "Let not dark despair o'ercome you. When we have Pardee's and the Professor's testimony as to what took place while Emery was watchfully waiting beneath the trees at 74th Street, we may be able to fit some very interestin' bits together."

As he spoke Belle Dillard entered the front hall from the rear of the house. She saw us in the drawing-room and came in at once.

"Where's Lady Mae?" she asked in a troubled voice. "I was here an hour ago, and Grete told me she was out. And she's not in her room now."

Vance rose and gave her his chair.

"Mrs. Drukker died last night of heart failure. When you were here earlier Mrs. Menzel was afraid to let you go up-stairs."

The girl sat very quiet for some time. Presently the tears welled to her eyes.

"Perhaps she heard of Adolph's terrible accident."

"Possibly. But it's not quite clear what happened here last night. Doctor Barstead thinks Mrs. Drukker died at about ten o'clock."

"Almost the same time Adolph died," she murmured. "It seems too terrible. . . . Pyne told me of the accident when I came down to breakfast this morning,—every one in the quarter was talking about it,—and I came over at once to be with Lady Mae. But Grete said she had gone out, and I didn't know what to think. There's something very strange about Adolph's death. . . ."

"What do you mean by that, Miss Dillard?" Vance stood by the window watching her covertly.

"I—don't know—what I mean," she answered brokenly. "But only yesterday afternoon Lady Mae spoke to me about Adolph and the—wall. . . ."

"Oh, did she, now?" Vance's tone was more indolent than usual, but every nerve in his body was, I knew, vigilantly alert.

"On my way to the tennis courts," the girl went on, in a low, hushed voice, "I walked with Lady Mae along the bridge path above the playground—she often went there to watch Adolph playing with the children,—and we stood for a long time leaning over the stone balustrade of the wall. A group of children were gathered around Adolph: he had a toy aeroplane and was showing them how to fly it. And the children seemed to regard him as one of themselves; they didn't look upon him as a grown-up. Lady Mae was very happy and proud about it. She watched him with shining eyes, and then she said to me: 'They're not afraid of him, Belle, because he's a hunchback. They call him Humpty Dumpty—he's their old friend of the story-book. My poor Humpty Dumpty! It was all my fault for letting him fall when he was little.' . . ." The girl's voice faltered, and she put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"So she mentioned to you that the children called Drukker Humpty Dumpty." Vance reached slowly in his pocket for his cigarette-case.

She nodded, and a moment later lifted her head as if forcing herself to face something she dreaded.

"Yes! And that's what was so strange; for after a little while she shuddered and drew back from the wall. I asked her what was the matter, and she said in a terrified voice: 'Suppose, Belle—suppose that Adolph should ever fall off of this wall—the way the real Humpty Dumpty did!' I was almost afraid myself; but I forced a smile, and told her she was foolish. It didn't do any good, though. She shook her head and gave me a look that sent a chill through me. 'I'm not foolish,' she said. 'Wasn't Cock Robin killed with a bow and arrow, and wasn't Johnny Sprig shot with a little gun—*right here in New York?*'" The girl turned a frightened gaze upon us. "And it *did* happen, didn't it—just as she foresaw?"

"Yes, it happened," Vance nodded. "But we mustn't be mystical about it. Mrs. Drukker's imagination was abnormal. All manner of wild conjectures went through her tortured mind; and with these two other Mother-Goose deaths so vivid in her memory, it's not remarkable that she should have turned the children's sobriquet for her son into a tragic speculation of that kind. That he should actually have been killed in the manner she feared is nothing more than a coincidence. . . ."

He paused and drew deeply on his cigarette.

"I say, Miss Dillard," he asked negligently; "did you, by any chance, repeat your conversation with Mrs. Drukker to any one

yesterday?"

She regarded him with some surprise before answering.

"I mentioned it at dinner last night. It worried me all the afternoon, and—somehow—I didn't want to keep it to myself."

"Were any comments made about it?"

"Uncle told me I shouldn't spend so much time with Lady Mae—that she was unhealthily morbid. He said the situation was very tragic, but that there was no need for me to share Lady Mae's suffering. Mr. Pardee agreed with uncle. He was very sympathetic, and asked if something could not be done to help Lady Mae's mental condition."

"And Mr. Arnesson?"

"Oh, Sigurd never takes anything seriously,—I hate his attitude sometimes. He laughed as though it was a joke; and all he said was: 'It would be a shame if Adolph took his tumble before he got his new quantum problem worked out.'"

"Is Mr. Arnesson at home now, by the by?" asked Vance. "We want to ask him about the necess'ry arrangements in regard to the Drukkers."

"He went to the university early this morning; but he'll be back before lunch. He'll attend to everything, I am sure. We were about the only friends Lady Mae and Adolph had. I'll take charge in the meantime and see that Grete gets the house in order."

A few minutes later we left her and went to interview Professor Dillard.



## 19. THE RED NOTE-BOOK

(Saturday, April 16; noon)

The professor was plainly perturbed when we entered the library that noon. He sat in an easy chair with his back to the window, a glass of his precious port on the table beside him.

"I've been expecting you, Markham," he said, before we had time to speak. "There's no need to dissemble. Drukker's death was no accident. I'll admit I felt inclined to discount the insane implications arising from the deaths of Robin and Sprigg; but the moment Pyne related the circumstances of Drukker's fall I realized that there was a definite design behind these deaths: the probabilities of their being accidental would be incalculable. You know it, as well as I; otherwise you wouldn't be here."

"Very true." Markham had seated himself facing the professor. "We're confronted by a terrific problem. Moreover, Mrs. Drukker died of shock last night at almost the same time her son was killed."

"That, at least," returned the old man after a pause, "may be regarded as a blessing. It's better she didn't survive him—her mind unquestionably would have collapsed." He looked up. "In what way can I help?"

"You were probably the last person, with the exception of the actual murderer, to see Drukker alive; and we would like to know everything you can tell us of what took place last night."

Professor Dillard nodded.

"Drukker came here after dinner—about eight, I should say. Pardee had dined with us; and Drukker was annoyed at finding him here—in fact, he was openly hostile. Arnesson twitted him good-naturedly about his irascibility—which only made him more irritable; and, knowing that Drukker was anxious to thrash out a problem with me, I finally suggested that he and I stroll down to the park. . . ."

"You were not gone very long," suggested Markham.

"No. An unfortunate episode occurred. We walked up the bridle path to almost the exact spot where, I understand, the poor fellow was killed. We had been there for perhaps half an hour, leaning against the stone balustrade of the wall, when Pardee walked up. He stopped to speak to us, but Drukker was so antagonistic in his remarks that, after a few minutes, Pardee turned and walked away in the direction he had come. Drukker was very much upset, and I suggested we postpone the discussion. Furthermore, a damp mist had fallen, and I was beginning to get some twinges in my foot. Drukker straightway became morose, and said he didn't care to go indoors just yet. So I left him alone by the wall, and came home."

"Did you mention the episode to Arnesson?"

"I didn't see Sigurd after I got back. I imagine he'd gone to bed."

Later as we rose to take our leave, Vance asked casually: "Can you tell us where the key to the alley door is kept?"

"I know nothing about it, sir," the professor replied irritably, but added in a more equable tone: "However, as I remember, it used to hang on a nail by the archery-room door."

From Professor Dillard we went straight to Pardee, and were received at once in his study. His manner was rigid and detached, and even after we had seated ourselves he remained standing by the window, staring at us with unfriendly eyes.

"Do you know, Mr. Pardee," asked Markham, "that Mr. Drukker fell from the wall in the park at ten o'clock last night—shortly after you stopped and spoke to him?"

"I heard of the accident this morning." The man's pallor became more noticeable, and he toyed nervously with his watch chain. "It's very unfortunate." His eyes rested vacantly for a while on Markham. "Have you asked Professor Dillard about it? He was with Drukker —"

"Yes, yes; we've just come from him," interrupted Vance. "He said there was a ruffled atmosphere between you and Mr. Drukker last night."

Pardee slowly walked to the desk and sat down stiffly.

"Drukker was displeased for some reason to find me at the Dillards' when he came over after dinner. He hadn't the good taste to hide his displeasure, and created a somewhat embarrassing situation. But, knowing him as I did, I tried to pass the matter off. Soon, however, Professor Dillard took him out for a walk."

"You didn't remain long afterward," observed Vance indolently.

"No—about a quarter of an hour. Arnesson was tired and wanted to turn in, so I went for a walk myself. On my return I took the bridle path instead of the Drive, and came on Professor Dillard and Drukker standing by the wall talking. Not wishing to appear rude, I stopped for a moment. But Drukker was in a beastly mood and made several sneering remarks. I turned and walked back to 79th Street, crossed the Drive, and came home."

"I say; didn't you loiter a bit by the wayside?"

"I sat down near the 79th-Street entrance and smoked a cigarette."

For nearly half an hour Markham and Vance interrogated Pardee, but nothing more could be learned from him. As we came out into the street Arnesson hailed us from the front porch of the Dillard house and stalked forward to meet us.

"Just heard the sad news. Got home from the university a little while ago, and the professor told me you'd gone to rag Pardee. Learn anything?" Without waiting for an answer he ran on: "Frightful mess. I understand the entire Drukker family is wiped out. Well, well. And more story-book mumbo-jumbo to boot. . . . Any clues?"

"Ariadne has not yet favored us," responded Vance. "Are you an ambassador from Crete?"

"One never knows. Bring out your questionnaire." Vance had led the way toward the wall gate, and we now stepped down on the range.

"We'll repair to the Drukker house first," he said. "There'll be a number of things to settle. I suppose you'll look after Drukker's affairs and the funeral arrangements."

Arnesson made a grimace.

"Elected! I refuse, however, to attend the funeral. Obscene spectacles, funerals. But Belle and I will see to everything. Lady Mae probably left a will. We'll have to find it. Now, where do women generally hide their wills? . . ."

Vance halted by the Dillard's basement door and stepped into the archery-room. After glancing along the door's moulding he rejoined us on the range.

"The alley key isn't there.—By the by, what do you know about it, Mr. Arnesson?"

"You mean the key to yon wooden door in the fence? . . . Haven't an idea on the subject. Never use the alley myself—much simpler going out the front door. No one uses it, as far as I know. Belle locked it up years ago: thought some one might sneak in off the Drive and get an arrow in the eye. I told her, let 'em get popped—serve 'em right for being interested in archery."

We entered the Drukker house by the rear door. Belle Dillard and Mrs. Menzel were busy in the kitchen.

"Hallo, sis," Arnesson greeted the girl. His cynical manner had been dropped. "Hard lines for a young 'un like you. You'd better run home now. I'll assume command." And taking her arm in a jocularly paternal fashion, he led her to the door.

She hesitated and looked back at Vance.

"Mr. Arnesson is right," he nodded. "We'll carry on for the present.—But just one question before you go. Did you always keep the key to the alley door hanging in the archery-room?"

"Yes—always. Why? Isn't it there now?"

It was Arnesson who answered, with burlesque irony.

"Gone! Disappeared!—Most tragic. Some eccentric key-collector has evidently been snooping around." When the girl had left us, he cocked an eye at Vance. "What, in the name of all that's unholy, has a rusty key to do with the case?"

"Perhaps nothing," said Vance carelessly. "Let's go to the drawin'-room. It's more comfortable there." He led the way down the hall. "We want you to tell us what you can about last night."

Arnesson took an easy chair by the front window, and drew out his pipe.

"Last night, eh? . . . Well, Pardee came to dinner—it's a sort of habit with him on Fridays. Then Drukker, in the throes of quantum speculation, dropped in to pump the professor; and Pardee's presence galled him. Showed his feelings too, by Gad! No control. The professor broke up the *contretemps* by taking Drukker for an airing. Pardee moped for fifteen minutes or so, while I tried to keep awake. Then he had the goodness to depart. I looked over a few test papers . . . and so to bed." He lighted his pipe. "How does that thrilling recital explain the end of poor Drukker?"

"It doesn't," said Vance. "But it's not without interest.—Did you hear Professor Dillard when he returned home?"

"Hear him?" Arnesson chuckled. "When he hobbles about with his gouty foot, thumping his stick down and shaking the banisters, there's no mistaking his arrival on the scene. Fact is, he was unusually noisy last night."

"Offhand, what do you make of these new developments?" asked Vance, after a short pause.

"I'm somewhat foggy as to the details. The professor was not exactly phosphorescent. Sketchy, in fact. Drukker fell from the wall, like Humpty Dumpty, round ten o'clock, and was found this morning—that's all plain. But under what conditions did Lady Mae succumb to shock? Who, or what, shocked her? And how?"

"The murderer took Drukker's key and came here immediately after the crime. Mrs. Drukker caught him in her son's room. There was a scene, according to the cook, who listened from the head of the stairs; and during it Mrs. Drukker died from dilatation of the heart."

"Thereby relieving the gentleman of the bother of killing her."

"That seems clear enough," agreed Vance. "But the reason for the murderer's visit here is not so lucid. Can you suggest an explanation?"

Arnesson puffed thoughtfully on his pipe.

"Incomprehensible," he muttered at length. "Drukker had no valuables, or no compromising documents. Straightforward sort of cuss—not the kind to mix in any dirty business. . . . No possible reason for any one prowling about his room."

Vance lay back and appeared to relax.

"What was this quantum theory Drukker was working on?"

"Ha! Big thing!" Arnesson became animated. "He was on the path of reconciling the Einstein-Bohr theory of radiation with the facts of interference, and of overcoming the inconsistencies inherent in Einstein's hypothesis. His research had already led him to an abandonment of causal space-time coordination of atomic phenomena, and to its replacement by a statistical description.[\[27\]](#) . . . Would have revolutionized physics—made him famous. Shame he was told off before he'd put his data in shape."

"Do you happen to know where Drukker kept the records of these computations?"

"In a loose-leaf note-book—all tabulated and indexed. Methodical and neat about everything. Even his chirography was like copperplate."

"You know, then, what the note-book looked like?"

"I ought to. He showed it to me often enough. Red limp-leather cover—thin yellow pages—two or three clips on every sheet holding notations—his name gold-stamped in large letters on the binding. . . . Poor devil! *Sic transit*. . . ."

"Where would this note-book be now?"

"One of two places—either in the drawer of his desk in the study or else in the *escritoire* in his bedroom. In the daytime, of course, he worked in the study; but he fussed day and night when wrapped up in a problem. Kept an *escritoire* in his bedroom, where he put his current records when he retired, in case he got an inspiration to monkey with 'em during the night. Then, in the morning, back they'd go to the study. Regular machine for system."

Vance had been gazing lazily out of the window as Arnesson rambled on. The impression he gave was that he had scarcely heard the description of Drukker's habits; but presently he turned and fixed Arnesson with a languid look.

"I say," he drawled; "would you mind toddling up-stairs and fetching Drukker's note-book? Look in both the study and the bedroom."

I thought I noticed an almost imperceptible hesitation on Arnesson's part; but straightway he rose.

"Good idea. Too valuable a document to be left lying round." And he strode from the room.

Markham began pacing the floor, and Heath revealed his uneasiness by puffing more energetically on his cigar. There was a tense atmosphere in the little drawing-room as we waited for Arnesson's return. Each of us was in a state of expectancy, though just what we hoped for or feared would have been difficult to define.

In less than ten minutes Arnesson reappeared at the door. He shrugged his shoulders and held out empty hands.

"Gone!" he announced. "Looked in every likely place—couldn't find it." He threw himself into a chair and relighted his pipe. "Can't understand it. . . . Perhaps he hid it."

"Perhaps," murmured Vance.

## 20. THE NEMESIS

(Saturday, April 16; 1 p.m.)

It was past one o'clock, and Markham, Vance and I rode to the Stuyvesant Club. Heath remained at the Drukker house to carry on the routine work, to draw up his report, and to deal with the reporters who would be swarming there shortly.

Markham was booked for a conference with the Police Commissioner at three o'clock; and after lunch Vance and I walked to Stieglitz's Intimate Gallery and spent an hour at an exhibition of Georgia O'Keeffe's floral abstractions. Later we dropped in at Aeolian Hall and sat through Debussy's G-minor quartette. There were some Cézanne water-colors at the Montross Galleries; but by the time we had pushed our way through the late-afternoon traffic of Fifth Avenue the light had begun to fail, and Vance ordered the chauffeur to the Stuyvesant Club, where we joined Markham for tea.

"I feel so youthful, so simple, so innocent," Vance complained lugubriously. "So many things are happenin', and they're bein' manipulated so ingeniously that I can't grasp 'em. It's very disconcertin', very confusin'. I don't like it—I don't at all like it. Most wearin'." He sighed drearily and sipped his tea.

"Your sorrows leave me cold," retorted Markham.

"You've probably spent the afternoon inspecting arquebuses and petronels at the Metropolitan Museum. If you'd had to go through what I've suffered—"

"Now, don't be cross," Vance rebuked him. "There's far too much emotion in the world. Passion is not going to solve this case. Cerebration is our only hope. Let us be calm and thoughtful." His mood became serious. "Markham, this comes very near being the perfect crime. Like one of Morphy's great chess combinations, it has been calculated a score of moves ahead. There are no clues; and even if there were, they'd probably point in the wrong direction. And yet . . . and yet there's something that's trying to break through. I feel it: sheer intuition—that is to say, nerves. There's an inarticulate voice that wants to speak, and can't. A dozen times I've sensed the presence of some struggling force, like an invisible ghost trying to make contact without revealing its identity."

Markham gave an exasperated sigh.

"Very helpful. Do you advise calling in a medium?"

"There's something we've overlooked," Vance went on, disregarding the sarcasm. "The case is a cipher, and the key-word is somewhere before us, but we don't recognize it. 'Pon my soul, it's dashed annoyin'. . . . Let's be orderly. Neatness—that's our desideratum. First, Robin is killed. Next, Sprigg is shot. Then Mrs. Drukker is frightened with a black bishop. After that, Drukker is shoved over a wall. Makin' four distinct episodes in the murderer's extravaganza. Three of 'em were carefully planned. One—the leaving of the bishop at Mrs. Drukker's door—was forced on the murderer, and was therefore decided on without preparation. . . ."

"Clarify your reasoning on that point."

"Oh, my dear fellow! The conveyor of the black bishop was obviously acting in self-defence. An unexpected danger developed along his line of campaign, and he took this means of averting it. Just before Robin's death Drukker departed from the archery-room and installed himself in the arbor of the yard, where he could look into the archery-room through the rear window. A little later he saw some one in the room talking to Robin. He returned to his house, and at that moment Robin's body was thrown on the range. Mrs. Drukker saw it, and at the same time she probably saw Drukker. She screamed—very natural, what? Drukker heard the scream, and told us of it later in an effort to establish an alibi for himself after we'd informed him that Robin had been killed. Thus the murderer learned that Mrs. Drukker had seen something—how much, he didn't know. But he wasn't taking any chances. He went to her room at midnight to silence her, and took the bishop to leave beside her body as a signature. But he found the door locked, and left the bishop outside, by way of warning her to say nothing on pain of death. He didn't know that the poor woman suspected her own son."

"But why didn't Drukker tell us whom he saw in the archery-room with Robin?"

"We can only assume that the person was some one whom he couldn't conceive of as being guilty. And I'm inclined to believe he mentioned the fact to this person and thus sealed his own doom."

"Assuming the correctness of your theory, where does it lead us?"

"To the one episode that wasn't elaborately prepared in advance. And when there has been no preparation for a covert act there is pretty sure to be a weakness in one or more of the details.—Now, please note that at the time of each of the three murders any one of the various persons in the drama could have been present. No one had an alibi. That, of course, was cleverly calculated: the murderer chose an hour when all of the actors were, so to speak, waiting in the wings. But that midnight visit! Ah! That was a different matter. There was no time to work out a perfect set of circumstances,—the menace was too immediate. And what was the result? Drukker and Professor Dillard were, apparently, the only persons on hand at midnight. Arnesson and Belle Dillard were supping at the Plaza and didn't return home until half past twelve. Pardee was hornlocked with Rubinstein over a chess-board from eleven to one. Drukker is now of course eliminated. . . . What's the answer?"

"I could remind you," returned Markham irritably, "that the alibis of the others have not been thoroughly checked."

"Well, well, so you could." Vance lay back indolently and sent a long regular series of smoke-rings toward the ceiling. Suddenly his body tensed, and with meticulous care he leaned over and put out his cigarette. Then he glanced at his watch and got to his feet. He fixed Markham with a quizzical look.

"Allons, mon vieux. It's not yet six. Here's where Arnesson makes himself useful."

"What now?" expostulated Markham.

"Your own suggestion," Vance replied, taking him by the arm and leading him toward the door. "We're going to check Pardee's alibi."

Half an hour later we were seated with the professor and Arnesson in the Dillard Library.

"We've come on a somewhat unusual errand," explained Vance; "but it may have a vital bearing on our investigation." He took out

his wallet, and unfolded a sheet of paper. "Here's a document, Mr. Arnesson, I wish you'd glance over. It's a copy of the official scoresheet of the chess game between Pardee and Rubinstein. Very interestin'. I've toyed with it a bit, but I'd like your expert analysis of it. The first part of the game is usual enough, but the play after the adjournment rather appeals to me."

Arnesson took the paper and studied it with cynical amusement.

"Aha! The inglorious record of Pardee's Waterloo, eh?"

"What's the meaning of this, Markham?" asked professor Dillard contemptuously. "Do you hope to run a murderer to earth by dilly-dallying over a chess game?"

"Mr. Vance hoped something could be learned from it."

"Fiddlesticks!" The professor poured himself another glass of port and, opening a book, ignored us completely.

Arnesson was absorbed in the notations of the chess score.

"Something a bit queer here," he muttered. "The time's askew. Let's see. . . . The scoresheet shows that, up to the time of adjournment, White—that is, Pardee—had played one hour and forty-five minutes, and Black, or Rubinstein, one hour and fifty-eight minutes. So far, so good. Thirty moves. Quite in order. But the time at the end of the game, when Pardee resigned, totals two hours and thirty minutes for White, and three hours and thirty-two minutes for Black—which means that, during the second session of the game, White consumed only forty-five minutes whereas Black used up one hour and thirty-four minutes."

Vance nodded.

"Exactly. There were two hours and nineteen minutes of play beginning at 11 p.m., which carried the game to 1.19 a.m. And Rubinstein's moves during that time took forty-nine minutes longer than Pardee's.—Can you make out what happened?"

Arnesson pursed his lips and squinted at the notations.

"It's not clear. I'd need time."

"Suppose," Vance suggested, "we set up the game in the adjourned position and play it through. I'd like your opinion on the tactics."

Arnesson rose jerkily and went to the little chess table in the corner.

"Good idea." He emptied the men from the box. "Let's see now. . . . Oho! A black bishop is missing. When do I get it back, by the way?" He gave Vance a plaintive leer. "Never mind. We don't need it here. One black bishop was swapped." And he proceeded to arrange the men to accord with the position of the game at the time of adjournment. Then he sat down and studied the set-up.

"It doesn't strike me as a particularly unfavorable position for Pardee," ventured Vance.

"Me either. Can't see why he lost the game. Looks drawish to me." After a moment Arnesson referred to the scoresheet. "We'll run through the play and find out where the trouble lay." He made half a dozen moves; then, after several minutes' study, gave a grunt. "Ha! This is rather deep stuff of Rubinstein's. Amazing combination he began working up here. Subtle, by Gad! As I know Rubinstein, it took him a long time to figure it out. Slow, plodding chap."

"It's possible, isn't it," suggested Vance, "that the working out of that combination explains the discrepancy in time between Black and White?"

"Oh, undoubtedly. Rubinstein must have been in good form not to have made the discrepancy greater. Planning the combination took him all of forty-five minutes—or I'm a duffer."

"At what hour, would you say," asked Vance carelessly, "did Rubinstein use up that forty-five minutes?"

"Well, let's see. The play began at eleven: six moves before the combination started. . . . Oh, say, somewhere between half past eleven and half past twelve. . . . Yes, just about. Thirty moves before the adjournment: six moves beginning at eleven—that makes thirty-six: then on the forty-fourth move Rubinstein moved his pawn to Bishop-7-check, and Pardee resigned. . . . Yes—the working out of the combination was between eleven-thirty and twelve-thirty."

Vance regarded the men on the board, which were now in the position they had occupied at the time of Pardee's resignation.<sup>[28]</sup>

"Out of curiosity," he said quietly, "I played the game through to the checkmate the other night.—I say, Mr. Arnesson; would you mind doin' the same. I could bear to hear your comment on it."

Arnesson studied the position closely for a few minutes. Then he turned his head slowly and lifted his eyes to Vance. A sardonic grin overspread his face.

"I grasp the point. Gad! What a situation! Five moves for Black to win through. And an almost unheard-of finale in chess. Can't recall a similar instance. The last move would be Bishop to Knight-7, mating. In other words, Pardee was beaten by the black bishop! Incredible!"<sup>[29]</sup>

Professor Dillard put down his book.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, joining us at the chess table. "Pardee was defeated by the bishop?" He gave Vance a shrewd, admiring look. "You evidently had good reason, sir, for investigating that chess game. Pray overlook an old man's temper." He stood gazing down at the board with a sad, puzzled expression.

Markham was frowning with deep perplexity.

"You say it's unusual for a bishop alone to mate?" he asked Arnesson.

"Never happens—almost unique situation. And that it should happen to Pardee of all people! Incomprehensible!" He gave a short ironic laugh. "Inclines one to believe in a nemesis. You know, the bishop has been Pardee's *bête noir* for twenty years—it's ruined his life. Poor beggar! The black bishop is the symbol of his sorrow. Fate, by Gad! It's the one chessman that defeated the Pardee gambit. Bishop-to-Knight-5 always broke up his calculations—disqualified his pet theory—made a hissing and a mocking of his life's work. And now, with a chance to break even with the great Rubinstein, the bishop crops up again and drives him back into obscurity."

A few minutes later we took our departure and walked to West End Avenue, where we hailed a taxicab.

"It's no wonder, Vance," commented Markham, as we rode down-town, "that Pardee went white the other afternoon when you mentioned the black bishop's being at large at midnight. He probably thought you were deliberately insulting him—throwing his life's failure in his face."

"Perhaps. . . ." Vance gazed dreamily out into the gathering shadows. "Dashed queer about the bishop being his incubus all these years. Such recurring discouragements affect the strongest minds sometimes; create a desire for revenge on the world, with the cause of

one's failure exalted to an Astraeon symbol."

"It's difficult to picture Pardee in a vindictive rôle," objected Markham. Then, after a moment: "What was your point about the discrepancy in time between Pardee's and Rubinstein's playing? Suppose Rubinstein did take forty-five minutes or so to work out his combination. The game wasn't over until after one. I don't see that your visit to Arnesson put us ahead in any way."

"That's because you're unacquainted with the habits of chess players. In a clock game of that kind no player sits at the table all the time his opponent is figuring out moves. He walks about, stretches his muscles, takes the air, ogles the ladies, imbibes ice-water, and even indulges in food. At the Manhattan Square Masters Tournament last year there were four tables, and it was a common sight to see as many as three empty chairs at one time. Pardee's a nervous type. He wouldn't sit through Rubinstein's protracted mental speculations."

Vance lighted a cigarette slowly.

"Markham, Arnesson's analysis of that game reveals the fact that Pardee had three-quarters of an hour to himself around midnight."

## 21. MATHEMATICS AND MURDER

(Saturday, April 16; 8.30 p.m.)

Little was said about the case during dinner, but when we had settled ourselves in a secluded corner of the club lounge-room Markham again broached the subject.

"I can't see," he said, "that finding a loophole in Pardee's alibi helps us very much. It merely complicates an already intolerable situation."

"Yes," sighed Vance. "A sad and depressin' world. Each step appears to tangle us a little more. And the amazin' part of it is, the truth is staring us in the face; only, we can't see it."

"There's no evidence pointing to any one. There's not even a suspect against whose possible culpability reason doesn't revolt."

"I wouldn't say that, don't y' know. It's a mathematician's crime; and the landscape has been fairly cluttered with mathematicians."

Throughout the entire investigation no one had been indicated by name as the possible murderer. Yet each of us realized in his own heart that one of the persons with whom we had talked was guilty; and so hideous was this knowledge that we instinctively shrank from admitting it. From the first we had cloaked our true thoughts and fears with generalities.

"A mathematician's crime?" repeated Markham. "The case strikes me as a series of senseless acts committed by a maniac running amuck."

Vance shook his head.

"Our criminal is supersane, Markham. And his acts are not senseless: they're hideously logical and precise. True, they have been conceived with a grim and terrible humor, with a tremendously cynical attitude; but within themselves they are exact and rational."

Markham regarded Vance thoughtfully.

"How can you reconcile these Mother-Goose crimes with the mathematical mind?" he asked. "In what way can they be regarded as logical? To me they're nightmares, unrelated to sanity."

Vance settled himself deeper in his chair, and smoked for several minutes. Then he began an analysis of the case, which not only clarified the seeming madness of the crimes themselves, but brought all the events and the characters into a uniform focus. The accuracy of this analysis was brought home to us with tragic and overwhelming force before many days had passed.<sup>[30]</sup>

"In order to understand these crimes," he began, "we must consider the stock-in-trade of the mathematician, for all his speculations and computations tend to emphasize the relative insignificance of this planet and the unimportance of human life.—Regard, first, the mere scope of the mathematician's field. On the one hand he attempts to measure infinite space in terms of parsecs and light-years, and, on the other, to measure the electron which is so infinitely small that he has to invent the Rutherford unit—a millionth of a millimicron. His vision is one of transcendental perspectives, in which this earth and its people sink almost to the vanishing point. Some of the stars—such as Arcturus, Canopus and Betelgeuse—which he regards merely as minute and insignificant units, are many times more massive than our entire solar system. Shapleigh's estimate of the diameter of the Milky Way is 300,000 light-years; yet we must place 10,000 Milky Ways together to get the diameter of the universe—which gives us a cubical content a thousand milliard times greater than the scope of astronomical observation. Or, to put it relatively in terms of mass:—the sun's weight is 324,000 times greater than the weight of the earth; and the weight of the universe is postulated as that of a trillion<sup>[31]</sup>—a milliard times a milliard—suns. . . . Is it any wonder that workers in such stupendous magnitudes should sometimes lose all sense of earthly proportions?"

Vance made an insignificant gesture.

"But these are element'ry figures—the every-day facts of journeyman calculators. The higher mathematician goes vastly further. He deals in abstruse and apparently contradict'ry speculations which the average mind can not even grasp. He lives in a realm where time, as we know it, is without meaning save as a fiction of the brain, and becomes a fourth co-ordinate of three-dimensional space; where distance also is meaningless except for neighboring points, since there are an infinite number of shortest routes between any two given points; where the language of cause and effect becomes merely a convenient shorthand for explanat'ry purposes; where straight lines are non-existent and insusceptible of definition; where mass grows infinitely great when it reaches the velocity of light; where space itself is characterized by curvatures; where there are lower and higher orders of infinities; where the law of gravitation is abolished as an acting force and replaced by a characteristic of space—a conception that says, in effect, that the apple does not fall because it is attracted by the earth, but because it follows a geodesic, or world-line. . . .

"In this realm of the modern mathematician, curves exist without tangents. Neither Newton nor Leibnitz nor Bernoulli even dreamed of a continuous curve without a tangent—that is, a continuous function without a differential co-efficient. Indeed, no one is able to picture such a contradiction,—it lies beyond the power of imagination. And yet it is a commonplace of modern mathematics to work with curves that have no tangents.—moreover,  $\pi$ —that old friend of our school-days, which we regarded as immutable—is no longer a constant; and the ratio between diameter and circumference now varies according to whether one is measuring a circle at rest or a rotating circle. . . . Do I bore you?"

"Unquestionably," retorted Markham. "But pray continue, provided your observations have an earthly direction."

Vance sighed and shook his head hopelessly, but at once became serious again.

"The concepts of modern mathematics project the individual out of the world of reality into a pure fiction of thought, and lead to what Einstein calls the most degenerate form of imagination—pathological individualism. Silberstein, for instance, argues the possibility of five- and six-dimensional space, and speculates on one's ability to see an event before it happens. The conclusions contingent on the conception of Flammarion's Lumen—a fictive person who travels faster than the velocity of light and is therefore able to experience time extending in a reverse direction—are in themselves enough to distort any natural and sane point of view.<sup>[32]</sup> But there is another conceptual Homunculus even weirder than Lumen from the standpoint of rational thinking. This hypothetical creature can traverse all worlds at once with infinite velocity, so that he is able to behold all human history at a glance. From Alpha



Centauri he can see the earth as it was four years ago; from the Milky Way he can see it as it was 4,000 years ago; and he can also choose a point in space where he can witness the ice-age and the present day simultaneously! . . ."

Vance settled himself more deeply in his chair.

"Toying with the simple idea of infinity is enough to unhinge the average man's mind. But what of the well-known proposition of modern physics that we cannot take a straight and ever-advancing path into space without returning to our point of departure? This proposition holds, in brief, that we may go straight to Sirius and a million times further without changing direction, but we can never leave the universe: we at last return to our starting-point *from the opposite direction!* Would you say, Markham, that this idea is conducive to what we quaintly call normal thinking? But however paradoxical and incomprehensible it may seem, it is almost rudiment'ry when compared with other theorems advanced by mathematical physics. Consider, for example, what is called the problem of the twins. One of two twins starts to Arcturus at birth—that is, with accelerated motion in a gravitational field—and, on returning, discovers that he is much younger than his brother. If, on the other hand, we assume that the motion of the twins is Galilean and that they are therefore travelling with uniform motion relative to each other, then each twin will find that his brother is younger than himself! . . ."

"These are not paradoxes of logic, Markham: they're only paradoxes of feeling. Mathematics accounts for them logically and scientifically.[33] The point I'm trying to make is that things which seem inconsistent and even absurd to the lay mind, are commonplaces to the mathematical intelligence. A mathematico-physicist like Einstein announces that the diameter of space—of space, mind you—is 100,000,000 light-years, or 700 trillion miles; and considers the calculation abecedarian. When we ask what is beyond this diameter, the answer is: 'There is no beyond: these limitations include everything.' To wit, infinity is finite! Or, as the scientist would say, space is unbounded but finite.—Let your mind meditate on this idea for half an hour, Markham, and you'll have a sensation that you're going mad."

He paused to light a cigarette.

"Space and matter—that's the mathematician's speculative territ'ry. Eddington conceives matter as a characteristic of space—a bump in nothingness; whereas Weil conceives space as a characteristic of matter,—to him empty space is meaningless. Thus Kant's noumenon and phenomenon become interchangeable; and even philosophy loses all significance. But when we come to the mathematical conceptions of finite space all rational laws are abrogated. De Sitter's conception of the shape of space is globular, or spherical. Einstein's space is cylindrical; and matter approaches zero at the periphery, or 'border condition.' Weyl's space, based on Mach's mechanics, is saddle-shaped. . . . Now, what becomes of nature, of the world we live in, of human existence, when we weigh them against such conceptions? Eddington suggests the conclusion that there are no natural laws—namely, that nature is not amenable to the law of sufficient reason. Alas, poor Schopenhauer![34] And Bertrand Russell sums up the inevitable results of modern physics by suggesting that matter is to be interpreted merely as a group of occurrences, and that matter itself need not be existent! . . . Do you see what it all leads to? If the world is non-causative and non-existent, what is a mere human life?—or the life of a nation?—or, for that matter, existence itself? . . ."

Vance looked up, and Markham nodded dubiously.

"So far I follow you, of course," he said. "But your point seems vague—not to say esoteric."

"Is it surprising," asked Vance, "that a man dealing in such colossal, incommensurable concepts, wherein the individuals of human society are infinitesimal, might in time lose all sense of relative values on earth, and come to have an enormous contempt for human life? The comparatively insignificant affairs of this world would then become mere petty intrusions on the macrocosmos of his mental consciousness. Inevitably such a man's attitude would become cynical. In his heart he would scoff at all human values, and sneer at the littleness of the visual things about him. Perhaps there would be a sadistic element in his attitude; for cynicism is a form of sadism. . . ."

"But deliberate, planned murder!" objected Markham.

"Consider the psychological aspects of the case. With the normal person, who takes his recreations daily, a balance is maintained between the conscious and the unconscious activities: the emotions, being constantly dispersed, are not allowed to accumulate. But with the abnormal person, who spends his entire time in intense mental concentration and who rigorously suppresses all his emotions, the loosening of the subconscious is apt to result in a violent manifestation. This long inhibition and protracted mental application, without recreation or outlet of any kind, causes an explosion which often assumes the form of deeds of unspeakable horror. No human being, however intellectual, can escape the results. The mathematician who repudiates nature's laws is nevertheless amenable to those laws. Indeed, his rapt absorption in hyperphysical problems merely increases the pressure of his denied emotions. And outraged nature, in order to maintain her balance, produces the most grotesque fulminations—reactions which, in their terrible humor and perverted gaiety, are the exact reverse of the grim seriousness of abstruse mathematical theories. The fact that Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge—both great mathematical physicists—became confirmed spiritists, constitutes a similar psychological phenomenon."

Vance took several deep inhalations on his cigarette.

"Markham, there's no escaping the fact: these fantastic and seemingly incredible murders were planned by a mathematician as forced outlets to a life of tense abstract speculation and emotional repression. They fulfil all the indicated requirements: they are neat and precise, beautifully worked out, with every minute factor fitting snugly in place. No loose ends, no remainders, apparently no motive. And aside from their highly imaginative precision, all their indications point unmistakably to an abstrusely conceptive intelligence on the loose—a devotee of pure science having his fling."

"But why their grisly humor?" asked Markham. "How do you reconcile the Mother-Goose phase of them with your theory?"

"The existence of inhibited impulses," explained Vance, "always produces a state favorable to humor. Dugas designates humor as a '*détente*'—a release from tension; and Bain, following Spencer, calls humor a relief from restraint. The most fertile field for a manifestation of humor lies in accumulated potential energy—what Freud calls *Besetzungsenergie*—which in time demands a free discharge. In these Mother-Goose crimes we have the mathematician reacting to the most fantastic of frivolous acts in order to balance his superserious logical speculations. It's as if he were saying cynically: 'Behold! This is the world that you take so seriously because you know nothing of the infinitely larger abstract world. Life on earth is a child's game—hardly important enough to make a joke



about.' . . . And such an attitude would be wholly consistent with psychology; for after any great prolonged mental strain one's reactions will take the form of reversals—that is to say, the most serious and dignified will seek an outlet in the most childish games. Here, incidentally, you have the explanation for the practical joker with his sadistic instincts. . . .

"Moreover, all sadists have an infantile complex. And the child is totally amoral. A man, therefore, who experiences these infantile psychological reversals is beyond good and evil. Many modern mathematicians even hold that all convention, duty, morality, good, and the like, could not exist except for the fiction of free will. To them the science of ethics is a field haunted by conceptual ghosts; and they even arrive at the disintegrating doubt as to whether truth itself is not merely a figment of the imagination. . . . Add to these considerations the sense of earthly distortion and the contempt for human life which might easily result from the speculations of higher mathematics, and you have a perfect set of conditions for the type of crimes with which we are dealing."

When Vance had finished speaking Markham sat silent for a long time. Finally he moved restively.

"I can understand," he said, "how these crimes might fit almost any of the persons involved. But, on the basis of your argument, how do you account for the notes to the press?"

"Humor must be imparted," returned Vance. "'A jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him who hears it.' Also, the impulse toward exhibitionism enters into the present case."

"But the 'Bishop' alias?"

"Ah! That's a most vital point. The *raison d'être* of this terrible orgy of humor lies in that cryptic signature."

Markham turned slowly.

"Does the chess player and the astronomer fulfil the conditions of your theory as well as the mathematical physicist?"

"Yes," Vance replied. "Since the days of Philidor, Staunton and Kieseritzki, when chess was something of a fine art, the game has degenerated almost into an exact science; and during Capablanca's régime it has become largely a matter of abstract mathematical speculation. Indeed, Maroczy, Doctor Lasker and Vidmar are all well-known mathematicians. . . . And the astronomer, who actually views the universe, may get an even more intense impression of the unimportance of this earth than the speculative physicist. Imagination runs riot through a telescope. The mere theory of existing life on distant planets tends to reduce earthly life to secondry consideration. For hours after one has looked at Mars, for instance, and dallied with the notion that its inhabitants outnumber and surpass in intelligence our own population, one has difficulty in readjusting oneself to the petty affairs of life here on earth. Even a reading of Percival Lowell's romantic book<sup>[35]</sup> temporarily takes away from the imaginative person all consciousness of the significance of any single planetry existence."

There was a long silence. Then Markham asked:

"Why should Pardee have taken Arnesson's black bishop that night instead of one from the club where it would not have been missed?"

"We don't know enough of the motive to say. He may have taken it with some deliberate purpose in view.—But what evidence have you of his guilt? All the suspicions in the world would not permit you to take any step against him. Even if we knew indubitably who the murderer was, we'd be helpless. . . . I tell you, Markham, we're facing a shrewd brain—one that figures out every move, and calculates all the possibilities. Our only hope is to create our own evidence by finding a weakness in the murderer's combination."

"The first thing in the morning," declared Markham grimly, "I'm going to put Heath to work on Pardee's alibi that night. There'll be twenty men checking it up by noon, questioning every spectator at that chess game, and making a door-to-door canvass between the Manhattan Chess Club and the Drukker house. If we can find some one who actually saw Pardee in the vicinity of the Drukkers' around midnight, then we'll have a very suspicious piece of circumstantial evidence against him."

"Yes," agreed Vance; "that would give us a definite starting-point. Pardee would have considerable difficulty in explaining why he was six blocks away from the club during his set-to with Rubinstein at the exact hour that a black bishop was being left at Mrs. Drukker's door. . . . Yes, yes. By all means have Heath and his minions tackle the problem. It may lead us forward."

But the Sergeant was never called upon to check the alibi. Before nine o'clock on the following morning Markham called at Vance's house to inform him that Pardee had committed suicide.

## 22. THE HOUSE OF CARDS

(Sunday, April 17; 9 a.m.)

The astounding news of Pardee's death had a curiously disturbing effect on Vance. He stared at Markham unbelievably. Then he rang hastily for Currie and ordered his clothes and a cup of coffee. There was an eager impatience in his movements as he dressed.

"My word, Markham!" he exclaimed. "This is most extr'ordin'ry. . . . How did you hear of it?"

"Professor Dillard phoned me at my apartment less than half an hour ago. Pardee killed himself in the archery-room of the Dillard home some time last night. Pyne discovered the body this morning and informed the professor. I relayed the news to Sergeant Heath, and then came here. In the circumstances I thought we ought to be on hand." Markham paused to light his cigar. "It looks as if the Bishop case was over. . . . Not an entirely satisfactory ending, but perhaps the best for every one concerned."

Vance made no immediate comment. He sipped his coffee abstractedly, and at length got up and took his hat and stick.

"Suicide. . . .," he murmured, as we went down the stairs. "Yes, that would be wholly consistent. But, as you say, unsatisfact'ry—dashed unsatisfact'ry. . . ."

We rode to the Dillard house, and were admitted by Pyne. Professor Dillard had no more than joined us in the drawing-room when the door-bell rang, and Heath, pugnacious and dynamic, bustled in.

"This'll clean things up, sir," he exulted to Markham, after the usual ritualistic handshake. "Those quiet birds . . . you never can tell. Yet, who'd've thought. . . .?"

"Oh, I say, Sergeant," Vance drawled; "let's not think. Much too wearin'. An open mind—arid like a desert—is indicated."

Professor Dillard led the way to the archery-room. The shades at all the windows were drawn, and the electric lights were still burning. I noticed, too, that the windows were closed.

"I left everything exactly as it was," explained the professor.

Markham walked to the large wicker centre-table. Pardee's body was slumped in a chair facing the range door. His head and shoulders had fallen forward over the table; and his right arm hung at his side, the fingers still clutching an automatic pistol. There was an ugly wound in his right temple; and on the table beneath his head was a pool of coagulated blood.

Our eyes rested but a moment on the body, for a startling and incongruous thing diverted our attention. The magazines on the table had been pushed aside, leaving an open space in front of the body; and in this cleared area rose a tall and beautifully constructed house of playing cards. Four arrows marked the boundaries of the yard, and matches had been laid side by side to represent the garden walks. It was a reproduction that would have delighted a child's heart; and I recalled what Vance had said the night before about serious minds seeking recreation in children's games. There was something unutterably horrible in the juxtaposition of this juvenile card structure and violent death.

Vance stood looking down at the scene with sad, troubled eyes.

"Hic jacet John Pardee," he murmured, with a sort of reverence. "And this is the house that Jack built . . . a house of cards. . . ."

He stepped forward as if to inspect it more closely; but as his body struck the edge of the table there was a slight jar, and the flimsy edifice of cards toppled over.

Markham drew himself up and turned to Heath.

"Have you notified the Medical Examiner?"

"Sure." The Sergeant seemed to find it difficult to take his eyes from the table. "And Burke's coming along, in case we need him." He went to the windows and threw up the shades, letting in the bright daylight. Then he returned to Pardee's body and stood regarding it appraisingly. Suddenly he knelt down and leaned over.

"That looks to me like the .38 that was in the tool-chest," he remarked.

"Undoubtedly," nodded Vance, taking out his cigarette-case.

Heath rose and, going to the chest, inspected the contents of its drawer. "I guess that's it, all right. We'll get Miss Dillard to identify it after the doc has been here."

At this moment Arnesson, clothed in a brilliant red-and-yellow dressing-gown, burst excitedly into the room.

"By all the witches!" he exclaimed. "Pyne just told me the news." He came to the table and stared at Pardee's body. "Suicide, eh? . . . But why didn't he choose his own home for the performance? Damned inconsiderate of him to muss up some one else's house this way. Just like a chess player." He lifted his eyes to Markham. "Hope this won't involve us in more unpleasantness. We've had enough notoriety. Distracts the mind. When'll you be able to take the beggar's remains away? Don't want Belle to see him."

"The body will be removed as soon as the Medical Examiner has seen it," Markham told him in a tone of frosty rebuke. "And there will be no necessity to bring Miss Dillard here."

"Good." Arnesson still stood staring at the dead man. Slowly a look of cynical wistfulness came over his face. "Poor devil! Life was too much for him. Hypersensitive—no psychic stamina. Took things too seriously. Brooded over his fate ever since his gambit went up in smoke. Couldn't find any other diversion. The black bishop haunted him; probably tipped his mind from its axis. By Gad! Wouldn't be surprised if the idea drove him to self-destruction. Might have imagined he was a chess bishop—trying to get back at the world in the guise of his nemesis."

"Clever idea," returned Vance. "By the by, there was a house of cards on the table when we first saw the body."

"Ha! I wondered what the cards were doing there. Thought he might have sought solace in solitaire during his last moments. . . . A card house, eh? Sounds foolish. Do you know the answer?"

"Not all of it. 'The house that Jack built' might explain something."

"I see." Arnesson looked owlsh. "Playing children's games to the end—even on himself. Queer notion." He yawned cavernously. "Guess I'll get some clothes on." And he went up-stairs.

Professor Dillard had stood watching Arnesson with a look at once distressed and paternal. Now he turned to Markham with a gesture of annoyance.

"Sigurd's always protecting himself against his emotions. He's ashamed of his feelings. Don't take his careless attitude too seriously."

Before Markham could make a reply Pyne ushered Detective Burke into the room; and Vance took the opportunity of questioning the butler about his discovery of Pardee.

"How did it happen you entered the archery-room this morning?" he asked.

"It was a bit close in the pantry, sir," the man returned, "and I opened the door at the foot of the stairs to get a little more air. Then I noticed that the shades were down—"

"It's not custom'ry to draw the shades at night, then?"

"No, sir—not in this room."

"How about the windows?"

"I always leave them slightly open from the top at night."

"Were they left open last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good.—And after you opened the door this morning?"

"I started to put out the lights, thinking Miss Dillard had forgotten to turn the switch last night; but just then I saw the poor gentleman there at the table, and went straight up and informed Professor Dillard."

"Does Beedle know about the tragedy?"

"I told her of it right after you gentlemen arrived."

"What time did you and Beedle retire last night?"

"At ten o'clock, sir."

When Pyne had left us Markham addressed Professor Dillard.

"It might be well for you to give us what details you can while we're waiting for Doctor Doremus.—Shall we go up-stairs?"

Burke remained in the archery-room, and the rest of us went to the library.

"I'm afraid there's little I can tell you," the professor began, settling himself and taking out his pipe. There was a noticeable reserve in his manner—a kind of detached reluctance. "Pardee came here last night after dinner, ostensibly to chat with Arnesson, but actually, I imagine, to see Belle. Belle, however, excused herself early and went to bed—the child had a bad headache—and Pardee remained until about half past eleven. Then he went out; and that was the last I saw of him until Pyne brought me the terrible news this morning."

"But if," put in Vance, "Mr. Pardee came to see your niece, how do you account for his staying so late after she had retired?"

"I don't account for it." The old man exhibited perplexity. "He gave the impression, though, that there was something on his mind and that he desired a sense of human contact. The fact is, I had to hint rather broadly about being tired before he finally got up to go."

"Where was Mr. Arnesson during the evening?"

"Sigurd remained here talking with us for an hour or so after Belle had retired, and then went to bed. He'd been busy with Drukker's affairs all afternoon, and was played out."

"What time would that have been?"

"About half past ten."

"And you say," continued Vance, "that Mr. Pardee impressed you as being under a mental strain?"

"Not a strain exactly." The professor drew on his pipe, frowning. "He appeared depressed, almost melancholy."

"Did it strike you that he was in fear of something?"

"No; not in the least. He was more like a man who had suffered a great sorrow and couldn't shake the effects of it."

"When he went out did you go with him into the hall—that is, did you note which direction he took?"

"No. We always treated Pardee very informally here. He said good-night and left the room. I took it for granted he went to the front door and let himself out."

"Did you go to your own room at once?"

"In about ten minutes. I stayed up only long enough to arrange some papers I'd been working on."

Vance lapsed into silence—he was obviously puzzled over some phase of the episode; and Markham took up the interrogation.

"I suppose," he said, "that it is useless to ask if you heard any sound last night that might have been a shot."

"Everything in the house was quiet," Professor Dillard replied. "And anyway no sound of a shot would carry from the archery-room to this floor. There are two flights of stairs, the entire length of the lower hall and a passageway, and three heavy doors between. Moreover, the walls of this old house are very thick and solid."

"And no one," supplemented Vance, "could have heard the shot from the street, for the archery-room windows were carefully closed."

The professor nodded and gave him a searching look.

"That is true. I see you, too, noticed that peculiar circumstance. I don't quite understand why Pardee should have shut the windows."

"The idiosyncrasies of suicides have never been satisfactorily explained," returned Vance casually. Then, after a short pause, he asked: "What were you and Mr. Pardee talking about during the hour preceding his departure?"

"We talked very little. I was more or less engaged with a new paper of Millikan's in the *Physics Review* on alkali doublets, and I tried to interest him in it; but his mind, as I've said, was noticeably preoccupied, and he amused himself at the chess-board for the best part of the hour."

"Ah! Did he, now? That's most interestin'."

Vance glanced at the board. A number of pieces were still standing on the squares; and he rose quickly and crossed the room to the little table. After a moment he came back and reseated himself.

"Most curious," he murmured, and very deliberately lighted a cigarette. "He was evidently pondering over the end of his game with

Rubinstein just before he went down-stairs last night. The pieces are set up exactly as they were at the time he resigned the contest—with the inevitable black-bishop-mate only five moves off."

Professor Dillard's gaze moved to the chess table wonderingly.

"The black bishop," he repeated in a low tone. "Could that have been what was preying on his mind last night? It seems unbelievable that so trivial a thing could affect him so disastrously."

"Don't forget, sir," Vance reminded him, "that the black bishop was the symbol of his failure. It represented the wreckage of his hopes. Less potent factors have driven men to take their own lives."

A few minutes later Burke informed us that the Medical Examiner had arrived. Taking leave of the professor we descended again to the archery-room, where Doctor Doremus was busy with his examination of Pardee's body.

He looked up as we entered and waved one hand perfunctorily. His usual jovial manner was gone.

"When's this business going to stop?" he grumbled. "I don't like the atmosphere round here. Murders—death from shock—suicides. Enough to give any one the creeps. I'm going to get a nice uneventful job in a slaughter house."

"We believe," said Markham, "that this is the end."

Doremus blinked. "So! That's it, is it?—the Bishop suicides after running the town ragged. Sounds reasonable. Hope you're right." He again bent over the body, and, unflexing the fingers, tossed the revolver to the table.

"For your armory, Sergeant."

Heath dropped the weapon in his pocket.

"How long's he been dead, doc?"

"Oh, since midnight, or thereabouts. Maybe earlier, maybe later.—Any other fool questions?"

Heath grinned. "Is there any doubt about it being suicide?"

Doremus glared passionately at the Sergeant.

"What does it look like? A black-hand bombing?" Then he became professional. "The weapon was in his hand. Powder marks on the temple. Hole the right size for the gun, and in the right place. Position of the body natural. Can't see anything suspicious.—Why? Got any doubts?"

It was Markham who answered.

"To the contrary, doctor. Everything from our angle of the case points to suicide."

"It's suicide all right, then. I'll check up a little further, though.—Here, Sergeant, give me a hand."

When Heath had helped to lift Pardee's body to the divan for a more detailed examination, we went to the drawing-room where we were joined shortly by Arnesson.

"What's the verdict?" he asked, dropping into the nearest chair. "I suppose there's no question that the chap committed the act himself."

"Why should you raise the point, Mr. Arnesson?" Vance parried.

"No reason. An idle comment. Lots of queer things going on hereabouts."

"Oh, obviously." Vance blew a wreath of smoke upward. "No; the Medical Examiner seems to think there's no doubt in the matter. Did Pardee, by the by, impress you as bent on self-destruction last night?"

Arnesson considered. "Hard to say," he concluded. "He was never a gay soul. But suicide? . . . I don't know. However, you say there's no question about it; so there you are."

"Quite, quite. And how does this new situation fit into your formula?"

"Dissipates the whole equation, of course. No more need for speculation." Despite his words, he appeared uncertain. "What I can't understand," he added, "is why he should choose the archery-room. Lot of space in his own house for a *felo-de-se*."

"There was a convenient gun in the archery-room," suggested Vance. "And that reminds me: Sergeant Heath would like to have Miss Dillard identify the weapon, as a matter of form."

"That's easy. Where is it?"

Heath handed it to him, and he started from the room.

"Also"—Vance halted him—"you might ask Miss Dillard if she kept playing cards in the archery-room."

Arnesson returned in a few minutes and informed us that the gun was the one which had been in the tool-chest drawer, and that not only were playing cards kept in the table drawer of the archery-room but that Pardee knew of their presence there.

Doctor Doremus appeared soon afterwards and iterated his conclusion that Pardee had shot himself.

"That'll be my report," he said. "Can't see any way out of it. To be sure, lots of suicides are fakes—but that's *your* province. Nothing in the least suspicious here."

Markham nodded with undisguised satisfaction.

"We've no reason to question your findings, doctor. In fact, suicide fits perfectly with what we already know. It brings this whole Bishop orgy to a logical conclusion." He got up like a man from whose shoulders a great burden had been lifted. "Sergeant, I'll leave you to arrange for the removal of the body for the autopsy; but you'd better drop in at the Stuyvesant Club later. Thank Heaven today is Sunday! It gives us time to turn round."

That night at the club Vance and Markham and I sat alone in the lounge-room. Heath had come and gone, and a careful statement had been drawn up for the press announcing Pardee's suicide and intimating that the Bishop case was thereby closed. Vance had said little all day. He had refused to offer any suggestion as to the wording of the official statement, and had appeared reluctant even to discuss the new phase of the case. But now he gave voice to the doubts that had evidently been occupying his mind.

"It's too easy, Markham—much too easy. There's an aroma of speciousness about it. It's perfectly logical, d' ye see, but it's not satisfyin'. I can't exactly picture our Bishop terminating his debauch of humor in any such banal fashion. There's nothing witty in blowin' one's brain out—it's rather commonplace, don't y' know. Shows a woeful lack of originality. It's not worthy of the artificer of the Mother-Goose murders."

Markham was disgruntled.

"You yourself explained how the crimes accorded with the psychological possibilities of Pardee's mentality; and to me it appears highly reasonable that, having perpetrated his gruesome jokes and come to the end of his rope, he should have done away with himself."

"You're probably right," sighed Vance. "I haven't any coruscatin' arguments to combat you with. Only, I'm disappointed. I don't like anticlimaxes, especially when they don't jibe with my idea of the dramatist's talent. Pardee's death at this moment is too deuced neat—it clears things up too tidily. There's too much utility in it, and too little imagination."

Markham felt that he could afford to be tolerant.

"Perhaps his imagination was exhausted on the murders. His suicide might be regarded merely as a lowering of the curtain when the play was over. In any event, it was by no means an incredible act. Defeat and disappointment and discouragement—a thwarting of all one's ambitions—have constituted cause for suicide since time immemorial."

"Exactly. We have a reasonable motive, or explanation, for his suicide, but no motive for the murders."

"Pardee was in love with Belle Dillard," argued Markham; "and he probably knew that Robin was a suitor for her hand. Also, he was intensely jealous of Drukker."

"And Sprigg's murder?"

"We have no data on that point."

Vance shook his head.

"We can't separate the crimes as to motive. They all sprang from one underlying impulse: they were actuated by a single urgent passion."

Markham sighed impatiently.

"Even if Pardee's suicide is unrelated to the murders, we're at a dead end, figuratively and literally."

"Yes, yes. A dead end. Very distressin'. Consolin' for the police, though. It lets them out—for a while, anyway. But don't misinterpret my vagaries. Pardee's death is unquestionably related to the murders. Rather intimate relationship, too, I'd say."

Markham took his cigar slowly from his mouth and scrutinized Vance for several moments.

"Is there any doubt in your mind," he asked, "that Pardee committed suicide?"

Vance hesitated before answering.

"I could bear to know," he drawled, "why that house of cards collapsed so readily when I deliberately leaned against the table—"

"Yes?"

"—and why it didn't topple over when Pardee's head and shoulders fell forward on the table after he'd shot himself."

"Nothing to that," said Markham. "The first jar may have loosened the cards—" Suddenly his eyes narrowed. "Are you implying that the card-house was built *after* Pardee was dead?"

"Oh, my dear fellow! I'm not indulgin' in implications. I'm merely givin' tongue to my youthful curiosity, don't y' know."

### 23. A STARTLING DISCOVERY

(Monday, April 25; 8.30 p.m.)

Eight days went by. The Drukker funeral was held in the little house on 76th Street, attended only by the Dillards and Arnesson and a few men from the university who came to pay a last tribute of respect to a scientist for whose work they had a very genuine admiration.

Vance and I were at the house on the morning of the funeral when a little girl brought a small cluster of spring flowers she had picked herself, and asked Arnesson to give them to Drukker. I almost expected a cynical response from him, and was surprised when he took the flowers gravely and said in a tone almost tender:

"I'll give them to him at once, Madeleine. And Humpty Dumpty thanks you for remembering him." When the child had been led away by her governess, he turned to us. "She was Drukker's favorite. . . . Funny fellow. Never went to the theatre. Detested travel. His only recreation was entertaining youngsters."

I mention this episode because, in spite of its seeming unimportance, it was to prove one of the most vital links in the chain of evidence that eventually cleared up, beyond all question of doubt, the problem of the Bishop murders.

The death of Pardee had created a situation almost unique in the annals of modern crime. The statement given out by the District Attorney's office had only intimated that there was a possibility of Pardee's being guilty of the murders. Whatever Markham may have personally believed, he was far too honorable and just to cast any direct doubt on another's character without overwhelming proofs. But the wave of terror arising from these strange murders had reached such proportions that he could not, in view of the duty he owed to the community, refrain from saying that he believed the case to be closed. Thus, while no open accusation of guilt was made against Pardee, the Bishop murders were no longer regarded as a source of menace to the city, and a sigh of relief went up from all quarters.

In the Manhattan Chess Club there was probably less discussion of the case than anywhere else in New York. The members felt perhaps that the club's honor was in some way involved. Or there may have been a sense of loyalty toward a man who had done as much for chess as Pardee. But whatever the cause of the club's avoidance of the subject, the fact remained that its members attended, almost to a man, Pardee's funeral. I could not help admiring this tribute to a fellow chess player; for, whatever his personal acts, he had been one of the great sustaining patrons of the royal and ancient game to which they were devoted.<sup>[36]</sup>

Markham's first official act on the day after Pardee's death was to secure Sperling's release. The same afternoon the Police Department moved all its records of the Bishop murders to the file marked "shelved cases," and withdrew the guards from the Dillard house. Vance protested mildly against this latter step; but, in view of the fact that the Medical Examiner's *post-mortem* report had substantiated in every particular the theory of suicide, there was little that Markham could do in the matter. Furthermore, he was thoroughly convinced that the death of Pardee had terminated the case; and he scoffed at Vance's wavering doubts.

During the week following the finding of Pardee's body Vance was restive and more distraught than usual. He attempted to interest himself in various matters, but without any marked success. He showed signs of irritability; and his almost miraculous equanimity seemed to have deserted him. I got the impression that he was waiting for something to happen. His manner was not exactly expectant, but there was a watchfulness in his attitude amounting at times almost to apprehension.

On the day following the Drukker funeral Vance called on Arnesson, and on Friday night accompanied him to a performance of Ibsen's "Ghosts"—a play which, I happened to know, he disliked. He learned that Belle Dillard had gone away for a month's visit to the home of a relative in Albany. As Arnesson explained, she had begun to show the effects of all she had been through, and needed a change of scene. The man was plainly unhappy over her absence, and confided to Vance that they had planned to be married in June. Vance also learned from him that Mrs. Drukker's will had left everything to Belle Dillard and the professor in the event of her son's death—a fact which appeared to interest Vance unduly.

Had I known, or even suspected, what astounding and terrible things were hanging over us that week, I doubt if I could have stood the strain. For the Bishop murder case was not ended. The climactic horror was still to come; but even that horror, terrific and staggering as it proved, was only a shadow of what it might have been had not Vance reasoned the case out to two separate conclusions, only one of which had been disposed of by Pardee's death. It was this other possibility, as I learned later, that had kept him in New York, vigilant and mentally alert.

Monday, April 25, was the beginning of the end. We were to dine with Markham at the Bankers Club and go afterwards to a performance of "Die Meistersinger"<sup>[37]</sup>; but we did not witness the triumphs of *Walther* that night. I noticed that when we met Markham in the rotunda of the Equitable Building he seemed troubled; and we were no more than seated in the club grill when he told us of a phone call he had received from Professor Dillard that afternoon.

"He asked me particularly to come to see him tonight," Markham explained; "and when I tried to get out of it he became urgent. He made a point of the fact that Arnesson would be away the entire evening, and said that a similar opportunity might not present itself until it was too late. I asked him what he meant by that; but he refused to explain, and insisted that I come to his house after dinner. I told him I'd let him know if I could make it."

Vance had listened with the intensest interest.

"We must go there, Markham. I've been rather expecting a call of this kind. It's possible we may at last find the key to the truth."

"The truth about what?"

"Pardee's guilt."

Markham said no more, and we ate our dinner in silence.

At half past eight we rang the bell of the Dillard house, and were taken by Pyne direct to the library.

The old professor greeted us with nervous reserve.

"It's good of you to come, Markham," he said, without rising. "Take a chair and light a cigar. I want to talk to you—and I want to

take my time about it. It's very difficult. . . ." His voice trailed off as he began filling his pipe.

We settled ourselves and waited. A sense of expectancy invaded me for no apparent reason, except perhaps that I caught some of the radiations of the professor's obviously distraught mood.

"I don't know just how to broach the subject," he began; "for it has to do, not with physical facts, but with the invisible, human consciousness. I've struggled all week with certain vague ideas that have been forcing themselves upon me; and I see no way to rid myself of them but by talking with you. . . ."

He looked up hesitantly.

"I preferred to discuss these ideas with you when Sigurd was not present, and as he has gone to-night to see Ibsen's 'Pretenders'—his favorite play, by the way—I took the opportunity to ask you here."

"What do these ideas concern?" asked Markham.

"Nothing specifically. As I have said, they're very vague; but they have nevertheless grown fairly insistent. . . . So insistent, in fact," he added, "that I thought it best to send Belle away for a while. It's true that she was in a tortured state of mind as a result of all these tragedies; but my real reason for shipping her north was that I was beset by intangible doubts."

"Doubts?" Markham leaned forward. "What sort of doubts?"

Professor Dillard did not reply at once.

"Let me answer that question by asking another," he countered presently. "Are you wholly satisfied in your mind that the situation in regard to Pardee is exactly as it appears?"

"You mean the authenticity of his suicide?"

"That and his presumptive culpability."

Markham settled back contemplatively.

"Are *you* not wholly satisfied?" he asked.

"I can't answer that question." Professor Dillard spoke almost curtly. "You have no right to ask me. I merely wanted to be sure that the authorities, having all the data in their hands, were convinced that this terrible affair was a closed book." A look of deep concern came over his face. "If I knew that to be a fact, it would help me to repulse the vague misgivings that have haunted me day and night for the past week."

"And if I were to say that I am not satisfied?"

The old professor's eyes took on a distant, distressed look. His head fell slightly forward, as if some burden of sorrow had suddenly weighed him down. After several moments he lifted his shoulders and drew a deep breath.

"The most difficult thing in this world," he said, "is to know where one's duty lies; for duty is a mechanism of the mind, and the heart is forever stepping in and playing havoc with one's resolutions. Perhaps I did wrong to ask you here; for, after all, I have only misty suspicions and nebulous ideas to go on. But there was the possibility that my mental uneasiness was based on some deep hidden foundation of whose existence I was unaware. . . . Do you see what I mean?" Evasive as were his words, there was no doubt as to the disturbing mien of the shadowy image that lurked at the back of his mind.

Markham nodded sympathetically.

"There is no reason whatever to question the findings of the Medical Examiner." He made the statement in a forced matter-of-fact voice. "I can understand how the proximity of these tragedies might have created an atmosphere conducive to doubts. But I think you need have no further misgivings."

"I sincerely hope you're right," the professor murmured; but it was clear he was not satisfied. "Suppose, Markham—" he began, and then stopped. "Yes, I hope you're right," he repeated.

Vance had sat through this unsatisfactory discussion smoking placidly; but he had been listening with unwonted concentration, and now he spoke.

"Tell me, Professor Dillard, if there has been anything—no matter how indefinite—that may have given birth to your uncertainty."

"No—nothing." The answer came quickly and with a show of spirit. "I have merely been wondering—testing every possibility. I dared not be too sanguine without some assurance. Pure logic is all very well for principles that do not touch us personally. But where one's own safety is concerned the imperfect human mind demands visual evidence."

"Ah, yes." Vance looked up, and I thought I detected a flash of understanding between these two disparate men.

Markham rose to make his adieu; but Professor Dillard urged him to remain a while.

"Sigurd will be here before long. He'd enjoy seeing you again. As I said, he's at 'The Pretenders,' but I'm sure he will come straight home. . . . By the way, Mr. Vance," he went on, turning from Markham; "Sigurd tells me you accompanied him to 'Ghosts' last week. Do you share his enthusiasm for Ibsen?"

A slight lift of Vance's eyebrows told me that he was somewhat puzzled by this question; but when he answered there was no hint of perplexity in his voice.

"I have read Ibsen a great deal; and there can be little doubt that he was a creative genius of a high order, although I've failed to find in him either the aesthetic form or the philosophic depth that characterizes Goethe's 'Faust,' for instance."

"I can see that you and Sigurd would have a permanent basis of disagreement."

Markham declined the invitation to stay longer, and a few minutes later we were walking down West End Avenue in the brisk April air.

"You will please take note, Markham old dear," observed Vance, with a touch of waggishness, as we turned into 72nd Street and headed for the park, "that there are others than your modest collaborator who are hag-ridden with doubts as to the volition of Pardee's taking-off. And I might add that the professor is not in the least satisfied with your assurances."

"His suspicious state of mind is quite understandable," submitted Markham. "These murders have touched his house pretty closely."

"That's not the explanation. The old gentleman has fears. And he knows something which he will not tell us."

"I can't say that I got that impression."

"Oh, Markham—my dear Markham! Weren't you listening closely to his halting, reluctant tale? It was as if he were trying to convey

some suggestion to us without actually putting it into words. We were supposed to guess. Yes! That was why he insisted that you visit him when Arnesson was safely away at an Ibsen revival—"

Vance ceased speaking abruptly and stood stock-still. A startled look came in his eyes.

"Oh, my aunt! Oh, my precious aunt! So that was why he asked me about Ibsen! . . . My word! How unutterably dull I've been!" He stared at Markham, and the muscles of his jaw tightened. "The truth at last!" he said with impressive softness. "And it is neither you nor the police nor I who has solved this case: it is a Norwegian dramatist who has been dead for twenty years. In Ibsen is the key to the mystery."

Markham regarded him as though he had suddenly gone out of his mind; but before he could speak Vance hailed a taxicab.

"I'll show you what I mean when we reach home," he said, as we rode east through Central Park. "It's unbelievable, but it's true. And I should have guessed it long ago; but the connotation of the signature on those notes was too clouded with other possible meanings. . . ."

"If it were midsummer instead of spring," commented Markham wrathfully, "I'd suggest that the heat had affected you."

"I knew from the first there were three possible guilty persons," continued Vance. "Each was psychologically capable of the murders, provided the impact of his emotions had upset his mental equilibrium. So there was nothing to do but to wait for some indication that would focus suspicion. Drukker was one of my three suspects, but he was murdered; and that left two. Then Pardee to all appearances committed suicide, and I'll admit that his death made reasonable the assumption that he had been the guilty one. But there was an eroding doubt in my mind. His death was not conclusive; and that house of cards troubled me. We were stalemated. So again I waited, and watched my third possibility. Now I know that Pardee was innocent, and that he did not shoot himself. He was murdered—just as were Robin and Sprigg and Drukker. His death was another grim joke—he was a victim thrown to the police in the spirit of diabolical jest. And the murderer has been chuckling at our gullibility ever since."

"By what reasoning do you arrive at so fantastic a conclusion?"

"It's no longer a question of reasoning. At last I have the explanation for the crimes; and I know the meaning of the 'Bishop' signature to the notes. I'll show you a piece of amazing and incontrovertible evidence very soon."

A few minutes later we reached his apartment, and he led us straight to the library.

"The evidence has been here within arm's reach all the time."

He went to the shelves where he kept his dramas, and took down Volume II of the collected works of Henrik Ibsen.<sup>[38]</sup> The book contained "The Vikings at Helgeland" and "The Pretenders"; but with the first of these plays Vance was not concerned. Turning to "The Pretenders" he found the page where the *dramatis personae* were given, and laid the book on the table before Markham.

"Read the cast of characters of Arnesson's favorite play," he directed.

Markham, silent and puzzled, drew the volume toward him; and I looked over his shoulder. This is what we saw:

HÅKON HÅKONSSON, *the King elected by the Birchlegs.*

INGA OF VARTEIG, *his mother.*

EARL SKULE.

LADY RAGNHILD, *his wife.*

SIGRID, *his sister.*

MARGRETE, *his daughter.*

GUTHORM INGESSON.

SIGURD RIBBUNG.

NICHOLAS ARNESSON, *Bishop of Oslo.*

DAGFINN THE PEASANT, *Hakon's marshal.*

IVAR BODDE, *his chaplain.*

VEGARD VAERADAL, *one of his guard.*

GREGORIUS JONSSON, *a nobleman.*

PAUL FLIDA, *a nobleman.*

INGEBORG, *Andres Skjaldarband's wife.*

PETER, *her son, a young priest.*

SIRA VILIAM, *Bishop Nicholas's chaplain.*

MASTER SIGARD OF BRABANT, *a physician.*

JATGEIR SKALD, *an Icelander.*

BÅRD BRATTE, *a chieftain from the Trondhiem district.*

But I doubt if either of us read beyond the line:

NICHOLAS ARNESSON, *Bishop of Oslo.*

My eyes became riveted on that name with a set and horrified fascination. And then I remembered. . . . *Bishop Arnesson* was one of the most diabolical villains in all literature—a cynical, sneering monster who twisted all the sane values of life into hideous buffooneries.



## 24. THE LAST ACT

(Tuesday, April 26; 9 a.m.)

With this astounding revelation the Bishop murder case entered its final and most terrible phase. Heath had been informed of Vance's discovery; and it was arranged that we should meet in the District Attorney's office early the following day for a counsel of war.

Markham, when he took leave of us that night, was more troubled and despondent than I had ever seen him.

"I don't know what can be done," he said hopelessly. "There's no legal evidence against the man. But we may be able to devise some course of action that will give us the upper hand. . . . I never believed in torture, but I almost wish we had access today to the thumbscrew and the rack."

Vance and I arrived at his office a few minutes after nine the next morning. Swacker intercepted us and asked us to wait in the reception room for a little while. Markham, he explained, was engaged for the moment. We had no more than seated ourselves when Heath appeared, grim, pugnacious and sullen.

"I gotta hand it to you, Mr. Vance," he proclaimed. "You sure got a line on the situation. But what good it's going to do us I don't see. We can't arrest a guy because his name's in a book."

"We may be able to force the issue some way," Vance rejoined. "In any event, we now know where we stand."

Ten minutes later Swacker beckoned to us and indicated that Markham was free.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," Markham apologized. "I had an unexpected visitor." His voice had a despairing ring. "More trouble. And, curiously enough, it's connected with the very section of Riverside Park where Drukker was killed. However, there's nothing I can do about it. . . ." He drew some papers before him. "Now to business."

"What's the new trouble in Riverside Park?" asked Vance casually.

Markham frowned.

"Nothing that need bother us now. A kidnapping, in all likelihood. There's a brief account of it in the morning papers, in case you're interested. . . ."

"I detest reading the papers," Vance spoke blandly, but with an insistence that puzzled me. "What happened?"

Markham drew a deep breath of impatience.

"A child disappeared from the playground yesterday after talking with an unknown man. Her father came here to solicit my help. But it's a job for the Bureau of Missing Persons; and I told him so.—Now, if your curiosity is appeased—"

"Oh, but it isn't," persisted Vance. "I simply must hear the details. That section of the park fascinates me strangely."

Markham shot him a questioning glance through lowered lids.

"Very well," he acquiesced. "A five-year-old girl, named Madeleine Moffat, was playing with a group of children at about half past five last evening. She crawled up on a high mound near the retaining wall, and a little later, when her governess went to get her, thinking she had descended the other side, the child was nowhere to be found. The only suggestive fact is that two of the other children say they saw a man talking to her shortly before she disappeared; but, of course, they can give no description of him. The police were notified, and are investigating. And that's all there is to the case so far."

"Madeleine." Vance repeated the name musingly. "I say, Markham; do you know if this child knew Drukker?"

"Yes!" Markham sat up a little straighter. "Her father mentioned that she often went to parties at his house. . . ."

"I've seen the child," Vance rose and stood, hands in pockets, gazing down at the floor. "An adorable little creature . . . golden curls. She brought a handful of flowers for Drukker the morning of his funeral. . . . And now she has disappeared after having been seen talking with a strange man. . . ."

"What's going on in your mind?" demanded Markham sharply.

Vance appeared not to have heard the question.

"Why should her father appeal to you?"

"I've known Moffat slightly for years—he was at one time connected with the city administration. He's frantic—grasping at every straw. The proximity of the affair to the Bishop murders has made him morbidly apprehensive. . . . But see here, Vance; we didn't come here to discuss the Moffat child's disappearance. . . ."

Vance lifted his head: there was a look of startled horror on his face.

"Don't speak—oh, don't speak. . . ." He began pacing up and down, while Markham and Heath watched him in mute amazement.

"Yes—yes; that would be it," he murmured to himself. "The time is right . . . it all fits. . . ."

He swung about, and going to Markham seized his arm.

"Come—quickly! It's our only chance—we can't wait another minute." He fairly dragged Markham to his feet and led him toward the door. "I've been fearing something like this all week—"

Markham wrenched his arm free from the other's grip.

"I won't move from this office, Vance, until you explain."

"It's another act in the play—the last act! Oh, take my word for it." There was a look in Vance's eyes I had never seen before. "It's 'Little Miss Muffet' now. The name isn't identical, but that doesn't matter. It's near enough for the Bishop's jest; he'll explain it all to the press. He probably beckoned the child to the tuffet, and sat down beside her. And now she's gone—frightened away. . . ."

Markham moved forward in a sort of daze; and Heath, his eyes bulging, leapt to the door. I have often wondered what went on in their minds during those few seconds of Vance's importunate urgings. Did they believe in his interpretation of the episode? Or were they merely afraid not to investigate, in view of the remote possibility that another hideous joke had been perpetrated by the Bishop? Whatever their convictions or doubts, they accepted the situation as Vance saw it; and a moment later we were in the hall, hastening toward the elevator. At Vance's suggestion we picked up Detective Tracy from the branch office of the Detective Bureau in the

Criminal Courts Building.

"This affair is serious," he explained. "Anything may happen."

We emerged through the Franklin-Street entrance, and in a few minutes were on our way up-town in the District Attorney's car, breaking speed regulations and ignoring traffic signals. Scarcely a word was spoken on that momentous ride; but as we swung through the tortuous roads of Central Park Vance said:

"I may be wrong, but we will have to risk it. If we wait to see whether the papers get a note, it'll be too late. We're not supposed to know yet; and that's our one chance. . . ."

"What do you expect to find?" Markham's tone was husky and a little uncertain.

Vance shook his head despondently.

"Oh, I don't know. But it'll be something devilish."

When the car drew up with a lurch in front of the Dillard house Vance leapt out and ran up the steps ahead of us. Pyne answered his insistent ring.

"Where's Mr. Arnesson?" he demanded.

"At the university, sir," the old butler replied; and I imagined there was fright in his eyes. "But he'll be home for an early lunch."

"Then take us at once to Professor Dillard."

"I'm sorry, sir," Pyne told him; "but the professor is also out. He went to the Public Library—"

"Are you alone here?"

"Yes, sir. Beedle's gone to market."

"So much the better." Vance took hold of the butler and turned him toward the rear stairs. "We're going to search the house, Pyne. You lead the way."

Markham came forward.

"But, Vance, we can't do that!"

Vance wheeled round.

"I'm not interested in what you can do or can't do. I'm going to search this house. . . . Sergeant, are you with me?" There was a strange look on his face.

"You bet your sweet life!" (I never liked Heath as much as at that moment.)

The search was begun in the basement. Every hallway, every closet, every cupboard and waste space was inspected. Pyne, completely cowed by Heath's vindictiveness, acted as guide. He brought keys and opened doors for us, and even suggested places we might otherwise have overlooked. The Sergeant had thrown himself into the hunt with energy, though I am sure he had only a vague idea as to its object. Markham followed us disapprovingly; but he, too, had been caught in the sweep of Vance's dynamic purposefulness; and he must have realized that Vance had some tremendous justification for his rash conduct.

Gradually we worked our way upward through the house. The library and Arnesson's room were gone over carefully. Belle Dillard's apartment was scrutinized, and close attention was given to the unused rooms on the third floor. Even the servants' quarters on the fourth floor were overhauled. But nothing suspicious was discovered. Though Vance suppressed his eagerness I could tell what a nervous strain he was under by the tireless haste with which he pushed the search.

Eventually we came to a locked door at the rear of the upper hall.

"Where does that lead?" Vance asked Pyne.

"To a little attic room, sir. But it's never used—"

"Unlock it."

The man fumbled for several moments with his bunch of keys.

"I don't seem to find the key, sir. It's supposed to be here. . . ."

"When did you have it last?"

"I couldn't say, sir. To my knowledge no one's been in the attic for years."

Vance stepped back and crouched.

"Stand aside, Pyne."

When the butler had moved out of the way Vance hurled himself against the door with terrific force. There was a creaking and straining of wood; but the lock held.

Markham rushed forward and caught him round the shoulders.

"Are you mad!" he exclaimed. "You're breaking the law."

"The law!" There was scathing irony in Vance's retort. "We're dealing with a monster who sneers at all law. You may coddle him if you care to, but I'm going to search that attic if it means spending the rest of my life in jail.—Sergeant, open that door!"

Again I experienced a thrill of liking for Heath. Without a moment's hesitation he poised himself on his toes and sent his shoulders crashing against the door's panel just above the knob. There was a splintering of wood as the lock's bolt tore through the moulding. The door swung inward.

Vance, freeing himself from Markham's hold, ran stumbling up the steps with the rest of us at his heels. There was no light in the attic, and we paused for a moment at the head of the stairs to accustom our eyes to the darkness. Then Vance struck a match and, groping forward, sent up the window shade with a clatter. The sunlight poured in, revealing a small room, scarcely ten feet square, cluttered with all manner of discarded odds and ends. The atmosphere was heavy and stifling, and a thick coating of dust lay over everything.

Vance looked quickly about him, and an expression of disappointment came over his face.

"This is the only place left," he remarked, with the calmness of desperation.

After a more careful scrutiny of the room, he stepped to the corner by the little window and peered down at a battered suit-case which lay on its side against the wall. I noticed that it was unlatched and that its straps hung free. Leaning over he threw the cover back.

"Ah! Here, at least, is something for you, Markham."

We crowded about him. In the suit-case was an old Corona typewriter. A sheet of paper was in the carriage; and on it had already been typed, in pale-blue *élite* characters, the two lines:

Little Miss Muffet  
Sat on a tuffet

At this point the typist had evidently been interrupted, or for some other reason had not completed the Mother-Goose rhyme.

"The new Bishop note for the press," observed Vance. Then reaching into the suit-case he lifted out a pile of blank paper and envelopes. At the bottom, beside the machine, lay a red-leather note-book with thin yellow leaves. He handed it to Markham with the terse announcement:

"Drukker's calculations on the quantum theory."

But there was still a look of defeat in his eyes; and again he began inspecting the room. Presently he went to an old dressing-table which stood against the wall opposite to the window. As he bent over to peer behind it he suddenly drew back and, lifting his head, sniffed several times. At the same moment he caught sight of something on the floor at his feet, and kicked it toward the centre of the room. We looked down at it with astonishment. It was a gas-mask of the kind used by chemists.

"Stand back, you chaps!" he ordered; and holding one hand to his nose and mouth he swung the dressing-table away from the wall. Directly behind it was a small cupboard door about three feet high, set into the wall. He wrenched it open and looked inside, then slammed it shut immediately.

Brief as was my view of the interior of the cupboard, I was able to glimpse its contents clearly. It was fitted with two shelves. On the lower one were several books lying open. On the upper shelf stood an Erlenmeyer flask clamped to an iron support, a spirit-lamp, a condenser tube, a glass beaker, and two small bottles.

Vance turned and gave us a despairing look.

"We may as well go: there's nothing more here."

We returned to the drawing-room, leaving Tracy to guard the door to the attic.

"Perhaps, after all, you were justified in your search," acknowledged Markham, studying Vance gravely. "I don't like such methods, however. If we hadn't found the typewriter—"

"Oh, that!" Vance, preoccupied and restless, went to the window overlooking the archery range. "I wasn't hunting for the typewriter—or the note-book, either. What do they matter?" His chin fell forward on his breast, and his eyes closed in a kind of lethargy of defeat. "Everything's gone wrong—my logic has failed. We're too late."

"I don't pretend to know what you're grumbling about," said Markham. "But at least you've supplied me evidence of a sort. I'll now be able to arrest Arneson when he returns from the university."

"Yes, yes; of course. But I wasn't thinking of Arneson, or the arrest of the culprit, or the triumph of the District Attorney's office. I was hoping—"

He broke off and stiffened.

"We're *not* too late! I didn't think far enough. . . ." He went swiftly to the archway. "It's the Drukker house we must search. . . . Hurry!" He was already half-running down the hall, Heath behind him, and Markham and I bringing up the rear.

We followed him down the rear stairs, across the archery-room, and out on the range. We did not know, and I doubt if any of us even guessed, what was in his mind; but some of his inner excitement had been communicated to us, and we realized that only a vital urgency could have shaken him so completely out of his usual attitude of disinterest and calm.

When we came to the screen-porch of the Drukker house he reached through the broken wire-netting and released the catch. The kitchen door, to my astonishment, was unlocked; but Vance seemed to expect this, for he unhesitatingly turned the knob and threw it open.

"Wait!" he directed, pausing in the little rear hallway. "There's no need to search the entire house. The most likely place. . . . Yes! Come along . . . up-stairs . . . somewhere in the centre of the house . . . a closet most likely . . . where no one could hear. . . ." As he spoke he led the way up the rear stairs, past Mrs. Drukker's room and the study, and thence to the third floor. There were but two doors on this upper hall—one at the extreme end, and a smaller door set midway in the right wall.

Vance went straight to the latter. There was a key protruding from the lock, and, turning it, he drew open the door. Only a shadowy blackness met our eyes. Vance was on his knees in a second, groping inside.

"Quick, Sergeant. Your flash-light."

Almost before he had uttered the words a luminous circle fell on the floor of the closet. What I saw sent a chill of horror over me. A choked exclamation burst from Markham; and a soft whistle told me that Heath too was appalled by the sight. Before us on the floor, in a limp, silent heap, lay the little girl who had brought flowers to her broken Humpty Dumpty on the morning of his funeral. Her golden hair was dishevelled; her face was deathly pale, and there were streaks down her cheeks where the futile tears had welled forth and dried.

Vance bent over and put his ear to her heart. Then he gathered her tenderly in his arms.

"Poor little Miss Muffet," he whispered, and rising went toward the front stairs. Heath preceded him, flashing his light all the way so there would be no chance of his stumbling. In the main lower hall he paused.

"Unbolt the door, Sergeant."

Heath obeyed with alacrity, and Vance stepped out on the sidewalk.

"Go to the Dillard's and wait for me there," he flung back over his shoulder. And with the child clasped closely to his breast he started diagonally across 76th Street to a house on which I could make out a doctor's brass name-plate.

## 25. THE CURTAIN FALLS

(Tuesday, April 26; 11 a.m.)

Twenty minutes later Vance rejoined us in the Dillard drawing-room.

"She's going to be all right," he announced, sinking into a chair and lighting a cigarette. "She was only unconscious, had fainted from shock and fright; and she was half-suffocated." His face darkened. "There were bruises on her little wrist. She probably struggled in that empty house when she failed to find Humpty Dumpty; and then the beast forced her into the closet and locked the door. No time to kill her, d' ye see. Furthermore, killing wasn't in the book. 'Little Miss Muffet' wasn't killed—merely frightened away. She'd have died, though, from lack of air. And *he* was safe: no one could hear her crying. . . ."

Markham's eyes rested on Vance affectionately.

"I'm sorry I tried to hold you back," he said simply. (For all his conventionally legal instincts, there was a fundamental bigness to his nature.) "You were right in forcing the issue, Vance. . . . And you, too, Sergeant. We owe a great deal to your determination and faith."

Heath was embarrassed.

"Oh, that's all right, sir. You see, Mr. Vance had me all worked up about the kid. And I like kids, sir."

Markham turned an inquisitive look on Vance.

"You expected to find the child alive?"

"Yes; but drugged or stunned perhaps. I didn't think of her as dead, for that would have contravened the Bishop's joke."

Heath had been pondering some troublous point.

"What I can't get through my head," he said, "is why this Bishop, who's been so damn careful about everything else, should leave the door of the Drukker house unlocked."

"We were expected to find the child," Vance told him. "Everything was made easy for us. Very considerate of the Bishop, what? But we weren't supposed to find her till to-morrow—after the papers had received the Little-Miss-Muffet notes. They were to have been our clew. But we anticipated the gentleman."

"But why weren't the notes sent yesterday?"

"It was no doubt the Bishop's original intention to post his poetry last night; but I imagine he decided it was best for his purpose to let the child's disappearance attract public attention first. Otherwise the relationship between Madeleine Moffat and little Miss Muffet might have been obscured."

"Yeh!" snarled Heath through his teeth. "And by to-morrow the kid woulda been dead. No chance then of her identifying him."

Markham looked at his watch and rose with determination.

"There's no point in waiting for Arnesson's return. The sooner we arrest him the better." He was about to give Heath an order when Vance intervened.

"Don't force the issue, Markham. You haven't any real evidence against the man. It's too delicate a situation for aggression. We must go carefully or we'll fail."

"I realize that the finding of the typewriter and the note-book is not conclusive," concurred Markham. "But the identification by the child—"

"Oh, my dear fellow! What weight would a jury attach to a frightened five-year-old girl's identification without powerful contributory evidence? A clever lawyer could nullify it in five minutes. And even assuming you could make the identification hold, what would it boot you? It wouldn't connect Arnesson in any way with the Bishop murders. You could only prosecute him for attempted kidnapping,—the child's unharmed, remember. And if you should, through a legal miracle, get a doubtful conviction, Arnesson would receive at most a few years in the bastille. That wouldn't end this horror. . . . No, no. You mustn't be precipitate."

Reluctantly Markham resumed his seat. He saw the force of Vance's argument.

"But we can't let this thing go on," he declared ferociously. "We must stop this maniac some way."

"Some way—yes." Vance began pacing the room restlessly. "We may be able to wangle the truth out of him by subterfuge: he doesn't know yet that we've found the child. . . . It's possible Professor Dillard could assist us—" He halted and stood looking down at the floor. "Yes! That's our one chance. We must confront Arnesson with what we know when the professor is present. The situation is sure to force an issue of some kind. The professor now will do all in his power to help convict Arnesson."

"You believe he knows more than he had told us?"

"Undoubtedly. I've told you so from the first. And when he hears of the Little-Miss-Muffet episode, it's not unlikely he'll supply us with the evidence we need."

"It's a long chance." Markham was pessimistic. "But it can do no harm to try. In any event, I shall arrest Arnesson before I leave here, and hope for the best."

A few moments later the front door opened and Professor Dillard appeared in the hall opposite the archway. He scarcely acknowledged Markham's greeting—he was scanning our faces as if trying to read the meaning of our unexpected visit. Finally he put a question.

"You have, perhaps, thought over what I said last night?"

"Not only have we thought it over," said Markham, "but Mr. Vance has found the thing that was disturbing you. After we left here he showed me a copy of 'The Pretenders.'"

"Ah!" The exclamation was like a sigh of relief. "For days that play has been in my mind, poisoning every thought. . . ." He looked up fearfully. "What does it mean?"

Vance answered the question.

"It means, sir, that you've led us to the truth. We're waiting now for Mr. Arnesson.—And I think it would be well if we had a talk

with you in the meantime. You may be able to help us."

The old man hesitated.

"I had hoped not to be made an instrument in the boy's conviction." His voice held a tragic paternal note. But presently his features hardened; a vindictive light shone in his eyes; and his hand tightened over the knob of his stick. "However, I can't consider my own feelings now. Come; I will do what I can."

On reaching the library he paused by the sideboard and poured himself a glass of port. When he had drunk it he turned to Markham with a look of apology.

"Forgive me. I'm not quite myself." He drew forward the little chess table and placed glasses on it for all of us. "Please overlook my discourtesy." He filled the glasses and sat down.

We drew up chairs. There was none of us, I think, who did not feel the need of a glass of wine after the harrowing events we had just passed through.

When we had settled ourselves the professor lifted heavy eyes to Vance, who had taken a seat opposite to him.

"Tell me everything," he said. "Don't try to spare me."

Vance drew out his cigarette-case.

"First, let me ask you a question. Where was Mr. Arnesson between five and six yesterday afternoon?"

"I—don't know." There was a reluctance in the words. "He had tea here in the library; but he went out about half past four, and I didn't see him again until dinner time."

Vance regarded the other sympathetically for a moment, then he said:

"We've found the typewriter on which the Bishop notes were printed. It was in an old suit-case hidden in the attic of this house."

The professor showed no sign of being startled.

"You were able to identify it?"

"Beyond any doubt. Yesterday a little girl named Madeleine Moffat disappeared from the playground in the park. There was a sheet of paper in the machine, and on it had already been typed: 'Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet.'"

Professor Dillard's head sank forward.

"Another insane atrocity! If only I hadn't waited till last night to warn you—!"

"No great harm has been done," Vance hastened to inform him. "We found the child in time: she's out of danger now."

"Ah!"

"She had been locked in the hall-closet on the top floor of the Drukker house. We had thought she was here somewhere—which is how we came to search your attic."

There was a silence; then the professor asked:

"What more have you to tell me?"

"Drukker's note-book containing his recent quantum researches was stolen from his room the night of his death. We found this note-book in the attic with the typewriter."

"He stooped even to that?" It was not a question, but an exclamation of incredulity. "Are you sure of your conclusions? Perhaps if I had made no suggestion last night—had not sowed the seed of suspicion. . . ."

"There can be no doubt," declared Vance softly. "Mr. Markham intends to arrest Mr. Arnesson when he returns from the university. But to be frank with you, sir: we have practically no legal evidence, and it is a question in Mr. Markham's mind whether or not the law can even hold him. The most we can hope for is a conviction for attempted kidnapping through the child's identification."

"Ah, yes . . . the child would know." A bitterness crept into the old man's eyes. "Still, there should be some means of obtaining justice for the other crimes."

Vance sat smoking pensively, his eyes on the wall beyond. At last he spoke with quiet gravity.

"If Mr. Arnesson were convinced that our case against him was a strong one, he might choose suicide as a way out. That perhaps would be the most humane solution for every one."

Markham was about to make an indignant protest, but Vance anticipated him.

"Suicide is not an indefensible act *per se*. The Bible, for instance, contains many accounts of heroic suicide. What finer example of courage than Rhazis', when he threw himself from the tower to escape the yoke of Demetrius?[39] There was gallantry, too, in the death of Saul's sword-bearer, and in the self-hanging of Ahithophel. And surely the suicides of Samson and Judas Iscariot had virtue. History is filled with notable suicides—Brutus and Cato of Utica, Hannibal, Lucretia, Cleopatra, Seneca. . . . Nero killed himself lest he fall into the hands of Otho and the Pretorian guards. In Greece we have the famous self-destruction of Demosthenes; and Empedocles threw himself in the crater of Etna. Aristotle was the first great thinker to advance the dictum that suicide is an anti-social act, but, according to tradition, he himself took poison after the death of Alexander. And in modern times let us not forget the sublime gesture of Baron Nogi. . . ."

"All that is no justification of the act," Markham retorted. "The law—"

"Ah, yes—the law. In Chinese law every criminal condemned to death has the option of suicide. The Codex adopted by the French National Assembly at the end of the eighteenth century abolished all punishments for suicide; and in the *Sachsenspiegel*—the principal foundation of Teuton law—it is plainly stated that suicide is not a punishable act. Moreover, among the Donatists, Circumcellions and Patricians suicide was considered pleasing to the gods. And even in More's Utopia there was a synod to pass on the right of the individual to take his own life. . . . Law, Markham, is for the protection of society. What of a suicide that makes possible that protection? Are we to invoke a legal technicality, when, by so doing, we actually lay society open to continued danger? Is there no law higher than those on the statute books?"

Markham was sorely troubled. He rose and walked the length of the room and back, his face dark with anxiety. When he sat down again he looked at Vance a long while, his fingers drumming with nervous indecision on the table.

"The innocent of course must be considered," he said in a voice of discouragement. "As morally wrong as suicide is, I can see your point that at times it may be theoretically justified." (Knowing Markham as I did, I realized what this concession had cost him; and I

realized, too, for the first time, how utterly hopeless he felt in the face of the scourge of horror which it was his duty to wipe out.)

The old professor nodded understandingly.

"Yes, there are some secrets so hideous that it is well for the world not to know them. A higher justice may often be achieved without the law taking its toll."

As he spoke the door opened, and Arnesson stepped into the room.

"Well, well. Another conference, eh?" He gave us a quizzical leer, and threw himself into a chair beside the professor. "I thought the case had been adjudicated, so to speak. Didn't Pardee's suicide put *finis* to the affair?"

Vance looked straight into the man's eyes.

"We've found little Miss Muffet, Mr. Arnesson."

The other's eyebrows went up with sardonic amusement.

"Sounds like a charade. What am I supposed to answer: 'How's little Jack Horner's thumb?' Or, should I inquire into the health of Jack Sprat?"

Vance did not relax his steady gaze.

"We found her in the Drukker house, locked in a closet," he amplified, in a low, even tone.

Arnesson became serious, and an involuntary frown gathered on his forehead. But this slackening of pose was only transient. Slowly his mouth twisted into a smirk.

"You policemen are so efficient. Fancy finding little Miss Muffet so soon. Remarkable." He wagged his head in mock admiration. "However, sooner or later it was to be expected.—And what, may I ask, is to be the next move?"

"We also found the typewriter," pursued Vance, ignoring the question. "And Drukker's stolen notebook."

Arnesson was at once on his guard.

"Did you really?" He gave Vance a canny look. "Where were these tell-tale objects?"

"Up-stairs—in the attic."

"Aha! Housebreaking?"

"Something like that."

"Withal," Arnesson scoffed, "I can't see that you have a cast-iron case against any one. A typewriter is not like a suit of clothes that fits only one person. And who can say how Drukker's note-book found its way into our attic? —You must do better than that, Mr. Vance."

"There is, of course, the factor of opportunity. The Bishop is a person who could have been on hand at the time of each murder."

"That is the flimsiest of contributory evidence," the man countered. "It would not help much toward a conviction."

"We might be able to show why the murderer chose the sobriquet of Bishop."

"Ah! That unquestionably would help." A cloud settled on Arnesson's face, and his eyes became reminiscent. "I'd thought of that, too."

"Oh, had you, now?" Vance watched him closely. "And there's another piece of evidence I haven't mentioned. Little Miss Muffet will be able to identify the man who led her to the Drukker house and forced her into the closet."

"So! The patient has recovered?"

"Oh, quite. Doing nicely, in fact. We found her, d' ye see, twenty-four hours before the Bishop intended us to."

Arnesson was silent. He was staring down at his hands which, though folded, were working nervously. Finally he spoke.

"And if, in spite of everything, you were wrong. . . ."

"I assure you, Mr. Arnesson," said Vance quietly, "that I *know* who is guilty."

"You positively frighten me!" The man had got a grip on himself, and he retorted with biting irony. "If, by any chance, I myself were the Bishop, I'd be inclined to admit defeat. . . . Still, it's quite obvious that it was the Bishop who took the chessman to Mrs. Drukker at midnight; and I didn't return home with Belle until half past twelve that night."

"So you informed her. As I recall, you looked at your watch and told her what time it was.—Come, now: what time was it?"

"That's correct—half past twelve."

Vance sighed and tapped the ash from his cigarette.

"I say, Mr. Arnesson; how good a chemist are you?"

"One of the best," the man grinned. "Majored in it.—What then?"

"When I was searching the attic this morning I discovered a little wall-closet in which some one had been distilling hydrocyanic acid from potassium ferrocyanide. There was a chemist's gas-mask on hand, and all the paraphernalia. Bitter-almond odor still lurking in the vicinity."

"Quite a treasure-trove, our attic. A sort of haunt of Loki, it would seem."

"It was just that," returned Vance gravely, "—the den of an evil spirit."

"Or else the laboratory of a modern Doctor Faustus. . . . But why the cyanide, do you think?"

"Precaution, I'd say. In case of trouble the Bishop could step out of the picture painlessly. Everything in readiness, don't y' know."

Arnesson nodded.

"Quite a correct attitude on his part. Really decent of him, in fact. No use putting people to unnecessary bother if you're cornered. Yes, very correct."

Professor Dillard had sat during this sinister dialogue with one hand pressed to his eyes, as though in pain. Now he turned sorrowfully to the man he had fathered for so many years.

"Many great men, Sigurd, have justified suicide—" he began; but Arnesson cut him short with a cynical laugh.

"Faugh! Suicide needs no justification. Nietzsche laid the bugaboo of voluntary death. '*Auf eine stolze Art sterben, wenn es nicht mehr möglich ist, auf eine stolze Art zu leben. Der Tod unter den verächtlichsten Bedingungen, ein unfreier Tod, ein Tod zur unrechtlichen Zeit ist ein Feiglings-Tod. Wir haben es nicht in der Hand, zu verhindern, geboren zu werden: aber wir können diesen Fehler—denn bisweilen ist es ein Fehler—wieder gut machen. Wenn man sich abschafft, tut man die achtungswürdigste Sache, die es giebt: man*'"

*verdient beinahe damit, zu leben.*[40]—Memorized that passage from 'Götzen-Dämmerung' in my youth. Never forgot it. A sound doctrine."

"Nietzsche had many famous predecessors who also upheld suicide," supplemented Vance. "Zeno the Stoic left us a passionate dithyramb defending voluntary death. And Tacitus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Cato, Kant, Fichte, Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau, all wrote apologies for suicide. Schopenhauer protested bitterly against the fact that suicide was regarded as a crime in England. . . . And yet, I wonder if the subject can be formulated. Somehow I feel that it's too personal a matter for academic discussion."

The professor agreed sadly.

"No one can know what goes on in the human heart in that last dark hour."

During this discussion Markham had been growing impatient and uneasy; and Heath, though at first rigid and watchful, had begun to unbend. I could not see that Vance had made the slightest progress; and I was driven to the conclusion that he had failed signally in accomplishing his purpose of ensnaring Arnesson. However, he did not appear in the least perturbed. I even got the impression that he was satisfied with the way things were going. But I did notice that, despite his outer calm, he was intently alert. His feet were drawn back and poised; and every muscle in his body was taut. I began to wonder what the outcome of this terrible conference would be.

The end came swiftly. A short silence followed the professor's remark. Then Arnesson spoke.

"You say you know who the Bishop is, Mr. Vance. That being the case, why all this palaver?"

"There was no great haste." Vance was almost casual. "And there was the hope of tying up a few loose ends,—hung juries are so unsatisfactory, don't y' know. . . . Then again, this port is excellent."

"The port? . . . Ah yes." Arnesson glanced at our glasses, and turned an injured look on the professor. "Since when have I been a teetotaler, sir?"

The other gave a start, hesitated, and rose.

"I'm sorry, Sigurd. It didn't occur to me . . . you never drink in the forenoon." He went to the sideboard and, filling another glass, placed it, with an unsteady hand, before Arnesson. Then he refilled the other glasses.

No sooner had he resumed his seat than Vance uttered an exclamation of surprise. He had half risen and was leaning forward, his hands resting on the edge of the table, his eyes fixed with astonishment on the mantel at the end of the room.

"My word! I never noticed that before. . . . Extr'ordin'ry!"

So unexpected and startling had been his action, and so tense was the atmosphere, that involuntarily we swung about and looked in the direction of his fascinated gaze.

"A Cellini plaque!" he exclaimed. "The Nymph of Fontainebleau! Berenson told me it was destroyed in the seventeenth century. I've seen its companion piece in the Louvre. . . ."

A red flush of angry indignation mounted to Markham's cheeks; and for myself I must say that, familiar as I was with Vance's idiosyncrasies and intellectual passion for rare antiques, I had never before known him to exhibit such indefensible bad taste. It seemed unbelievable that he would have let himself be distracted by an *objet-d'art* in such a tragic hour.

Professor Dillard frowned at him with consternation.

"You've chosen a strange time, sir, to indulge your enthusiasm for art," was his scathing comment.

Vance appeared abashed and chagrined. He sank back in his seat, avoiding our eyes, and began turning the stem of his glass between his fingers.

"You are quite right, sir," he murmured. "I owe you an apology."

"The plaque, incidentally," the professor added, by way of mitigating the severity of his rebuke, "is merely a copy of the Louvre piece."

Vance, as if to hide his confusion, raised his wine to his lips. It was a highly unpleasant moment: every one's nerves were on edge; and, in automatic imitation of his action, we lifted our glasses too.

Vance gave a swift glance across the table and, rising, went to the front window, where he stood, his back to the room. So unaccountable was his hasty departure that I turned and watched him wonderingly. Almost at the same moment the edge of the table was thrust violently against my side, and simultaneously there came a crash of glassware.

I leapt to my feet and gazed down with horror at the inert body sprawled forward in the chair opposite, one arm and shoulder flung across the table. A short silence of dismay and bewilderment followed. Each of us seemed momentarily paralyzed. Markham stood like a graven image, his eyes fastened on the table; and Heath, staring and speechless, clung rigidly to the back of his chair.

"Good Gad!"

It was Arnesson's astonished ejaculation that snapped the tension.

Markham went quickly round the table and bent over Professor Dillard's body.

"Call a doctor, Arnesson," he ordered.

Vance turned wearily from the window and sank into a chair.

"Nothing can be done for him," he said, with a deep sigh of fatigue. "He prepared for a swift and painless death when he distilled his cyanide.—The Bishop case is over."

Markham was glaring at him with dazed incomprehension.

"Oh, I've half-suspected the truth ever since Pardee's death," Vance went on, in answer to the other's unspoken question. "But I wasn't sure of it until last night when he went out of his way to hang the guilt on Mr. Arnesson."

"Eh? What's that?" Arnesson turned from the telephone.

"Oh, yes," nodded Vance. "You were to pay the penalty. You'd been chosen from the first as the victim. He even suggested the possibility of your guilt to us."

Arnesson did not seem as surprised as one would have expected.

"I knew the professor hated me," he said. "He was intensely jealous of my interest in Belle. And he was losing his intellectual grip—I've seen that for months. I've done all the work on his new book, and he's resented every academic honor paid me. I've had an idea he was back of all this deviltry; but I wasn't sure. I didn't think, though, he'd try to send me to the electric-chair."

Vance got up and, going to Arnesson, held out his hand.

"There was no danger of that.—And I want to apologize for the way I've treated you this past half hour. Merely a matter of tactics. Y' see, we hadn't any real evidence, and I was hopin' to force his hand."

Arnesson grinned sombrely.

"No apology necessary, old son. I knew you didn't have your eye on me. When you began riding me I saw it was only technique. Didn't know what you were after, but I followed your cues the best I could. Hope I didn't bungle the job."

"No, no. You turned the trick."

"Did I?" Arnesson frowned with deep perplexity. "But what I don't understand is why he should have taken the cyanide when he thought it was I you suspected."

"That particular point we'll never know," said Vance. "Maybe he feared the girl's identification. Or he may have seen through my deception. Perhaps he suddenly revolted at the idea of shouldering you with the onus. . . . As he himself said, no one knows what goes on in the human heart during the last dark hour."

Arnesson did not move. He was looking straight into Vance's eyes with penetrating shrewdness.

"Oh, well," he said at length; "we'll let it go at that. . . . Anyway, thanks!"



## 26. HEATH ASKS A QUESTION

(Tuesday, April 26; 4 p.m.)

When Markham and Vance and I departed from the Dillard house an hour later, I thought the Bishop affair was over. And it was over as far as the public was concerned. But there was another revelation to come; and it was, in a way, the most astounding of all the facts that had been brought to light that day.

Heath joined us at the District Attorney's office after lunch, for there were several delicate official matters to be discussed; and later that afternoon Vance reviewed the entire case, explaining many of its obscure points.

"Arnesson has already suggested the motive for these insane crimes," he began. "The professor knew that his position in the world of science was being usurped by the younger man. His mind had begun to lose its force and penetration; and he realized that his new book on atomic structure was being made possible only through Arnesson's help. A colossal hate grew up in him for his foster son; Arnesson became in his eyes a kind of monster whom he himself, like Frankenstein, had created, and who was now rising to destroy him. And this intellectual enmity was augmented by a primitive emotional jealousy. For ten years he had centred in Belle Dillard the accumulated affection of a life of solit'ry bachelorhood—she represented his one hold on every-day existence—and when he saw that Arnesson was likely to take her from him, his hatred and resentment were doubled in intensity."

"The motive is understandable," said Markham. "But it does not explain the crimes."

"The motive acted as a spark to the dry powder of his pent-up emotions. In looking about for a means to destroy Arnesson, he hit upon the diabolical jest of the Bishop murders. These murders gave relief to his repressions; they met his psychic need for violent expression; and at the same time they answered the dark question in his mind how he could dispose of Arnesson and keep Belle Dillard for himself."

"But why," Markham asked, "didn't he merely murder Arnesson and have done with it?"

"You overlook the psychological aspects of the situation. The professor's mind had disintegrated through long intense repression. Nature was demanding an outlet. And it was his passionate hatred of Arnesson that brought the pressure to an explosion point. The two impulses were thus combined. In committing the murders he was not only relieving his inhibitions, but he was also venting his wrath against Arnesson, for Arnesson, d' ye see, was to pay the penalty. Such a revenge was more potent, and hence more satisfying, than the mere killing of the man would have been,—it was the great grim joke behind the lesser jokes of the murders themselves. . . .

"However, this fiendish scheme had one great disadvantage, though the professor did not see it. It laid the affair open to psychological analysis; and at the outset I was able to postulate a mathematician as the criminal agent. The difficulty of naming the murderer lay in the fact that nearly every possible suspect was a mathematician. The only one I knew to be innocent was Arnesson, for he was the only one who consistently maintained a psychic balance—that is, who constantly discharged the emotions arising from his protracted abstruse speculations. A general sadistic and cynical attitude that is volubly expressed, and a violent homicidal outburst, are psychologically equivalent. Giving full rein to one's cynicism as one goes along produces a normal outlet and maintains an emotional equilibrium. Cynical, scoffing men are always safe, for they are farthest removed from sporadic physical outbreaks; whereas the man who represses his sadism and accumulates his cynicism beneath a grave and stoical exterior is always liable to dangerous fulminations. This is why I knew Arnesson was incapable of the Bishop murders and why I suggested your letting him help us with the investigation. As he admitted, he suspected the professor; and his request to assist us was, I believe, actuated by a desire to keep posted so that he could better protect Belle Dillard and himself in case his suspicions should prove correct."

"That sounds reasonable," acceded Markham. "But where did Dillard get his fantastic ideas for the murders?"

"The Mother-Goose motif was probably suggested to him when he heard Arnesson jestingly tell Robin to beware of an arrow from Sperling's bow. He saw in that remark a means of venting his hatred against the man who had made it; and he bided his time. The opportunity to stage the crime came shortly after. When he saw Sperling pass up the street that morning, he knew that Robin was alone in the archery-room. So he went below, engaged Robin in conversation, struck him over the head, drove a shaft into his heart, and shoved him out on the range. He then wiped up the blood, destroyed the cloth, posted his notes at the corner, put one in the house letter-box, returned to the library, and called up this office. One unforeseen factor cropped up, however:—Pyne was in Arnesson's room when the professor said he went out on the balcony. But no harm came of it, for though Pyne knew something was amiss when he caught the professor lying, he certainly didn't suspect the old gentleman of being a murderer. The crime was a decided success."

"Still and all," put in Heath, "you guessed that Robin hadn't been shot with a bow and arrow."

"Yes. I saw from the battered condition of the nock of the arrow that it had been hammered into Robin's body; and I concluded therefore that the chap had been killed indoors, after having first been stunned with a blow on the head. That was why I assumed that the bow had been thrown to the range from the window,—I didn't know then that the professor was guilty. The bow of course was never on the range.—But the evidence on which I based my deductions cannot be held as an error or oversight on the professor's part. As long as his Mother-Goose joke was accomplished, the rest didn't matter to him."

"What instrument do you think he used?" Markham put the question.

"His walking stick, most likely. You may have noticed it has an enormous gold knob perfectly constructed as a lethal weapon.<sup>[4]</sup> Incidentally, I'm inclined to think he exaggerated his gout to attract sympathy and to shunt any possible suspicion from himself."

"And the suggestion for the Sprigg murder?"

"After Robin's death he may have deliberately looked about for Mother-Goose material for another crime. In any event, Sprigg visited the house the Thursday night preceding the shooting; and it was at that time, I imagine, that the idea was born. On the day chosen for the gruesome business he rose early and dressed, waited for Pyne's knock at half past seven, answered it, and then went to the park—probably through the archery-room and by way of the alley. Sprigg's habit of taking daily morning walks may have been casually mentioned by Arnesson, or even by the lad himself."

"But how do you explain the tensor formula?"

"The professor had heard Arnesson talking to Sprigg about it a few nights before; and I think he placed it under the body to call attention—through association—to Arnesson. Moreover, that particular formula subtly expressed the psychological impulse beneath the crimes. The Riemann-Christoffel tensor is a statement of the infinity of space—the negation of infinitesimal human life on this earth; and subconsciously it no doubt satisfied the professor's perverted sense of humor, giving added homogeneity to his monstrous conception. The moment I saw it I sensed its sinister significance; and it substantiated my theory that the Bishop murders were the acts of a mathematician whose values had become abstract and incommensurable."

Vance paused to light another cigarette, and after a moment's thoughtful silence continued.

"We come now to the midnight visit to the Drukker house. That was a grim *entr'acte* forced on the murderer by the report of Mrs. Drukker's scream. He feared the woman had seen Robin's body thrown to the range; and when, on the morning of Sprigg's murder, she had been in the yard and met him returning from the kill, he was more worried than ever that she would put two and two together. No wonder he tried to prevent our questioning her! And at the earliest opportunity he attempted to silence her for all time. He took the key from Belle Dillard's handbag before the theatre that night, and replaced it the next morning. He sent Pyne and Beedle to bed early; and at half past ten Drukker complained of fatigue and went home. At midnight he figured that the coast was clear for his grisly visit. His taking the black bishop as a symbolic signature to the contemplated murder was probably suggested by the chess discussion between Pardee and Drukker. Then again, it was Arnesson's chessman, and I even suspect him of telling us of the chess discussion to call attention to Arnesson's chess set in case the black bishop should fall into our hands."

"Do you think he had any idea of involving Pardee at that time?"

"Oh, no. He was genuinely surprised when Arnesson's analysis of the Pardee-Rubinstein game revealed the fact that the bishop had long been Pardee's nemesis. . . . And you were undoubtedly right about Pardee's reaction to my mention of the black bishop the next day. The poor chap thought I was deliberately ridiculing him as a result of his defeat at Rubinstein's hands. . . ."

Vance leaned over and tapped the ashes from his cigarette.

"Too bad," he murmured regretfully. "I owe him an apology, don't y' know." He shrugged his shoulders slightly, and, settling back in his chair, took up his narrative. "The professor got his idea for Drukker's murder from Mrs. Drukker herself. She expressed her imaginative fears to Belle Dillard, who repeated them at dinner that night; and the plan took shape. There were no complications to its execution. After dinner he went to the attic and typed the notes. Later he suggested a walk to Drukker, knowing Pardee wouldn't remain long with Arnesson; and when he saw Pardee on the bridge path he of course knew Arnesson was alone. As soon as Pardee had walked away, he struck Drukker and tipped him over the wall. Immediately he took the little path to the Drive, crossed to 76th Street, and went to Drukker's room, returning by the same route. The whole episode couldn't have occupied more than ten minutes. Then he calmly walked past Emery and went home with Drukker's note-book under his coat. . . ."

"But why," interposed Markham, "if you were sure that Arnesson was innocent, did you make such a point of locating the key to the alley door? Only Arnesson could have used the alley on the night of Drukker's death. Dillard and Pardee both went out by the front door."

"I wasn't interested in the key from the standpoint of Arnesson's guilt. But if the key was gone, d' ye see, it would have meant that some one had taken it in order to throw suspicion on Arnesson. How simple it would have been for Arnesson to slip down the alley after Pardee had gone, cross the Drive to the little path and attack Drukker after the professor had left him. . . . And, Markham, that is what we were supposed to think. It was, in fact, the obvious explanation of Drukker's murder."

"What I can't get through my head, though," complained Heath, "is why the old gent should have killed Pardee. That didn't throw any suspicion on Arnesson, and it made it look like Pardee was guilty and had got disgusted and croaked himself."

"That spurious suicide, Sergeant, was the professor's most fantastic joke. It was at once ironical and contemptuous; for all during that comic interlude plans were being made for Arnesson's destruction. And, of course, the fact that we possessed a plausible culprit had the great advantage of relaxing our watchfulness and causing the guards to be removed from the house. The murder, I imagine, was conceived rather spontaneously. The professor invented some excuse to accompany Pardee to the archery-room, where he had already closed the windows and drawn the shades. Then, perhaps pointing out an article in a magazine, he shot his unsuspecting guest through the temple, placed the gun in his hand, and, as a bit of sardonic humor, built the house of cards. On returning to the library he set up the chessmen to give the impression that Pardee had been brooding over the black bishop. . . ."

"But, as I say, this piece of grim grotesquerie was only a side-issue. The Little-Miss-Muffet episode was to be the *dénouement*; and it was carefully planned so as to bring the heavens crashing down on Arnesson. The professor was at the Drukker house the morning of the funeral when Madeleine Moffat brought the flowers for Humpty Dumpty; and he undoubtedly knew the child by name—she was Drukker's favorite and had been to the house on numerous occasions. The Mother-Goose idea being now firmly implanted in his mind, like a homicidal obsession, he very naturally associated the name Moffat with Muffet. Indeed, it's not unlikely that Drukker or Mrs. Drukker had called the child 'Little Miss Muffat' in his presence. It was easy for him to attract her attention and summon her to the mound by the wall yesterday afternoon. He probably told her that Humpty Dumpty wanted to see her; and she came with him eagerly, following him under the trees by the bridge path, thence across the Drive, and through the alley between the apartment houses. No one would have noticed them, for the Drive is teeming with children at that hour. Then last night he planted in us the seed of suspicion against Arnesson, believing that when the Little-Miss-Muffet notes reached the press we would look for the child and find her, dead from lack of air, in the Drukker house. . . . A clever, devilish plan!"

"But did he expect us to search the attic of his own home?"

"Oh, yes; but not until to-morrow. By then he would have cleaned out the closet and put the typewriter in a more conspicuous place. And he would have removed the note-book, for there's little doubt that he intended to appropriate Drukker's quantum researches. But we came a day too soon, and upset his calculations."

Markham smoked moodily for a time.

"You say you were convinced of Dillard's guilt last night when you remembered the character of *Bishop Arnesson*. . . ."

"Yes—oh, yes. That gave me the motive. At that moment I realized that the professor's object was to shoulder Arnesson with the

guilt, and that the signature to the notes had been chosen for that purpose."

"He waited a long time before he called our attention to 'The Pretenders,'" commented Markham.

"The fact is, he didn't expect to have to do it at all. He thought we'd discover the name for ourselves. But we were duller than he anticipated; and at last, in desperation, he sent for you and beat cleverly round the bush, accentuating 'The Pretenders.'"

Markham did not speak for several moments. He sat frowning reproachfully, his fingers tapping a tattoo on the blotter.

"Why," he asked at length, "did you not tell us last night that the professor and not Arnesson was the Bishop? You let us think—"

"My dear Markham! What else could I do? In the first place, you wouldn't have believed me, and would most likely have suggested another ocean trip, what? Furthermore, it was essential to let the professor think we suspected Arnesson. Otherwise, we'd have had no chance to force the issue as we did. Subterfuge was our only hope; and I knew that if you and the Sergeant suspected him you'd be sure to give the game away. As it was, you didn't have to dissemble; and lo! it all worked out beautifully."

The Sergeant, I noticed, had, for the past half hour, been regarding Vance from time to time with a look of perplexed uncertainty; but for some reason he had seemed reluctant to give voice to his troubled thoughts. Now, however, he shifted his position uneasily and, taking his cigar slowly from his mouth, asked a startling question.

"I ain't complaining about your not putting us wise last night, Mr. Vance, but what I would like to know is: why, when you hopped up and pointed at that plate on the mantel, did you switch Arnesson's and the old gent's glasses?"

Vance sighed deeply and gave a hopeless wag of the head.

"I might have known that nothing could escape your eagle eye, Sergeant."

Markham thrust himself forward over the desk, and glared at Vance with angry bewilderment.

"What's this!" he spluttered, his usual self-restraint deserting him. "You changed the glasses? You deliberately—"

"Oh, I say!" pleaded Vance. "Let not your wrathful passions rise." He turned to Heath with mock reproach. "Behold what you've got me in for, Sergeant."

"This is no time for evasion." Markham's voice was cold and inexorable. "I want an explanation."

Vance made a resigned gesture.

"Oh, well. Attend. My idea, as I've explained to you, was to fall in with the professor's plan and appear to suspect Arnesson. This morning I purposely let him see that we had no evidence, and that, even if we arrested Arnesson, it was doubtful if we could hold him. I knew that, in the circumstances, he would take some action—that he would try to meet the situation in some heroic way—for the sole object of the murders was to destroy Arnesson utterly. That he would commit some overt act and give his hand away, I was confident. What it would be I didn't know. But we'd be watching him closely. . . . Then the wine gave me an inspiration. Knowing he had cyanide in his possession, I brought up the subject of suicide, and thus planted the idea in his mind. He fell into the trap, and attempted to poison Arnesson and make it appear like suicide. I saw him surreptitiously empty a small phial of colorless fluid into Arnesson's glass at the sideboard when he poured the wine. My first intention was to halt the murder and have the wine analyzed. We could have searched him and found the phial, and I could have testified to the fact that I saw him poison the wine. This evidence, in addition to the identification by the child, might have answered our purpose. But at the last moment, after he had refilled all our glasses, I decided on a simpler course—"

"And so you diverted our attention and switched the glasses!"

"Yes, yes. Of course. I figured that a man should be willing to drink the wine he pours for another."

"You took the law in your own hands!"

"I took it in my arms—it was helpless. . . . But don't be so righteous. Do you bring a rattlesnake to the bar of justice? Do you give a mad dog his day in court? I felt no more compunction in aiding a monster like Dillard into the Beyond than I would have in crushing out a poisonous reptile in the act of striking."

"But it was murder!" exclaimed Markham in horrified indignation.

"Oh, doubtless," said Vance cheerfully. "Yes—of course. Most reprehensible. . . . I say, am I by any chance under arrest?"

The "suicide" of Professor Dillard terminated the famous Bishop murder case, and automatically cleared Pardee's reputation of all suspicion. The following year Arnesson and Belle Dillard were married quietly and sailed for Norway, where they made their home. Arnesson had accepted the chair of applied mathematics at the University of Oslo; and it will be remembered that two years later he was awarded the Nobel prize for his work in physics. The old Dillard house in 75th Street was torn down, and on the site now stands a modern apartment house on whose façade are two huge terra-cotta medallions strongly suggestive of archery targets. I have often wondered if the architect was deliberate in his choice of decoration.

## Footnotes

- [1] "The Greene Murder Case" (Scribners 1928)
- [2] Mr. Joseph A. Margolies of Brentano's told me that for a period of several weeks during the Bishop murder case more copies of "Mother Goose Melodies" were sold than of any current novel. And one of the smaller publishing houses reprinted and completely sold out an entire edition of those famous old nursery rhymes.
- [3] The book Vance referred to was that excellent and comprehensive treatise, "Archery," by Robert P. Elmer, M.D.
- [4] "The Benson Murder Case" (Scribners 1926)
- [5] "The 'Canary' Murder Case" (Scribners 1927)
- [6] Though Laplace is best known for his "Mécanique Céleste," Vance was here referring to his masterly work, "Théorie Analytique des Probabilités," which Herschel called "the ne plus ultra of mathematical skill and power."
- [7] Heath was referring to Doctor Emanuel Doremus, the Chief Medical Examiner of New York.
- [8] The book referred to by Professor Dillard was the great work which appeared two years later, "The Atomic Structure of Radiant Energy," a mathematical emendation of Planck's quantum theory refuting the classical axiom of the continuity of all physical processes, as contained in Maximus Tyrius'
- Οὐδὲ ἐνταῦθα ἡ φύσις μοταπηθῶν δρόως.**
- [9] The American chess master—sometimes confused with Doctor Emanuel Lasker, the former world champion.
- [10] Mae Brenner will still be remembered by Continental music lovers. Her début was made at the unprecedented age of twenty-three as *Sulamith* in "Die Königin von Saba" at the Imperial Opera House in Vienna; although her greatest success was perhaps her *Desdemona* in "Otello"—the last rôle she sang before her retirement.
- [11] The name was, of course, originally spelled Drucker. The change—possibly some vague attempt at Americanization—was made by Mrs. Drukker when she settled in this country.
- [12] He gave me very much the same impression as did General Homer Lee when I visited him at Santa Monica shortly before his death.
- [13] Saturday was a "half day" at the District Attorney's office. Swacker was Markham's secretary.
- [14] The old anonymous nursery rhyme, "The Death and Burial of Cock Robin," is not, as is commonly supposed, one of the original "Mother Goose Melodies," although it has often been included in modern editions of that famous work.
- [15] Inspector William M. Moran, who died two years ago, was, at the time of the Bishop case, the Commanding Officer of the Detective Bureau.
- [16] This expression was actually developed by Christoffel for a problem on the conductivity of heat, and published by him in 1869 in the "Crelle Journal für reine und angewandte Mathematik."
- [17] A similar state of panic obtained in London in 1888 when Jack-the-Ripper was engaged in his grisly, abnormal debauch; and again in Hanover in 1923 when Haarmann, the werewolf, was busy with his anthropophagous slaughters. But I can recall no other modern parallel for the atmosphere of gruesome horror that settled over New York during the Bishop murders.
- [18] Chief Inspector O'Brien was then in command of the entire Police Department.
- [19] Captain Hagedorn was the fire-arms expert of the New York Police Department. It was he who, in the Benson murder case, gave Vance the data with which to establish the height of the murderer; and who made the examination of the three bullets fired from the old Smith & Wesson revolver in the Greene murder case.
- [20] Akiba Rubinstein was then, and is to-day, the chess champion of Poland and one of the great international masters of the game. He was born in Stavisk, near Lodz, in 1882, and made his début in international chess at the Ostend tournament in 1906. His recent visit to America resulted in a series of new triumphs.
- [21] Since this discussion took place Professor Pickering has posited from the perturbations of Uranus, two other outer planets beyond Neptune: *P* and *S*.
- [22] Colonel Benjamin Hanlon, commanding officer of the Detective Division attached to the District Attorney's office.
- [23] "Louise" was Vance's favorite modern opera, but he greatly preferred Mary Garden to Farrar in the title rôle.
- [24] It may be recalled that the *World's* accounts of the Bishop case were the envy of the other metropolitan newspapers. Sergeant Heath, though impartial in his statements of facts to the press, nevertheless managed to save several picturesque *bonnes-bouches* for Quinan, and permitted himself certain speculations which, while having no news value, gave the *World's* stories an added interest and color.
- [25] Guilfoyle, it may be remembered, was one of the detectives who shadowed Tony Skeel in the Canary murder case.
- [26] Hennessey had kept watch with Doctor Drumm over the Greene mansion from the Narcoss Flats, in the Greene murder case. Snitkin also had taken part in the Greene investigation, and had played a minor rôle in both the Benson and the Canary case. The dapper Emery was the detective who had unearthed the cigarette stubs from beneath the fire-logs in Alvin Benson's living-room.
- [27] An important step toward the solution of these complex problems was taken a few years later by the de Broglie-Schrödinger theory as laid down in de Broglie's "Ondes et Mouvements" and Schrödinger's "Abhandlungen zur Wellenmechanik."
- [28] For the benefit of the expert chess-player who may be academically interested I append the exact position of the game when Pardee resigned:—WHITE: King at QKtsq; Rook at QB8; Pawns at QR2 and Q2. BLACK: King at Q5; Knight at QKt5; Bishop at QR6; Pawns at QKt7 and QB7.
- [29] The final five unplayed moves for Black to mate, as I later obtained them from Vance, were:—45. RxP; KtxR. 46. KxKt; P—Kt8 (Queen). 47. KxQ; K—Q6. 48. K—Rsq; K—B7. 49. P—Q3; B—Kt7 mate.
- [30] I am obviously unable to set down Vance's exact words, despite the completeness of my notes; but I sent him a proof of the

following passages with a request that he revise and edit them; so that, as they now stand, they represent an accurate paraphrase of his analysis of the psychological factors of the Bishop murders.

[31] Vance was here using the English connotation of "trillion," which is the third power of a million, as opposed to the American and French system of numeration which regards a trillion as a mere million millions.

[32] Lumen was invented by the French astronomer to prove the possibility of the reversal of time. With a speed of 250,000 miles per second, he was conceived as soaring into space at the end of the battle of Waterloo, and catching up all the light-rays that had left the battlefield. He attained a gradually increasing lead, until at the end of two days he was witnessing, not the end, but the beginning of the battle; and in the meantime he had been viewing events in reverse order. He had seen projectiles leaving the objects they had penetrated and returning to the cannon; dead men coming to life and arranging themselves in battle formation. Another hypothetical adventure of Lumen was jumping to the moon, turning about instantaneously, and seeing himself leaping from the moon to the earth backwards.

[33] Vance requested me to mention here A. d'Abro's recent scholarly work, "The Evolution of Scientific Thought," in which there is an excellent discussion of the paradoxes associated with spacetime.

[34] Vance's M. A. thesis, I recall, dealt with Schopenhauer's "Ueber die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde."

[35] I do not know whether Vance was here referring to "Mars and Its Canals" or "Mars as the Abode of Life."

[36] Pardee left in his will a large sum for the furtherance of chess; and in the autumn of that same year, it will be remembered, the Pardee Memorial Tournament was held at Cambridge Springs.

[37] Of the Wagnerian operas this was Vance's favorite. He always asserted that it was the only opera that had the structural form of a symphony; and more than once he expressed the regret that it had not been written as an orchestral piece instead of as a conveyance for an absurd drama.

[38] Vance's set was the William Archer copyright edition, published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

[39] I admit that the name of Rhazis was unfamiliar to me; and when I looked it up later I found that the episode to which Vance referred does not appear in the Anglican Bible, but in the second book of Maccabees in the Apocrypha.

[40] "One should die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly. The death which takes place in the most contemptible circumstances, the death that is not free, the death which occurs at the wrong time, is the death of a coward. We have not the power to prevent ourselves from being born; but this error—for sometimes it is an error—can be rectified if we choose. The man who does away with himself, performs the most estimable of deeds; he almost deserves to live for having done so."

[41] It was discovered later that the large weighted gold handle, which was nearly eight inches long, was loose and could be easily removed from the stick. The handle weighed nearly two pounds and, as Vance had observed, constituted a highly efficient "black jack." Whether or not it had been loosened for the purpose to which it was put, is of course wholly a matter of conjecture.

## 05. SCARAB

### 1. MURDER!

(Friday, July 13; 11 A.M.)

Philo Vance was drawn into the Scarab murder case by sheer coincidence, although there is little doubt that John F.-X. Markham—New York's District Attorney—would sooner or later have enlisted his services. But it is problematic if even Vance, with his fine analytic mind and his remarkable *flair* for the subtleties of human psychology, could have solved that bizarre and astounding murder if he had not been the first observer on the scene; for, in the end, he was able to put his finger on the guilty person only because of the topsy-turvy clues that had met his eye during his initial inspection.

Those clues—highly misleading from the materialistic point of view—eventually gave him the key to the murderer's mentality and thus enabled him to elucidate one of the most complicated and incredible criminal problems in modern police history.

The brutal and fantastic murder of that old philanthropist and art patron, Benjamin H. Kyle, became known as the Scarab murder case almost immediately, as a result of the fact that it had taken place in a famous Egyptologist's private museum and had centred about a rare blue scarabaeus that had been found beside the mutilated body of the victim.

This ancient and valuable seal, inscribed with the names of one of the early Pharaohs (whose mummy had, by the way, not been found at the time), constituted the basis on which Vance reared his astonishing structure of evidence. The scarab, from the police point of view, was merely an incidental piece of evidence that pointed somewhat obviously toward its owner; but this easy and specious explanation did not appeal to Vance.

"Murderers," he remarked to Sergeant Ernest Heath, "do not ordinarily insert their visitin' cards in the shirt bosoms of their victims. And while the discovery of the lapis-lazuli beetle is most interestin' from both the psychological and evidential standpoints, we must not be too optimistic and jump to conclusions. The most important question in this pseudo-mystical murder is why—and how—the murderer left that archaeological specimen beside the defunct body. Once we find the reason for that amazin' action, we'll hit upon the secret of the crime itself."

The doughty Sergeant had sniffed at Vance's suggestion and had ridiculed his scepticism; but before another day had passed he generously admitted that Vance had been right, and that the murder had not been so simple as it had appeared in first view.

As I have said, a coincidence brought Vance into the case before the police were notified. An acquaintance of his had discovered the slain body of old Mr. Kyle, and had immediately come to him with the gruesome news.

It happened on the morning of Friday, July 13th. Vance had just finished a late breakfast in the roof-garden of his apartment in East Thirty-eighth Street, and had returned to the library to continue his translation of the Menander fragments found in the Egyptian papyri during the early years of the present century, when Currie—his valet and majordomo—shuffled into the room and announced with an air of discreet apology:

"Mr. Donald Scarlett has just arrived, sir, in a state of distressing excitement, and asks that you hasten to receive him."

Vance looked up from his work with an expression of boredom.

"Scarlett, eh? Very annoyin'. . . . And why should he call on me when excited? I infinitely prefer calm people. . . . Did you offer him a brandy-and-soda—or some triple bromides?"

"I took the liberty of placing a service of Courvoisier brandy before him," explained Currie. "I recall that Mr. Scarlett has a weakness for Napoleon's cognac."

"Ah, yes—so he has. . . . Quite right, Currie." Vance leisurely lit one of his *Régie* cigarettes and puffed a moment in silence. "Suppose you show him in when you deem his nerves sufficiently calm."

Currie bowed and departed.

"Interestin' Johnny, Scarlett," Vance commented to me (I had been with Vance all morning arranging and filing his notes.) "You remember him, Van—eh, what?"

I had met Scarlett twice, but I must admit I had not thought of him for a month or more. The impression of him, however, came back to me now with considerable vividness. He had been, I knew, a college mate of Vance's at Oxford, and Vance had run across him during his sojourn in Egypt two years before.

Scarlett was a student of Egyptology and archaeology, having specialized in these subjects at Oxford under Professor F. Ll. Griffith. Later he had taken up chemistry and photography in order that he might join some Egyptological expedition in a technical capacity. He was a well-to-do Englishman, an amateur and dilettante, and had made of Egyptology a sort of fad.

When Vance had gone to Alexandria Scarlett had been working in the Museum laboratory at Cairo. The two had met again and renewed their old acquaintance. Recently Scarlett had come to America as a member of the staff of Doctor Mindrum W. C. Bliss, the famous Egyptologist, who maintained a private museum of Egyptian antiquities in an old house in East Twentieth Street, facing Gramercy Park. He had called on Vance several times since his arrival in this country, and it was at Vance's apartment that I had met him. He had, however, never called without an invitation, and I was at a loss to understand his unexpected appearance this morning, for he possessed all of the well-bred Englishman's punctiliousness about social matters.

Vance, too, was somewhat puzzled, despite his attitude of lackadaisical indifference.

"Scarlett's a clever lad," he drawled musingly. "And most proper. Why should he call on me at this indecent hour? And why should he be excited? I hope nothing untoward has befallen his erudite employer. . . . Bliss is an astonishin' man, Van—one of the world's great Egyptologists."<sup>[1]</sup>

I recalled that during the winter which Vance had spent in Egypt he had become greatly interested in the work of Doctor Bliss, who was then endeavoring to locate the tomb of Pharaoh Intef V who ruled over Upper Egypt at Thebes during the Hyksos domination. In fact, Vance had accompanied Bliss on an exploration in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings. At that time he had just become attracted by the Menander fragments, and he had been in the midst of a uniform translation of them when the Bishop murder case interrupted his



labors.

Vance had also been interested in the variations of chronology of the Old and the Middle Kingdoms of Egypt—not from the historical standpoint but from the standpoint of the evolution of Egyptian art. His researches led him to side with the Bliss-Weigall, or short, chronology[2] (based on the Turin Papyrus), as opposed to the long chronology of Hall and Petrie, who set back the Twelfth Dynasty and all preceding history one full Sothic cycle, or 1,460 years. After inspecting the art works of the pre-Hyksos and the post-Hyksos eras, Vance was inclined to postulate an interval of not more than 300 years between the Twelfth and Eighteenth Dynasties, in accordance with the shorter chronology. In comparing certain statues made during the reign of Amen-emhêt III with others made during the reign of Thut-mosè I—thus bridging the Hyksos invasion, with its barbaric Asiatic influence and its annihilation of indigenous Egyptian culture—he arrived at the conclusion that the maintenance of the principles of Twelfth-Dynasty aesthetic attainment could not have been possible with a wider lacuna than 300 years. In brief, he concluded that, had the interregnum been longer, the evidences of decadence in Eighteenth-Dynasty art would have been even more pronounced.

These researches of Vance's ran through my head that sultry July morning as we waited for Currie to usher in the visitor. The announcement of Scarlett's call had brought back memories of many wearying weeks of typing and tabulating Vance's notes on the subject. Perhaps I had a feeling—what we loosely call a premonition—that Scarlett's surprising visit was in some way connected with Vance's aesthetico-Egyptological researches. Perhaps I was even then arranging in my mind, unconsciously, the facts of that winter two years before, so that I might cope more understandingly with the object of Scarlett's present call.

But surely I could have had not the slightest idea or suspicion of what was actually about to befall us. It was far too appalling and too bizarre for the casual imagination. It lifted us out of the ordinary routine of daily experience and dashed us into a frowsty, miasmic atmosphere of things at once incredible and horrifying—things fraught with the seemingly supernatural black magic of a Witches' Sabbat. Only, in this instance it was the mystic and fantastic lore of ancient Egypt—with its confused mythology and its grotesque pantheon of beast-headed gods—that furnished the background.

Scarlett almost dashed through the portières of the library when Currie had pulled back the sliding door for him to enter. Either the Courvoisier had added to his excitement or else Currie had woefully underrated the man's nervous state.

"Kyle has been murdered!" the newcomer blurted, leaning against the library table and staring at Vance with gaping eyes.

"Really, now! That's very distressin'." Vance held out his cigarette-case. "Do have one of my *Régies*. . . . And you'll find that chair beside you most comfortable. A Charles chair: I picked it up in London. . . . Beastly mess, people getting murdered, what? But it really can't be helped, don't y' know. The human race is so deuced blood-thirsty."

His indifference had a salutary effect on Scarlett, who sank limply into the chair and began lighting his cigarette with trembling hands.

Vance waited a moment and then asked:

"By the by, how do you know Kyle has been murdered?"

Scarlett gave a start.

"I saw him lying there—his head bashed in. A frightful sight. No doubt about it." (I could not help feeling that the man had suddenly assumed a defensive attitude.)

Vance lay back in his chair languidly and pyramided his long tapering hands.

"Bashed in with what? And lying where? And how did you happen to discover the corpse? . . . Buck up, Scarlett, and make an effort at coherence."

Scarlett frowned and took several deep inhalations on his cigarette. He was a man of about forty, tall and slender, with a head more Alpine than Nordic—a Dinaric type. His forehead bulged slightly, and his chin was round and recessive. He had the look of a scholar, though not that of a sedentary bookworm, for there was strength and ruggedness in his body; and his face was deeply tanned like that of a man who has lived for years in the sun and wind. There was a trace of fanaticism in his intense eyes—an expression that was somehow enhanced by an almost completely bald head. Yet he gave the impression of honesty and straightforwardness—in this, at least, his British institutionalism was strongly manifest.

"Right you are, Vance," he said after a brief pause, with a more or less successful effort at calmness. "As you know, I came to New York with Doctor Bliss in May as a member of his staff; and I've been doing all the technical work for him. I have my diggings round the corner from the museum, in Irving Place. This morning I had a batch of photographs to classify, and reached the museum shortly before half past ten. . . ."

"Your usual hour?" Vance put the question negligently.

"Oh, no. I was a bit latish this morning. We'd been working last night on a financial report of the last expedition."

"And then?"

"Funny thing," continued Scarlett. "The front door was slightly ajar—I generally have to ring. But I saw no reason to disturb Brush —"

"Brush?"

"The Bliss butler. . . . So I merely pushed the door open and entered the hallway. The steel entrance door to the museum, which is on the right of the hallway, is rarely locked, and I opened it. Just as I started to descend the stairs into the museum I saw some one lying in the opposite corner of the room. At first I thought it might be one of the mummy cases we'd unpacked yesterday—the light wasn't very good—and then, as my eyes got adjusted, I realized it was Kyle. He was crumpled up, with his arms extended over his head. . . . Even then I thought he had only fallen in a faint; and I started down the steps toward him."

He paused and passed his handkerchief—which he drew from his cuff—across his shining head.

"By Jove, Vance!—it was a hideous sight. He'd been hit over the head with one of the new statues we placed in the museum yesterday, and his skull had been crushed in like an egg-shell. The statue still lay across his head."

"Did you touch anything?"

"Good heavens, no!" Scarlett spoke with the emphasis of horror. "I was too ill—the thing was ghastly. And it didn't take half an eye to see that the poor beggar was dead."

Vance studied the man closely.

"I say, what was the first thing you did?"

"I called out for Doctor Bliss—he has his study at the top of the little spiral stairs at the rear of the museum. . . ."

"And got no answer?"

"No—no answer. . . . Then—I admit—I got frightened. Didn't like the idea of being found alone with a murdered man, and toddled back toward the front door. Had a notion I'd sneak out and not say I'd been there. . . ."

"Ah!" Vance leaned forward and carefully selected another cigarette. "And then, when you were again in the street, you fell to worryin'."

"That's it precisely! It didn't seem cricket to leave the poor devil there—and still I didn't want to become involved. . . . I was now walking up Fourth Avenue threshing the thing out with myself and bumping against people without seeing 'em. And I happened to think of you. I knew you were acquainted with Doctor Bliss and the outfit, and could give me good advice. And another thing, I felt a little strange in a new country—I wasn't just sure how to go about reporting the matter. . . . So I hurried along to your flat here." He stopped abruptly and watched Vance eagerly. "What's the procedure?"

Vance stretched his long legs before him and lazily contemplated the end of his cigarette.

"I'll take over the procedure," he replied at length. "It's not so dashed complicated, and it varies according to circumstances. One may call the police station, or stick one's head out the window and scream, or confide in a traffic officer, or simply ignore the corpse and wait for some one else to stumble on it. It amounts to the same thing in the end—the murderer is almost sure to get safely away. . . . However, in the present case I'll vary the system a bit by telephoning to the Criminal Courts Building."

He turned to the mother-of-pearl French telephone on the Venetian tabouret at his side, and asked for a number. A few moments later he was speaking to the District Attorney.

"Greetings, Markham old dear. Beastly weather, what?" His voice was too indolent to be entirely convincing. "By the by, Benjamin H. Kyle has passed to his Maker by foul means. He's at present lying on the floor of the Bliss Museum with a badly fractured skull. . . . Oh, yes—quite dead, I understand. Are you interested, by any chance? Thought I'd be unfriendly and notify you. . . . Sad—sad. . . . I'm about to make a few observations *in situ criminis*. . . . Tut, tut! This is no time for reproaches. Don't be so deuced serious. . . . Really, I think you'd better come along. . . . Right-o! I'll await you here."

He replaced the receiver on the bracket and again settled back in his chair.

"The District Attorney will be along anon," he announced, "and we'll probably have time for a few observations before the police arrive."

His eyes shifted dreamily to Scarlett.

"Yes . . . as you say . . . I'm acquainted with the Bliss outfit. Fascinat' possibilities in the affair: it may prove most entertainin'. . . ." (I knew by his expression that his mind was contemplating—not without a certain degree of anticipatory interest—a new criminal problem.) "So, the front door was ajar, eh? And when you called out no one answered?"

Scarlett nodded but made no audible reply. He was obviously puzzled by Vance's casual reception of his appalling recital.

"Where were the servants? Couldn't they have heard you?"

"Not likely. They're in the other side of the house—down-stairs. The only person who could have heard me was Doctor Bliss—provided he'd been in his study."

"You could have rung the front door-bell, or summoned someone from the main hall," Vance suggested.

Scarlett shifted in his chair uneasily.

"Quite true," he admitted. "But—dash it all, old man!—I was in a funk. . . ."

"Yes, yes—of course. Most natural. *Prima-facie* evidence and all that. Very suspicious, eh what? Still, you had no reason for wanting the old codger out of the way, had you?"

"Oh, my God, no!" Scarlett went pale. "He footed the bills. Without his support the Bliss excavations and the museum itself would go by the board."

Vance nodded.

"Bliss told me of the situation when I was in Egypt. . . . Didn't Kyle own the property in which the museum is situated?"

"Yes—both houses. You see, there are two of 'em. Bliss and his family and young Salveter—Kyle's nephew—live in one, and the museum occupies the other. Two doors have been cut through, and the museum-house entrance has been bricked up. So it's practically one establishment."

"And where did Kyle live?"

"In the brownstone house next to the museum. He owned a block of six or seven adjoining houses along the street."

Vance rose and walked meditatively to the window.

"Do you know how Kyle became interested in Egyptology? It was rather out of his line. His weakness was for hospitals and those unspeakable English portraits of the Gainsborough school. He was one of the bidders for the *Blue Boy*. Luckily for him, he didn't get it."

"It was young Salveter who wangled his uncle into financing Bliss. The lad was a pupil of Bliss's when the latter was instructor of Egyptology at Harvard. When he was graduated he was at a loose end, and old Kyle financed the expedition to give the lad something to do. Very fond of his nephew, was old Kyle."

"And Salveter's been with Bliss ever since?"

"Very much so. To the extent of living in the same house with him. Hasn't left his side since their first visit to Egypt three years ago. Bliss made him Assistant Curator of the Museum. He deserved the post, too. A bright boy—lives and eats Egyptology."

Vance returned to the table and rang for Currie.

"The situation has possibilities," he remarked, in his habitual drawl. . . . "By the by, what other members of the Bliss ménage are there?"

"There's Mrs. Bliss—you met her in Cairo—a strange girl, half Egyptian, much younger than Bliss. And then there's Hani, an



Egyptian, whom Bliss brought back with him—or, rather, whom *Mrs.* Bliss brought back with *her*. Hani was an old dependent of Meryt's father. . . ."

"Meryt?"

Scarlett blinked and looked ill at ease.

"I meant Mrs. Bliss," he explained. "Her given name is Meryt-Amen. In Egypt, you see, it's customary to think of a lady by her native name."

"Oh, quite." A slight smile flickered at the corner of Vance's mouth. "And what position does this Hani occupy in the household?"

Scarlett pursed his lips.

"A somewhat anomalous one, if you ask me. Fellahîn stock—a Coptic Christian of sorts. He accompanied old Abercrombie—Meryt's father—on his various tours of exploration. When Abercrombie died, he acted as a kind of foster-father to Meryt. He was attached to the Bliss expedition this spring in some minor capacity as a representative of the Egyptian Government. He's a sort of high-class handy-man about the museum. Knows a lot of Egyptology, too."

"Does he hold any official post with the Egyptian Government now?"

"That I don't know . . . though I wouldn't be surprised if he's doing a bit of patriotic spying. You never can tell about these chaps."

"And do these persons complete the household?"

"There are two American servants—Brush, the butler, and Dingle, the cook."

Currie entered the room at this moment.

"Oh, I say, Currie," Vance addressed him; "an eminent gentleman has just been murdered in the neighborhood, and I am going to view the body. Lay out a dark gray suit and my Bangkok. A sombre tie, of course. . . . And, Currie—the Amontillado first."

"Yes, sir."

Currie received the news as if murders were everyday events in his life, and went out.

"Do you know any reason, Scarlett," Vance asked, "why Kyle should have been put out of the way?"

The other hesitated almost imperceptibly.

"Can't imagine," he said, knitting his brows. "He was a kindly, generous old fellow—pompous and rather vain, but eminently likable. I'm not acquainted with his private life, though. He may have had enemies. . . ."

"Still," suggested Vance, "it's not exactly likely that an enemy would have followed him to the museum and wreaked vengeance on him in a strange place, when any one might have walked in."

Scarlett sat up abruptly.

"But you're not implying that any one in the house—"

"My dear fellow!"

Currie entered the room at this moment with the sherry, and Vance poured out three glasses. When we had drunk the wine he excused himself to dress. Scarlett paced up and down restlessly during the quarter of an hour Vance was absent. He had discarded his cigarette and lighted an old briar pipe which had a most atrocious smell.

Almost at the moment when Vance returned to the library an automobile horn sounded raucously outside. Markham was below waiting for us.

As we walked toward the door Vance asked Scarlett:

"Was it custom'ry for Kyle to be in the museum at this hour of the morning?"

"No, most unusual. But Doctor Bliss had made an appointment with him for this morning, to discuss the expenditures of the last expedition and the possibilities of continuing the excavations next season."

"You knew of this appointment?" Vance asked indifferently. "Oh, yes. Doctor Bliss called him by phone last night during the conference, when we were assembling the report."

"Well, well." Vance passed out into the hall. "So there were others who also knew that Kyle would be at the museum this morning."

Scarlett halted and looked startled.

"Really, you're not intimating—" he began.

"Who heard the appointment made?" Vance was already descending the stairs.

Scarlett followed him with puzzled, downcast eyes.

"Well, let me see. . . . There was Salveter, and Hani, and . . ."

"Pray, don't hesitate."

"And Mrs. Bliss."

"Every one in the household, then, but Brush and Dingle?"

"Yes. . . . But see here, Vance; the appointment was for eleven o'clock; and the poor old duffer was done in before half past ten."

"That's most inveiglin'," Vance murmured.

## 2. THE VENGEANCE OF SAKHMET

(Friday, July 13; 11:30 A.M.)

Markham greeted Vance with a look of sour reproach.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded tartly. "I was in the midst of an important committee meeting—"

"The meaning is still to be ascertained," Vance interrupted lightly, stepping into the car. "The cause of your ungracious presence, however, is a most fascinatin' murder."

Markham shot him a shrewd look, and gave orders to the chauffeur to drive with all possible haste to the Bliss Museum. He recognized the symptoms of Vance's perturbation: a frivolous outward attitude on Vance's part was always indicative of an inner seriousness.

Markham and he had been friends for fifteen years, and Vance had aided him in many of his investigations. In fact, he had come to depend on Vance's assistance in the more complicated criminal cases that came under his jurisdiction.<sup>[3]</sup>

It would be difficult to find two men so diametrically opposed to each other temperamentally. Markham was stern, aggressive, straightforward, grave, and a trifle ponderous. Vance was debonair, whimsical, and superficially cynical—an amateur of the arts, and with only an impersonal concern in serious social and moral problems. But this very disparateness in their natures seemed to bind them together.

On our way to the museum, a few blocks distant, Scarlett recounted briefly to the District Attorney the details of his macabre discovery.

Markham listened attentively. Then he turned to Vance.

"Of course, it may be just an act of thuggery—some one from the street. . . ."

"Oh, my aunt!" Vance sighed and shook his head lugubriously. "Really, y' know, thugs don't enter conspicuous private houses in broad daylight and rap persons over the head with statues. They at least bring their own weapons and chose *mises-en-scène* which offer some degree of safety."

"Well, anyway," Markham grumbled, "I've notified Sergeant Heath.<sup>[4]</sup> He'll be along presently."

At the corner of Twentieth Street and Fourth Avenue he halted the car. A uniformed patrolman stood before a call-box, who, on recognizing the District Attorney, came to attention and saluted.

"Hop in the front seat, officer," Markham ordered. "We may need you."

When we reached the museum Markham stationed the officer at the foot of the steps leading to the double front door; and we at once ascended to the vestibule.

I made a casual mental note of the two houses, which Scarlett had already briefly described to us. Each had a twenty-five-foot frontage, and was constructed of large flat blocks of brownstone. The house on the right had no entrance—it had obviously been walled up. Nor were there any windows on the areaway level. The house on the left, however, had not been altered. It was three stories high; and a broad flight of stone stairs, with high stone banisters, led to the first floor. The "basement," as was usual in such structures, was a little below the street level. The two houses had at one time been exactly alike, and now, with the alterations and the one entrance, gave the impression of being a single establishment.

As we entered the shallow vestibule—a characteristic of all the old brownstone mansions along the street—I noticed the heavy oak entrance door, which Scarlett had said was ajar earlier in the morning, was now closed. Vance, too, remarked the fact, for he at once turned to Scarlett and asked:

"Did you close the door when you left the house?"

Scarlett looked seriously at the massive panels, as if trying to recall his actions.

"Really, old man, I can't remember," he answered. "I was devilishly upset. I may have shut the door. . . ."

Vance tried the knob, and the door opened.

"Well, well. The latch has been set anyway. Very careless on some one's part. . . . Is that unusual?"

Scarlett looked astonished.

"Never knew it to be unlatched."

Vance held up his hand, indicating that we were to remain in the vestibule, and stepped quietly inside to the steel door on the right leading to the museum. We could see him open it gingerly but could not distinguish what was beyond. He disappeared for a moment.

"Oh, Kyle's quite dead," he announced sombrely on his return. "And apparently no one has discovered him yet." He cautiously reclosed the front door. "We sha'n't take advantage of the latch being set," he added. "We'll abide by the conventions and see who answers." Then he pressed the bell-button.

A few moments later the door was opened by a cadaverous, chlorotic man in butler's livery. He bowed perfunctorily to Scarlett, and coldly inspected the rest of us.

"Brush, I believe." It was Vance who spoke.

The man bowed slightly without taking his eyes off of us.

"Is Doctor Bliss in?" Vance asked.

Brush shifted his gaze interrogatively to Scarlett. Receiving an assuring nod, he opened the door a little wider.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "He's in his study. Who shall I say is calling?"

"You needn't disturb him, Brush." Vance stepped into the entrance hall, and we followed him. "Has the doctor been in his study all morning?"

The butler drew himself up and attempted to reprove Vance with a look of haughty indignation.

Vance smiled, not unkindly.

"Your manner is quite correct, Brush. But we're not wanting lessons in etiquette. This is Mr. Markham, the District Attorney of New York; and we're here for information. Do you care to give it voluntarily?"

The man had caught sight of the uniformed officer at the foot of the stone steps, and his face paled.

"You'll be doing the doctor a favor by answering," Scarlett put in.

"Doctor Bliss has been in his study since nine o'clock," the butler replied, in a tone of injured dignity.

"How can you be sure of that fact?" Vance asked.

"I brought him his breakfast there; and I've been on this floor ever since."

"Doctor Bliss's study," interjected Scarlett, "is at the rear of this hall." He pointed to a curtained door at the end of the wide corridor.

"He should be able to hear us now," remarked Markham.

"No, the door is padded," Scarlett explained. "The study is his *sanctum sanctorum*; and no sounds can reach him from the house."

The butler, his eyes like two glittering pin-points, had started to move away. "Just a moment, Brush." Vance's voice halted him. "Who else is in the house at this time?"

The man turned, and when he answered it seemed to me that his voice quavered slightly.

"Mr. Hani is up-stairs. He has been indisposed—"

"Oh, has he, now?" Vance took out his cigarette-case. "And the other members of the household?"

"Mrs. Bliss went out about nine—to do some shopping, so I understood her to say—Mr. Salveter left the house shortly afterward."

"And Dingle?"

"She's in the kitchen below, sir."

Vance studied the butler appraisingly.

"You need a tonic, Brush. A combination of iron, arsenic and strychnine would build you up."

"Yes, sir. I've been thinking of consulting a doctor. . . . It's lack of fresh air, sir."

"Just so." Vance had selected one of his beloved *Régies*, and was lighting it with meticulous care. "By the by, Brush; what about Mr. Kyle? He called here this morning, I understand."

"He's in the museum now. . . . I'd forgotten, sir. Doctor Bliss may be with him."

"Indeed! And what time did Mr. Kyle arrive?"

"About ten o'clock."

"Did you admit him?"

"Yes, sir."

"And did you notify Doctor Bliss of his arrival?"

"No, sir. Mr. Kyle told me not to disturb the doctor. He explained that he was early for his appointment, and wished to look over some curios in the museum for an hour or so. He said he'd knock on the doctor's study door later."

"And he went direct into the museum?"

"Yes, sir—in fact, I opened the door for him."

Vance drew luxuriously on his cigarette for a moment.

"One more thing, Brush. I note that the latch on the front door has been set, so that any one from the outside could enter the house without ringing. . . ."

The man gave a slight start and, going quickly to the door, bent over and inspected the lock.

"So it is, sir. . . . Very strange."

Vance watched him closely.

"Why strange?"

"Well, sir, it wasn't unlatched when Mr. Kyle came at ten o'clock. I looked at it specially when I let him in. He said he wished to be left alone in the museum, and as members of the house sometimes leave the door on the latch when they go out for a short time, I made sure that no one had done so this morning. Otherwise they might have come in and disturbed Mr. Kyle without my warning them."

"But, Brush," interjected Scarlett excitedly; "when I got here at half past ten the door was open—"

Vance made an admonitory gesture.

"That's all right, Scarlett." Then he turned back to the butler. "Where did you go after admitting Mr. Kyle?"

"Into the drawing-room." The man pointed to a large sliding door half-way down the hall on the left, at the foot of the stairs.

"And remained there till when?"

"Till ten minutes ago."

"Did you hear Mr. Scarlett come in and go out the front door?"

"No, sir. . . . But then, I was using the vacuum cleaner. The noise of the motor—"

"Quite so. But if the vacuum cleaner's motor was hummin', how do you know that Doctor Bliss did not leave his study?"

"The drawing-room door was open, sir. I'd have seen him if he came out."

"But he might have gone into the museum and left the house by the front door without your hearing him. Y' know, you didn't hear Mr. Scarlett enter."

"That would have been out of the question, sir. Doctor Bliss wore only a light dressing-gown over his pyjamas. His clothes are all up-stairs."

"Very good, Brush. . . . And now, one more question. Has the front doorbell rung since Mr. Kyle's arrival?"

"No, sir."

"Maybe it rang and Dingle answered it. . . . That motor hum, don't y' know."

"She would have come up and told me, sir. She never answers the door in the morning. She's not in presentable habiliments till afternoon."

"Quite characteristically feminine," Vance murmured. . . . "That will be all for the present, Brush. You may go down-stairs and wait for our call. An accident has happened to Mr. Kyle, and we are going to look into it. You are to say nothing . . . understand?" His voice

had suddenly become stern and ominous.

Brush drew himself up with a quick intake of breath: he appeared positively ill, and I almost expected him to faint. His face was like chalk.

"Certainly, sir—I understand." His words were articulated with great effort. Then he walked away unsteadily and disappeared down the rear stairs to the left of Doctor Bliss's study door.

Vance spoke in a low voice to Markham, who immediately beckoned to the officer in the street below.

"You are to stand in the vestibule here," he ordered. "When Sergeant Heath and his men come, bring them to us at once, we'll be in there." He indicated the large steel door leading into the museum. "If anyone else calls, hold them and notify us. Don't let any one ring the bell."

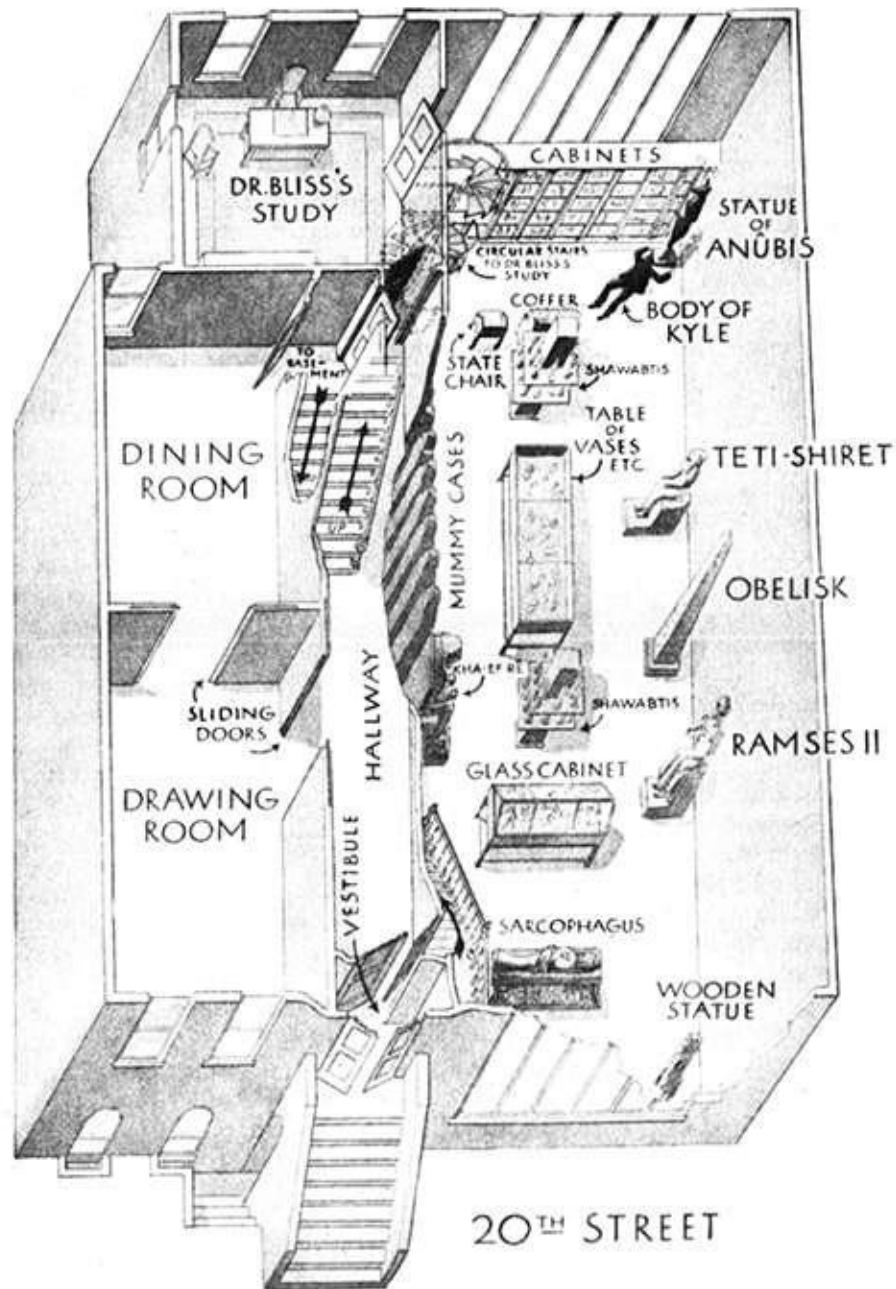
The officer saluted and took up his post; and the rest of us, with Vance leading the way, passed through the steel door into the museum.

A flight of carpeted stairs, four feet wide, led down along the wall to the floor of the enormous room beyond, which was on the street level. The first-story floor—the one which had been even with the hallway of the house we had just quitted—had been removed so that the room of the museum was two stories high. Two huge pillars, with steel beams and diagonal joists, had been erected as supports. Moreover, the walls marking the former rooms had been demolished. The result was that the room we had entered occupied the entire width and length of the house—about twenty-five by seventy feet—and had a ceiling almost twenty feet high.

At the front was a series of tall, leaded-glass windows running across the entire width of the building; and at the rear, above a series of oak cabinets, a similar row of windows had been cut. The curtains of the front windows were drawn, but those at the rear were open. The sun had not yet found its way into the room, and the light was dingy.

As we stood for a moment at the head of the steps I noted a small circular iron stairway at the rear leading to a small steel door on the same level as the door through which we had entered.

The arrangement of the museum in relation to the house which served as living quarters for the Blisses, was to prove of considerable importance in Vance's solution of Benjamin H. Kyle's murder, and for purposes of clarity I am including in this record a plan of the two houses. The floor of the museum, as I have said, was on the street level—it had formerly been the "basement" floor. And it must be borne in mind that the rooms indicated on the left-hand half of the plan were one story above the museum floor and half-way between the museum floor and the ceiling.



My eyes at once searched the opposite corner of the room for the murdered man; but that part of the museum was in shadow, and all I could see was a dark mass, like a recumbent human body, in front of the farthest rear cabinet.

Vance and Markham had descended the stairs while Scarlett and I waited on the upper landing. Vance went straightway to the front of the museum and pulled the draw-cords of the curtains. Light flooded the semi-darkness; and for the first time I took in the beautiful and amazing contents of that great room.

In the centre of the opposite wall rose a ten-foot obelisk from Heliopolis, commemorating an expedition of Queen Hat-shepsut of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and bearing her cartouche. To the right and left of the obelisk stood two plaster-cast portrait statues—one of Queen Teti-shiret of the Seventeenth Dynasty, and the other a black replica of the famous Turin statue of Ramses II—considered one of the finest pieces of sculptured portraiture in antiquity.

Above and beside them hung several papyri, framed and under glass, their faded burnt-orange backgrounds—punctuated with red,

yellow, green and white patches—making splashes of attractive color against the dingy gray plaster of the wall. Four large limestone bas-reliefs, taken from a Nineteenth-Dynasty tomb at Memphis and containing passages from the Book of the Dead, were aligned above the papyri.

Beneath the front windows stood a black granite Twenty-second-Dynasty sarcophagus fully ten feet long, its front and sides covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions. It was surmounted by a mummy-shaped lid, showing the soul bird, or Ba—with its falcon's form and human head. This sarcophagus was one of the rarest in America, and had been brought to this country by Doctor Bliss from the ancient necropolis at Thebes. In the corner beyond was a cedar-wood statue of an Asiatic, found in Palestine—a relic of the conquests of Thutmose III.

Near the foot of the stairs on which I stood loomed the majestic Kha-ef-Rê statue from the Fourth Dynasty. It was made of gray plaster of Paris, varnished and polished in imitation of the original diorite. It stood nearly eight feet high; and its dignity and power and magistral calm seemed to dominate the entire museum.[5]

To the right of the statue, and extending all the way to the spiral stairs at the rear, was a row of anthropoid mummy cases, gaudily decorated in gold and brilliant colors. Above them hung two enormously enlarged tinted photographs—one showing the Colossi of Amen-hotpe III,[6] the other depicting the great Amûn Temple at Karnak.

Around the two supporting columns in the centre of the museum deep shelves had been built, and on them reposed a fascinating array of *shawabtis*—beautifully carved and gaily painted wooden figures.

Extending between the two pillars was a long, low, velvet-covered table, perhaps fourteen feet in length, bearing a beautiful collection of alabaster perfumery and canopic vases, blue lotiform jars, kohl pots of polished obsidian, and several cylindrical carved cosmetic jars of semi-translucent and opaque alabaster. At the rear of the room was a squat coffer with inlays of blue glazed faience, white and red ivory and black ebony; and beside it stood a carved chair of state, decorated in gesso and gilt, and bearing a design of lotus flowers and buds.

Across the front of the room ran a long glass show-case containing pectoral collars of cloisonné, amulets of majolica, shell pendants, girdles of gold cowries, rhombic beads of carnelian and feldspar, bracelets and anklets and finger-rings, gold and ebony fans, and a collection of scarabs of most of the Pharaohs down to Ptolemaic times.

Around the walls, just below the ceiling, ran a five-foot frieze—a sectional copy of the famous Rhapsody of Pen-ta-Weret, commemorating the victory of Ramses II over the Hittites at Kadesh in Syria.

As soon as Vance had opened the heavy curtains of the front windows he and Markham moved toward the rear of the room. Scarlett and I descended the stairs and followed them. Kyle was lying on his face, his legs slightly drawn up under him, and his arms reaching out and encircling the feet of a life-sized statue in the corner. I had seen reproductions of this statue many times, but I did not know its name.

It was Vance who enlightened me. He stood contemplating the huddled body of the dead man, and slowly his eyes shifted to the serene sculpture—a brown limestone carving of a man with a jackal's head, holding a sceptre.

"Anûbis," he murmured, his face set tensely. "The Egyptian god of the underworld. Y' know, Markham, Anûbis was the god who prowled about the tombs of the dead. He guided the dead through Amentet—the shadowy abode of Osiris. He plays an important part in the Book of the Dead—he symbolized the grave; and he weighed the souls of men, and assigned each to its abode. Without Anûbis's help the soul would never have found the Realm of Shades. He was the only friend of the dying and the dead. . . . And here is Kyle, in an attitude of final and pious entreaty before him."

Vance's eyes rested for a moment on the benignant features of Anûbis. Then his gaze moved dreamily to the prostrate man who, but for the hideous wound in his head, might have been paying humble obeisance to the underworld god. He pointed to the smaller statue which had caused Kyle's death.

This statue was about two feet long and was black and shiny. It still lay diagonally across the back of the murdered man's skull: it seemed to have been caught and held there in the concavity made by the blow. An irregular pool of dark blood had formed beside the head, and I noted—without giving the matter any particular thought—that one point of the periphery of the pool had been smeared outward over the polished maple-wood floor.

"I don't like this, Markham," Vance was saying in a low voice. "I don't like it at all. . . . That diorite statue, which killed Kyle, is Sakhmet, the Egyptian goddess of vengeance—the destroying element. She was the goddess who protected the good and annihilated the wicked—the goddess who slew. The Egyptians believed in her violent power; and there are many strange legend'ry tales of her dark and terrible acts of revenge. . . ."

### 3. SCARABAEUS SACER

(Friday, July 13; noon)

Vance frowned slightly and studied the small black figure for a moment.

"It may mean nothing—surely nothing supernatural—but the fact that this particular statue was chosen for the murder makes me wonder if there may be something diabolical and sinister and superstitious in this affair."

"Come, come, Vance!" Markham spoke with forced matter-of-factness. "This is modern New York, not legendary Egypt."

"Yes . . . oh, yes. But superstition is still a ruling factor in so-called human nature. Moreover, there are many more convenient weapons in this room—weapons fully as lethal and more readily wielded. Why should a cumbersome, heavy statue of Sakhmet have been chosen for the deed? . . . In any event, it took a strong man to swing it with such force."

He looked toward Scarlett, whose eyes had been fastened on the dead man with a stare of fascination.

"Where was this statue kept?"

Scarlett blinked.

"Why—let me see. . . ." He was obviously trying to collect his wits. "Ah, yes. On the top of that cabinet." He pointed unsteadily to the row of wide shelves in front of Kyle's body. "It was one of the new pieces we unpacked yesterday. Hani placed it there. You see, we used that end cabinet temporarily for the new items, until we could arrange and catalogue 'em properly."

There were ten sections in the row of cabinets that extended across the rear of the museum, each one being about two and a half feet wide and a little over seven feet high. These cabinets—which in reality were but open shelves—were filled with all manner of curios: scores of examples of pottery and wooden vases, scent bottles, bows and arrows, adzes, swords, daggers, sistras, bronze and copper hand-mirrors, ivory game boards, perfume boxes, whip handles, palm-leaf sandals, wooden combs, palettes, head rests, reed baskets, carved spoons, plasterers' tools, sacrificial flint knives, funerary masks, statuettes, necklaces, and the like.

Each cabinet had a separate curtain of a material which looked like silk rep, suspended with brass rings on a small metal rod. The curtains to all the cabinets were drawn open, with the exception of the one on the end cabinet before which the dead body of Kyle lay. The curtain of this cabinet was only partly drawn.

Vance had turned around.

"And what about the Anûbis, Scarlett?" he asked. "Was it a recent acquisition?"

"That came yesterday, too. It was placed in that corner—to keep the shipment together."

Vance nodded, and walked to the partly curtained cabinet. He stood for several moments peering into the shelves.

"Very interestin'," he murmured, almost as if to himself. "I see you have a most unusual post-Hyksos bearded sphinx. . . . And that blue-glass vessel is very lovely. . . . though not so lovely as yon blue-paste lion's-head. . . . Ah! I note many evidences of old Intef's bellicose nature—that battle-ax, for instance. . . . And—my word!—there are some scimitars and daggers which look positively Asiatic. And"—he peered closely into the top shelf—"a most fascinatin' collection of ceremonial maces."

"Things Doctor Bliss picked up on his recent expedition," explained Scarlett. "Those flint and porphyry maces came from the antechamber of Intef's tomb. . . ."

At this moment the great metal door of the museum creaked on its hinges, and Sergeant Ernest Heath and three detectives appeared at the head of the stairs. The Sergeant immediately descended into the room, leaving his men on the little landing.

He greeted Markham with the usual ritualistic handshake.

"Howdy, sir," he rumbled. "I got here as soon as I could. Brought three of the boys from the Bureau, and sent word to Captain Dubois and Doc Doremus [7] to follow us up."

"It looks as if we might be in for another unpleasant scandal, Sergeant." Markham's tone was pessimistic. "That's Benjamin H. Kyle."

Heath stared aggressively at the dead man and grunted.

"A nasty job," he commented through his teeth. "What in hell is that thing he was croaked with?"

Vance, who had been leaning over the shelves of the cabinet, his back to us, now turned round with a genial smile.

"That, Sergeant, is Sakhmet, an ancient goddess of the primitive Egyptians. But she isn't in hell, so to speak. This gentleman, however,"—he touched the tall statue of Anûbis—"is from the nether regions."

"I mighta known you'd be here, Mr. Vance." Heath grinned with genuine friendliness, and held out his hand. "I've got you down on my suspect list. Every time there's a fancy homicide, who do I find on the spot but Mr. Philo Vance! . . . Glad to see you, Mr. Vance. I reckon you'll get your psychological processes to working now and clean this mystery up *pronto*."

"It'll take more than psychology to solve this case, I'm afraid." Vance had grasped the Sergeant's hand cordially. "A smatterin' of Egyptology might help, don't y' know."

"I'll leave that nifty stuff to you, Mr. Vance. What I want, first and foremost, is the finger-prints of that—that—" He bent over the small statue of Sakhmet. "That's the damndest thing I ever saw. The guy who sculpted that was cuckoo. It's got a lion's head with a big platter on the dome."

"The lion's head of Sakhmet is undoubtedly totemistic, Sergeant," explained Vance, good-naturedly. "And that 'platter' is a representation of the solar disk. The snake peering from the forehead is a cobra—or uraeus—and was the sign of royalty."

"Have it your own way, sir." The Sergeant had become impatient. "What I want is the finger-prints."

He swung about and walked toward the front of the museum.

"Hey, Snitkin!" he called belligerently to one of the men on the stair landing. "Relieve that officer outside—send him back to his beat. And bring Dubois in here as soon as he shows up." Then he returned to Markham. "Who'll give me the low-down on this, sir?"

Markham introduced him to Scarlett.

"This gentleman," he said, "found Mr. Kyle. He can tell you all we know of the case thus far."

Scarlett and Heath talked together for five minutes or so, the Sergeant maintaining throughout the conversation an attitude of undisguised suspicion. It was a basic principle with him that every one was guilty until his innocence had been completely and irrefutably established.

Vance in the meantime had been bending over Kyle's body with an intentness that puzzled me. Presently his eyes narrowed slightly and he went down on one knee, thrusting his head forward to within a foot of the floor. Then he took out his monocle, polished it carefully, and adjusted it. Markham and I both watched him in silence. After a few moments he straightened up.

"I say, Scarlett; is there a magnifyin' glass handy?"

Scarlett, who had just finished talking to Sergeant Heath, went at once to the glass case containing the scarabs and opened one of the drawers.

"What sort of museum would this be without a magnifier?" he asked, with a feeble attempt at jocularly, holding out a Coddington lens.

Vance took it and turned to Heath.

"May I borrow your flash-light, Sergeant?"

"Sure thing!" Heath handed him a push-button flash.

Vance again knelt down, and with the flash-light in one hand and the lens in the other, inspected a tiny oblong object that lay about a foot from Kyle's body.



**SCARAB OF INTEF V**

"Nisut Biti . . . Intef . . . Se Rê . . . Nub-Kheper-Rê." His voice was low and resonant.

The Sergeant put his hands in his pockets and sniffed.

"And what language might that be, Mr. Vance?" he asked.

"It's the transliteration of a few ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. I'm reading from this scarab. . . ."

The Sergeant had become interested. He stepped forward and leaned over the object that Vance was inspecting.

"A scarab, huh?"

"Yes, Sergeant. Sometimes called a scarabee, or scarabaeid, or scarabaeus—that is to say, beetle. . . . This little oval bit of lapis-lazuli was a sacred symbol of the old Egyptians. . . . This particular one, by the by, is most fascinatin'. It is the state seal of Intef V—a Pharaoh of the Seventeenth Dynasty. About 1650 B.C.—or over 3,500 year ago—he wore it. It bears the title and throne name of Intef-o, or Intef. His Horus name was Nefer-Kheperu, if I remember correctly. He was one of the native Egyptian rulers at Thebes during the reign of the Hyksos in the Delta.<sup>[8]</sup> The tomb of this gentleman is the one that Doctor Bliss has been excavating for several years. . . . And you of course note, Sergeant, that the scarab is set in a modern scarf-pin. . . ."

Heath grunted with satisfaction. Here, at least, was a piece of tangible evidence.

"A beetle, is it? And a scarf-pin! . . . Well, Mr. Vance, I'd like to get my hands on the bird who wore that blue thingumajig in his cravat."

"I can enlighten you on that point, Sergeant." Vance rose to his feet and looked toward the little metal door at the head of the circular stairway. "That scarf-pin is the property of Doctor Bliss."



#### 4. TRACKS IN THE BLOOD

(Friday, July 13; 12:15 P.M.)

Scarlett had been watching Vance intently, a look of horrified amazement on his round bronzed face.

"I'm afraid you're right, Vance," he said, nodding with reluctance. "Doctor Bliss found that scarab on the site of the excavation of Intef's tomb two years ago. He didn't mention it to the Egyptian authorities; and when he returned to America he had it set in a scarf-pin. But surely its presence here can have no significance. . . ."

"Really, now!" Vance faced Scarlett with a steady gaze. "I remember quite well the episode at Dirâ Abu 'n-Nega. I was *particeps criminis*, as it were, to the theft. But since there were other scarabs of Intef, as well as a cylindrical seal, in the British Museum, I turned my eyes the other way. . . . This is the first time I've had a close look at the scarab. . . ."

Heath had started toward the front stairs.

"Say, you—Emery!" he bawled, addressing one of the two men on the landing. "Round up this guy Bliss, and bring 'im in here—"

"Oh, I say, Sergeant!" Vance hastened after him and put a restraining hand on his arm. "Why so precipitate? Let's be calm. . . . This isn't the correct moment to drag Bliss in. And when we want him all we have to do is to knock on that little door—he's undoubtedly in his study, and he can't run away. . . . And there's a bit of prelimin'ry surveying to be done first."

Heath hesitated and made a grimace. Then:

"Never mind, Emery. But go out in the back yard, and see that nobody tries to make a getaway. . . . And you, Hennessey,"—he addressed the other man—"stand in the front hall. If any one tries to leave the house, grab 'em and bring 'em in—see?"

The two detectives disappeared with a stealth that struck me as highly ludicrous.

"Got something up your sleeve, sir?" the Sergeant asked, eying Vance hopefully. "This homicide, though, don't look very complicated to me. Kyle gets bumped off by a blow over the head, and beside him is a scarf-pin belonging to Doctor Bliss. . . . That's simple enough, ain't it?"

"Too dashed simple, Sergeant," Vance returned quietly, contemplating the dead man. "That's the whole trouble. . . ."

Suddenly he moved toward the statue of Anûbis, and leaning over, picked up a folded piece of paper which had lain almost hidden beneath one of Kyle's outstretched hands. Carefully unfolding it, he held it toward the light. It was a legal-sized sheet of paper, and was covered with figures.

"This document," he remarked, "must have been in Kyle's possession when he passed from this world. . . . Know anything about it, Scarlett?"

Scarlett stepped forward eagerly and took the paper with an unsteady hand. "Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "It's the report of expenditures we drew up last night. Doctor Bliss was working on this tabulation—"

"Uh-huh!" Heath grinned with vicious satisfaction. "So! Our dead friend here musta seen Bliss this morning—else how could he have got that paper?"

Scarlett frowned.

"I must say it looks that way," he conceded. "This report hadn't been made out when the rest of us knocked off last night. Doctor Bliss said he was going to draw it up before Mr. Kyle got here this morning." He seemed utterly nonplussed as he handed the paper back to Vance. "But there's something wrong somewhere. . . . You know, Vance, it's not reasonable—"

"Don't be futile, Scarlett." Vance's admonition cut him short. "If Doctor Bliss had wielded the statue of Sakhmet, why should he have left this report here to incriminate himself? . . . As you say, something is wrong somewhere."

"Wrong, is it!" Heath scoffed. "There's that beetle—and now we find this report. What more do you want, Mr. Vance?"

"A great deal more." Vance spoke softly. "A man doesn't ordinarily commit murder and leave such obvious bits of direct evidence strewn all about the place. . . . It's childish."

Heath snorted.

"Panic—that's what it was. He got scared and beat it in a hurry. . . ."

Vance's eyes rested on the little metal door of Doctor Bliss's study.

"By the by, Scarlett," he asked; "when did you last see that scarab scarf-pin?"

"Last night." The man had begun to pace restlessly up and down. "It was beastly hot in the study, and Doctor Bliss took off his collar and four-in-hand and laid 'em on the table. The scarab pin was sticking in the cravat."

"Ah!" Vance's gaze did not shift from the little door. "The pin lay on the table during the conference, eh? . . . And, as you told me, Hani and Mrs. Bliss and Salveter and yourself were present."

"Right."

"Any one, then, might have seen it and taken it?"

"Well—yes, . . . I suppose so."

Vance thought a moment.

"Still, this report . . . most curious! . . . I could bear to know how it got in Kyle's hands. You say it hadn't been completed when the conference broke up?"

"Oh, no." Scarlett seemed hesitant about answering. "We all turned in our figures, and Doctor Bliss said he was going to add 'em up and present them to Kyle to-day. Then he telephoned Kyle—in our presence—and made an appointment with him for eleven this morning."

"Is that all he said to Kyle on the phone?"

"Practically . . . though I believe he mentioned that new shipment that came yesterday—"

"Indeed? Very interestin'. . . . And what did Doctor Bliss say about the shipment?"

"As I remember—I really didn't pay much attention—he told Kyle that the crates had been unpacked, and added that he wanted Kyle to inspect their contents. . . . You see, there was some doubt whether Kyle would finance another expedition. The Egyptian Government had been somewhat snooty, and had retained most of the choicest items for the Cairo Museum. Kyle didn't like this, and as he had already put oodles of money in the enterprise, he was inclined to back out. No *kudos* for him, you understand. . . . In fact, Kyle's attitude was the cause of the conference. Doctor Bliss wanted to show him the exact cost of the former excavations and try to induce him to finance a continuation of the work. . . ."

"And the old boy refused to do it," supplemented Heath; "and then the doctor got excited and cracked him over the head with that black statue."

"You *will* insist that life is so simple, Sergeant," sighed Vance.

"I'd sure hate to think it was as complex as you make it, Mr. Vance." Heath's retort came very near to an expression of dignified sarcasm.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the main door was opened quietly and a middle-aged, dark-complexioned man in native Egyptian costume appeared at the head of the front stairs. He surveyed us with inquisitive calm, and slowly and with great deliberation of movement, descended into the museum.

"Good-morning, Mr. Scarlett," he said, with a sardonic smile. He glanced at the murdered man. "I observe that tragedy has visited this household."

"Yes, Hani," Scarlett spoke with a certain condescension. "Mr. Kyle has been murdered. These gentlemen"—he made a slight gesture in our direction—"are investigating the crime."

Hani bowed gravely. He was of medium height, somewhat slender, and gave one the impression of contemptuous aloofness. There was a distinct glint of racial animosity in his close-set eyes. His face was relatively short—he was markedly dolichocephalic—and his straight nose had the typical rounded extremity of the true Copt. His eyes were brown—the color of his skin—and his eyebrows bushy. He wore a close-cut, semi-gray beard, and his lips were full and sensual. His head was covered by a soft dark tarbûsh bearing a pendant tassel of blue silk, and about his shoulders hung a long kaftan of red-and-white striped cotton, which fell to his ankles and barely revealed his yellow-leather babûshes.

He stood for a full minute looking down at Kyle's body, without any trace of repulsion or even regret. Then he lifted his head and contemplated the statue of Anûbis. A queer devotional expression came over his face; and presently his lips curled in a faint sardonic smile. After a moment he made a sweeping gesture with his left hand and, turning slowly, faced us. But his eyes were not on us—they were fixed on some distant point far beyond the front windows.

"There is no need for an investigation, gentlemen," he said, in a sepulchral tone. "It is the judgment of Sakhmet. For many generations the sacred tombs of our forefathers have been violated by the treasure-seeking Occidental. But the gods of Egypt were powerful gods and protected their children. They have been patient. But the despoilers have gone too far. It was time for the wrath of their vengeance to strike. And it has struck. The tomb of Intef-o has been saved from the vandal. Sakhmet has pronounced her judgment, just as she did when she slaughtered the rebels at Henen-ensu[9] to protect her father, Rê, against their treason."

He paused and drew a deep breath.

"But Anûbis will never guide a sacrilegious giaour to the Halls of Osiris—however reverently he may plead. . . ."

Both Hani's manner and his words were impressive; and as he spoke I remembered, with an unpleasant feeling, the recent tragedy of Lord Carnarvon and the strange tales of ancient sorcery that sprang up to account for his death on supernatural grounds.

"Quite unscientific, don't y' know." Vance's voice, cynical and drawling, brought me quickly back to the world of reality. "I seriously question the ability of that piece of black igneous rock to accomplish a murder unless wielded by ordin'ry human hands. . . . And if you *must* talk tosh, Hani, we'd be tremendously obliged if you'd do it in the privacy of your bedchamber. It's most borin'."

The Egyptian shot him a look of hatred.

"The West has much to learn from the East regarding matters of the soul," he pronounced oracularly.

"I dare say," Vance smiled blandly. "But the soul is not now under discussion. The West, which you despise, is prone to practicality; and you'd do well to forgo the metempsychosis for the nonce and answer a few questions which the District Attorney would like to put to you."

Hani bowed his acquiescence; and Markham, taking his cigar from his mouth, fixed a stern look upon him.

"Where were you all this forenoon?" he asked.

"In my room—up-stairs. I was not well."

"And you heard no sounds in the museum here?"

"It would have been impossible for me to hear any sound in this room."

"And you saw no one enter or leave the house?"

"No. My room is at the rear, and I did not leave it until a few moments ago."

Vance put the next question.

"Why did you leave it then?"

"I had work to do here in the museum," the man replied sullenly.

"But I understand you heard Doctor Bliss make an appointment with Mr. Kyle for eleven this morning." Vance was watching Hani sharply. "Did you intend to interrupt the conference?"

"I had forgotten about the appointment." The answer did not come spontaneously. "If I had found Doctor Bliss and Mr. Kyle in conference I would have returned to my room."

"To be sure." Vance's tone held a tinge of sarcasm. "I say, Hani, what's your full name?"

The Egyptian hesitated, but only for a second. Then he said:

"Anûpu Hani." [10]

Vance's eyebrows went up, and there was irony in the slow smile that crept to the corners of his mouth.

"Anûpu," he repeated. "Most allurin'. *Anûpu*, I believe, was the Egyptian form for Anûbis, what? You would seem to be identified

with that unpleasant-lookin' gentleman in the corner, with the jackal's head."

Hani compressed his thick lips and made no response.

"It really doesn't matter, y' know," Vance remarked lightly. . . . "By the by, wasn't it you who placed the small statue of Sakhmet atop the cabinet yonder?"

"Yes. It was unpacked yesterday."

"And was it you who drew the curtain across the end cabinet?"

"Yes—at Doctor Bliss's request. The objects in it were in great disarray. We had not yet had time to arrange them."

Vance turned thoughtfully to Scarlett.

"Just what was said by Doctor Bliss to Mr. Kyle over the phone last night?"

"I think I've told you everything, old man." Scarlett appeared both puzzled and startled at Vance's persistent curiosity on this point. "He simply made the appointment for eleven o'clock, saying he'd have the financial report ready at that time."

"And what did he say about the new shipment?"

"Nothing, except that he was desirous of having Mr. Kyle see the items."

"And did he mention their whereabouts?"

"Yes; I recall that he said they had been placed in the end cabinet—the one with the closed curtains."

Vance nodded with a satisfaction I did not then understand.

"That accounts probably for Kyle's having come early to inspect the—what shall I say?—loot."

He faced Hani again with an engaging smile.

"And is it not true that you and the others at the conference last night heard this phone call?"

"Yes—we all heard it." The Egyptian had become morose; but I noticed that he was studying Vance surreptitiously from the corner of his eye.

"And—I take it—," mused Vance, "any one who knew Kyle might have surmised that he would come early to inspect the items in that end cabinet. . . . Eh, Scarlett?"

Scarlett shifted uneasily and looked at the great figure of the serene Kha-ef-Rê.

"Well—since you put it that way—yes. . . . Fact is, Vance, Doctor Bliss suggested that Mr. Kyle come early and have a peep at the treasures."

These ramifications had begun to irritate Sergeant Heath.

"Pardon me, Mr. Vance," he blurted, with ill-concealed annoyance; "but do you happen to be the defense attorney for this Doctor Bliss? If you aren't working hard to alibi him, I'm the Queen of Sheba."

"You're certainly not Solomon, Sergeant," returned Vance. "Don't you care to weigh all the possibilities?"

"Weigh hell!" Heath was losing his temper. "I want a heart-to-heart talk with this guy who wore that beetle-pin and drew up that report. I know clean-cut evidence when I see it."

"I don't doubt that for a moment," Vance spoke dulcetly. "But even clean-cut evidence may have various interpretations. . . ."

Snitkin threw open the door noisily at this point, and Doctor Doremus, the Medical Examiner, tripped jauntily down the stairs. He was a thin, nervous man, with a seamed, prematurely old face which carried a look at once crabbed and jocular.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he greeted us breezily. He shook hands perfunctorily with Markham and Heath, and squaring off, gave Vance an exaggeratedly disgruntled look.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, tilting his straw hat at an even more rakish angle. "Wherever there's a murder I find you, sir." He glanced at his wristwatch. "Lunch time, by George!" His flashing gaze moved about the museum and came to rest on one of the anthropoid mummy cases. "This place don't look healthy. . . . Where's the body, Sergeant?"

Heath had been standing before the prostrate body of Kyle. He now moved aside and pointed to the dead man.

"That's him, doc."

Doremus came forward and peered indifferently at the corpse.

"Well, he's dead," he pronounced, cocking his eye at Heath.

"Honest to Gawd?" The Sergeant was good-naturedly sarcastic.

"That's the way it strikes me—though since Carrel's experiments you never can tell. . . . Anyway, I'll stand by my decision." He chuckled, and kneeling down, touched one of Kyle's hands. Then he moved one of the dead man's legs sidewise. "And he's been dead for about two hours—not longer, maybe less."

Heath took out a large handkerchief and, with great care, lifted the black statue of Sakhmet from Kyle's head.

"I'm saving this for finger-prints. . . . Any signs of a struggle, doc?"

Doremus turned the body over and made a careful inspection of the face, the hands, and the clothes.

"Don't see any," he returned laconically. "Was struck from the rear, I'd say. Fell forward, arms outstretched. Didn't move after he'd hit the floor."

"Any chance, doctor, of his having been dead when the statue hit him?" asked Vance.

"Nope." Doremus rose and teetered on his toes impatiently. "Too much blood for that."

"Simple case of assault, then?"

"Looks like it. . . . I'm no wizard, though." The doctor had become irritable. "The autopsy will settle that point."

"Can we have the *post-mortem* report immediately?" Markham made the request.

"As soon as the Sergeant gets the body to the mortuary."

"It'll be there by the time you've finished lunch, doc," said Heath. "I ordered the wagon before I left the Bureau."

"That being that, I'll run along." Again Doremus shook hands with Markham and Heath, and throwing a friendly salutation to Vance, walked briskly out of the room.

I had noticed that ever since Heath had placed the statue of Sakhmet to one side he had stood staring impatiently at the small pool of blood. As soon as Doremus had departed he knelt down and became doggedly interested in something on the floor. He took out his

flashlight, which Vance had returned to him, and focussed it on the edge of the blood-pool at the point where I had noted the outward smear. Then, after a moment, he moved a short distance away, and again shot his light on a faint smudge which stained the yellow wood floor. Once more he shifted his position—this time toward the little spiral stairs. A grunt of satisfaction escaped him now, and rising, he walked, in a wide circle, to the stairs themselves. There he again knelt down and ran the beam of his flash-light over the lower steps. On the third step the ray of light suddenly halted, and the Sergeant's face shot forward in an attitude of intense concentration.

A grin slowly overspread his broad features, and straightening up, he brought a gaze of triumph to bear on Vance.

"I've got the case tied up in a sack now, sir," he announced.

"I take it," replied Vance, "you've found the spoor of the murderer."

"I'll say!" Heath nodded with the deliberate emphasis of finality. "It's just like I told you. . . ."

"Don't be too positive, Sergeant." Vance's face had grown sombre. "The obvious explanation is often the wrong one."

"Yeah?" Heath turned to Scarlett. "Listen, Mr. Scarlett, I got a question to ask you—and I want a straight answer." Scarlett bristled, but the Sergeant paid no attention to his resentment. "What kind of shoes does this Doctor Bliss generally wear around the house?"

Scarlett hesitated, and looked appealingly at Vance.

"Tell the Sergeant whatever you know," Vance advised him. "This is no time for reticence. You can trust me. There's no question of disloyalty now. The truth, d' ye see, is all that matters."

Scarlett cleared his throat nervously.

"Rubber tennis shoes," he said, in a low voice. "Ever since his first expedition in Egypt he has had weak feet—they troubled him abominably. He got relief by wearing white canvas sneakers with rubber soles."

"Sure he did." Heath walked back toward the body of Kyle. "Step over here a minute, Mr. Vance. I got something to show you."

Vance moved forward, and I followed him.

"Take a look at that footprint," the Sergeant continued, pointing toward the smear at the edge of the pool of blood where Kyle's head had lain. "It don't show up much till you get close to it . . . but, once you spot it, you'll notice that it has marks of a rubber-soled shoe, with crossings like a checker-board on the sole and round spots on the heel."

Vance bent over and inspected the footprint in the blood.

"Quite right, Sergeant." He had become very grave and serious.

"And now look here," Heath went on, pointing to two other smudges on the floor half-way to the iron stairs.

Vance leaned over the spots, and nodded.

"Yes," he admitted. "Those marks were probably made by the murderer. . . ."

"And once more, sir." Heath went to the stairs and flashed his pocket-light on the third step.

Vance adjusted his monocle and looked closely. Then he rose and stood still for a moment, his chin resting in the palm of his hand.

"How about it, Mr. Vance?" the Sergeant demanded. "Is that evidence enough for you?"

Markham stepped to the foot of the circular stairway, and placed his hand on Vance's shoulder.

"Why this stubbornness, old friend?" he asked in a kindly voice. "It begins to look like a clear case."

Vance lifted his eyes.

"A clear case—yes! But a clear case of what? . . . It doesn't make sense. Does a man of Bliss's mentality brutally murder a man with whom he is known to have had an appointment, and then leave his scarab-pin and a financial report, which no one else could have produced, on the scene of the crime, to involve himself? And, lest that evidence wasn't enough, is he going to leave bloody footprints, of a distinctive and personal design, leading from the body to his study? . . . Is it reasonable?"

"It may not be reasonable," Markham conceded; "but these things are nevertheless facts. And there's nothing to be done but confront Doctor Bliss with them."

"I suppose you're right." Vance's eyes again drifted toward the little metal door at the head of the spiral stairs. "Yes . . . the time has come to put Bliss on the carpet. . . . But I don't like it, Markham. There's something awry. . . . Maybe the doctor himself can enlighten us. Let me fetch him—I've known him for several years."

Vance turned and ascended the stairs, taking care not to step on the telltale footprint the Sergeant had discovered.

## 5. MERYT-AMEN

(Friday, July 13; 12:45 P.M.)

Vance knocked on the narrow door and reached into his pocket for his cigarette-case. We on the floor below watched the metal panel in silent expectancy. A feeling of dread, for some unknown reason, assailed me, and my muscles went tense. To this day I cannot explain the cause of my fear; but at that moment a chill came over my heart. All the evidence that had come to light pointed unmistakably toward the great Egyptologist in the little room beyond.

Vance alone seemed unconcerned. He casually lit his cigarette, and when he had replaced the lighter in his pocket, he knocked again at the door—this time more loudly. Still no answer.

"Very curious," I heard him murmur.

Then he raised his arm and pounded on the metal with a force that sent reverberating echoes through the great room of the museum.

At last, after several moments of ominous silence, there was a sound of a knob turning, and the heavy door swung slowly inward.

In the opening stood a tall, slender figure of a man in his middle forties. He wore a peacock-blue dressing-gown of self-figured silk, which reached to his ankles, and his sparse yellow hair was tousled as if he had just risen from bed. Indeed, his entire appearance was that of one who had suddenly been roused from a deep sleep. His eyes were hazy, and their lids drooped; and he clung to the inside knob of the door for support. He actually swayed a little as he peered dully at Vance.

Withal, he was a striking figure. His face was long and thin, rugged and deeply tanned. His forehead was high and narrow—a scholar's brow; but his nose, which was curved like an eagle's beak, was his most prominent characteristic. His mouth was straight, and surmounted a chin that was so square as to be cubic. His cheeks were sunken, and I got the distinct impression of a man who was physically ill but who overrode the ravages of disease by sheer nervous vitality.

For a moment he stared at Vance incomprehendingly. Then—like a person coming out of an anaesthetic—he blinked several times and took a deep inspiration.

"Ah!" His voice was thick and a trifle rasping. "Mr. Vance! . . . A long time since I've seen you. . . ." His eyes drifted about the museum and came to rest on the little group at the foot of the stairs. "I don't quite understand. . . ." He passed his hand slowly over the top of his head, and ran his fingers through his rumpled hair. "My head feels so heavy . . . please forgive me . . . I—I must have been asleep. . . . Who are these gentlemen below? . . . I recognize Scarlett and Hani. . . . It's been devilishly hot in my study."

"A serious accident has happened, Doctor Bliss," Vance informed him, in a low voice. "Would you mind stepping down into the museum? . . . We need your help."

"An accident!" Bliss drew himself up, and for the first time since he appeared at the door his eyes opened wide. "A serious accident? . . . What has happened? Not burglars, I hope. I've always been worried—"

"No, there have been no burglars, doctor," Vance steadied him as he walked nervously down the circular stairs.

When he reached the floor of the museum every eye in the room, I felt sure, was focussed on his feet. Certainly my own initial instinct was to inspect them; and I noticed that Heath, who stood beside me, had concentrated his gaze on the doctor's foot-covering. But if any of us expected to find Bliss shod in rubber-soled tennis shoes, he was disappointed. The man wore a pair of soft vici-kid bedroom slippers, dyed blue to match his dressing gown and adorned with orange trimmings.

I did note, however, that his gray-silk pyjamas, which showed through the deep V-opening of his gown, had a broad, turned-over collar in which a mauve four-in-hand had been loosely knotted.

His eyes swept the little group before him and returned to Vance.

"You say there have been no burglars?" His voice was still vague and thick. "What, then, was the accident, Mr. Vance?"

"An accident far more serious than burglars, doctor," replied Vance, who had not released his hold on the other's arm. "Mr. Kyle is dead."

"Kyle dead!" Bliss's mouth sagged open, and a look of hopeless amazement came into his eyes. "But—but . . . I talked to him last night. He was to come here this morning . . . regarding the new expedition. . . . Dead? All my work—my life's work—ended!" He slumped into one of the small folding wooden chairs of which there were perhaps a score scattered about the museum. A look of tragic resignation settled on his face. "This is terrible news."

"I'm very sorry, doctor," Vance murmured consolingly. "I fully understand your great disappointment. . . ."

Bliss rose to his feet. His lethargy had fallen from him, and his features became hard and resolute. He looked squarely at Vance.

"Dead?" His voice was menacing. "How did he die?"

"He was murdered," Vance pointed to the body of Kyle before which Markham and Heath and I were standing.

Bliss stepped toward Kyle's prostrate figure. For a full minute he stood staring down at the body; then his gaze shifted to the small statue of Sakhmet, and a moment later he lifted his eyes to the lupine features of Anûbis.

Suddenly he swung round and faced Hani. The Egyptian took a backward step, as though he feared violence from the doctor.

"What do you know about this?—you jackal!" Bliss threw the question at him venomously, a passionate hate in his voice. "You've spied on me for years. You've taken my money and pocketed bribes from your stupid and grasping government. You've poisoned my wife against me. You've stood in the way of all I've endeavored to accomplish. You tried to murder the old native who showed me the site of the two obelisks in front of Intef's pyramid.<sup>[1]</sup> You've hampered me at every turn. And because my wife believed in you and loved you, I've kept you. And now, when I've found the site of Intef's tomb and actually entered the antechamber and am about to give the fruits of my researches to the world, the one man who could make possible the success of my life's work is found murdered." Bliss's eyes were like burning coals. "What do you know about it, Anûpu Hani? Speak—you contemptible dog of a fellah!"

Hani had retreated several paces. Bliss's vitriolic tirade had pitifully cowed him. But he did not grovel: he had become grim and morose, and there was a snarl in his voice when he answered.

"I know nothing of the murder. It was the vengeance of Sakhmet! *She* killed the one who would have paid for the desecration of Intef's tomb. . . ."

"Sakhmet!" Bliss's scorn was devastating. "A piece of stone belonging to a hybrid mythology! You're not among illiterate witch-doctors now—you're confronted with civilized human beings who want the truth. . . . Who killed Kyle?"

"If it wasn't Sakhmet, I don't know, Your Presence." Despite the Egyptian's subservient attitude there was an underlying contempt in his manner and in the intonation of his voice. "I have been in my room all morning. . . . You, *hadretak*," he added, with a sneer, "were very close to your rich patron when he departed this world for the Land of Shades."

Two red patches of anger shone through the tan of Bliss's cheeks. His eyes blazed abnormally, and his hands plucked spasmodically at the folds of his dressing-gown. I feared that he would fly at the throat of the Egyptian.

Vance, too, had some such apprehension, for he moved to the doctor's side and touched him reassuringly on the arm.

"I understand perfectly how you feel, sir," he said in a soothing voice. "But temper won't help us get at the root of this matter."

Bliss sank back into his chair without a word, and Scarlett, who had been looking on at the scene with troubled amazement, stepped quickly up to Vance.

"There's something radically wrong here," he said. "The doctor isn't himself."

"So I observe." Vance spoke dryly, but there was a puzzled frown on his face. He scrutinized Bliss for a moment. "I say, doctor; what time did you fall asleep in your study this morning?"

Bliss looked up lethargically. His wrath seemed to have left him, and his eyes were again heavy.

"What time?" he repeated, like a man attempting to collect his thoughts. "Let me see. . . . Brush brought me my breakfast about nine, and a few minutes later I drank the coffee . . . some of it, at any rate—" His gaze wandered off into space. "That's all I remember until—until there was a pounding on the door. . . . What time is it, Mr. Vance?"

"It's well past noon," Vance informed him. "You evidently fell asleep as soon as you had your coffee. Quite natural, don't y' know. Scarlett tells me you worked late last night."

Bliss nodded heavily.

"Yes—till three this morning. I wanted to have the report in order for Kyle when he arrived. . . . And now"—he looked hopelessly toward the outstretched body of his benefactor—"I find him dead—murdered. . . . I can't understand."

"Neither can we—for the moment," Vance returned. "But Mr. Markham—the District Attorney—and Sergeant Heath of the Homicide Bureau are here for the purpose of ascertaining the facts; and you may rest assured, sir, that justice will be done. Just now you can help us materially by answering a few questions. Do you feel equal to it?"

"Of course I'm equal to it," Bliss replied, with a slight show of nervous vitality. "But," he added, running his tongue over his dry lips, "I'm horribly thirsty. A drink of water—"

"Ah! I thought you might be wanting a drink. . . . How about it, Sergeant?"

Heath was already on his way toward the front stairs. He disappeared through the door, and we could hear his voice giving staccato orders to some one outside. A minute or two later he returned to the museum with a glass of water.

Doctor Bliss drank it like a man parched with thirst, and when he set the glass down Vance asked him:

"When did you finish your financial report for Mr. Kyle?"

"This morning—just before Brush brought me my breakfast." Bliss's voice was stronger: there was even animation in his tone. "I had practically completed it before retiring last night—all but about an hour's work. So I came down to the study at eight this morning."

"And where is that report now?"

"On my desk in the study. I intended to check the figures after breakfast, before Kyle arrived. . . . I'll get it."

He started to rise, but Vance restrained him.

"That won't be necessary, sir. I have it here. . . . It was found in Mr. Kyle's hand."

Bliss looked at the paper, which Vance showed him, with dumbfounded eyes.

"In—Kyle's hand?" he stammered. "But . . . but . . ."

"Don't disturb yourself about it." Vance's manner was casual. "Its presence there will be explained when we've come to know the situation better. The report was no doubt taken from your study while you were asleep. . . ."

"Maybe Kyle himself—"

"It's possible, but hardly probable." It was obvious that Vance scouted the idea of Kyle's having personally taken the report. "By the by, is it customary for you to leave the door leading from your study into the museum unlocked?"

"Yes. I never lock it. No necessity to. As a matter of fact I couldn't tell you offhand where the key is."

"That bein' the case," mused Vance, "any one in the museum might have entered the study and taken the report after nine o'clock or so, when you were asleep."

"But who, in Heaven's name, Mr. Vance—?"

"We don't know yet. We're still in the conjectural stage of our investigation.—And if you'll be so good, doctor, permit me to ask the questions. . . . Do you happen to know where Mr. Salveter is this morning?"

Bliss turned his head toward Vance with a resentful gesture.

"Certainly I know where he is," he responded, setting his jaws firmly. (I got the impression that he intended to protect Kyle's nephew from any suspicion.) "I sent him to the Metropolitan Museum—"

"You sent him? When?"

"I asked him last night to go the first thing this morning and inquire regarding the duplicate set of reproductions of the tomb furniture in the recently discovered grave of Hotpeheres, the mother of Kheuf of the Fourth Dynasty—"

"Hotpeheres? Kheuf? Do you refer to Hetep-hir-es and Khufu?"

"Certainly!" The doctor's tone was tart. "I use the transliteration of Weigall. In his 'History of the Pharaohs!—"

"Yes, yes. Forgive me, doctor. I recall now that Weigall has altered many of the accepted transliterations from the Egyptian. . . . But,

if my memory is correct, the expedition which unearthed the tomb of Hetep-hir-es—or Hotpeheres—was sponsored by Harvard University and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts."

"Quite true. But I knew that my old friend, Albert Lythgoe, the Curator of the Egyptian department of the Metropolitan Museum, could supply me with the information I desired."

"I see," Vance paused. "Did you speak to Mr. Salveter this morning?"

"No." Bliss became indignant. "I was in my study from eight o'clock on; and the lad wouldn't think of disturbing me. He probably left the house about nine-thirty,—the Metropolitan Museum opens at ten."

Vance nodded.

"Yes; Brush said he went out about that time. But shouldn't he be back by now?"

Bliss shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps," he said, as if the matter was of no importance. "He may have had to wait for the Curator, however. Anyway, he'll be back as soon as he has finished his mission. He's a good conscientious lad: both my wife and I are extremely fond of him. It was he who, by interceding with his uncle, made possible the excavations of Intef's tomb."

"So Scarlett told me." Vance spoke with the offhandedness of complete uninterest, and drawing up a collapsible wooden chair sat down lazily. As he did so he gave Markham an admonitory glance—a glance which said as plainly as words could have done: "Let me do the talking for the time being." Then he leaned back and folded his hands behind his head.

"I say, doctor," he went on, with a slight yawn; "speaking of old Intef, I was present, don't y' know, when you appropriated that fascinatin' lapis-lazuli scarab. . . ."

Bliss's hand went to his four-in-hand, and he glanced guiltily toward Hani, who had moved before the statue of Teti-shiret and now stood with his back to us in a pose of detached and absorbed adoration. Vance pretended not to have seen the doctor's movements, and, gazing dreamily out of the rear windows, he continued:

"A most interestin' scarab—unusually marked. Scarlett tells me you had it made into a scarf-pin. . . . Have you it with you? I'd jolly well like to see it."

"Really, Mr. Vance,"—again Bliss's hand went to his cravat—"it must be up-stairs. If you'll call Brush—"

Scarlett had moved forward beside Bliss.

"It was in your study last night, doctor," he said, "—on the desk. . . ."

"So it was!" Bliss was in perfect control of himself now. "You'll find it on my desk, stuck in the necktie I was wearing yesterday."

Vance rose and confronted Scarlett with an arctic look.

"Thanks awfully," he said coldly. "When I need your assistance I'll call on you." Then he turned to Bliss. "The truth is, doctor, I was endeavorin' to ascertain when you last remembered havin' your scarab pin. . . . It's not in your study, d' ye see. It was lyin' beside the body of Mr. Kyle when we arrived here."

"My Intef scarab here!" Bliss leapt to his feet and gazed, with a panic-stricken stare, at the murdered man. "That's impossible!"

Vance stepped to Kyle's body and picked up the scarab.

"Not impossible, sir," he said, displaying the pin; "but very mystifyin'. . . . It was probably taken from your study at the same time as the report."

"It's beyond me," Bliss remarked slowly, in a hoarse whisper.

"Maybe it fell outa your necktie," Heath suggested antagonistically, thrusting his jaw forward.

"What do you mean?" The doctor's tone was dull and frightened. "I didn't have it in this necktie. I left it in the study—"

"Sergeant!" Vance gave Heath a look of stern reproof. "Let's go at this thing calmly and with discretion."

"Mr. Vance,"—Heath's aggressiveness did not relax—"I'm here to find out who croaked Kyle. And the person who had every opportunity to do it is this Doctor Bliss. On top of that fact we find a financial report and a stick-pin that hooks Doctor Bliss up to the dead man. And there's those footprints—"

"All you say is true, Sergeant." Vance cut him short. "But ballyragging the doctor will not give us the explanation of this extr'ordin'ry situation."

Bliss had shrunk back in his chair.

"Oh, my God!" he moaned. "I see what you're getting at. You think *I* killed him!" He turned his eyes to Vance in desperate entreaty. "I tell you I've been asleep since nine o'clock. I didn't even know Kyle was here. It's terrible—terrible. . . . Surely, Mr. Vance, you can't believe—"

There was a sound of angry voices at the main door of the museum, and we all looked in that direction. At the head of the stairs stood Hennessey, his arms wide, protesting volubly. On the door-sill was a young woman.

"This is my house," she said in a shrill, angry voice. "How dare you tell me I can't enter here? . . ."

Scarlett at once hurried toward the stairs.

"Meryt!"

"It's my wife," Bliss informed us. "Why is she refused admittance, Mr. Vance?"

Before Vance could answer, Heath was shouting:

"That's all right, Hennessey. Let the lady come in."

Mrs. Bliss hastened down the stairs, and almost ran to her husband.

"Oh, what is it, Mindrum? What has happened?" She dropped to her knees and put her arms about the doctor's shoulders. At that instant she caught sight of Kyle's body and, with a gasp and a shudder, turned her eyes away.

She was a striking-looking woman, whose age, I surmised, was about twenty-six-or-seven. Her large eyes were dark and heavily lashed, and her skin was a deep olive. Her Egyptian blood was most marked in the sensual fullness of her lips and in her high prominent cheekbones, which gave her face a decidedly Oriental character. There was something about her that recalled to my mind the beautiful reconstructed painting made of Queen Nefret-iti by Winifred Brunton.<sup>[12]</sup> She wore a powder-blue toque hat not unlike the headdress of Nefret-iti herself; and her gown of cinnamon-brown georgette crêpe clung closely to her slender, well-rounded body,



bringing out and emphasizing its sensuous curves. There were both strength and beauty in her supple figure, which followed the lines of the old Oriental ideal such as we find in Ingres' "Bain Turc."

Despite her youth she possessed a distinct air of maturity and poise: there were undeniable depths to her nature; and I could easily imagine, as I watched her kneeling beside Bliss, that she might be capable of powerful emotions and equally powerful deeds.<sup>[13]</sup>

Bliss patted her shoulder in an affectionately paternal manner. His eyes, though, were abstracted.

"Kyle is dead, my dear," he told her in a hollow voice. "He's been killed . . . and these gentlemen are accusing me of having done it."

"You!" Mrs. Bliss was instantly on her feet. For a moment her great eyes stared uncomprehendingly at her husband; then she turned on us in a flashing rage. But before she could speak Vance stepped toward her.

"The doctor is not quite accurate, Mrs. Bliss," he said in a low, even tone. "We have not accused him. We are merely making an investigation of this tragic affair; and it happens that the doctor's scarab-pin was found near Mr. Kyle's body. . . ."

"What of it?" She had become strangely calm. "Any one might have dropped it there."

"Exactly, madam," Vance returned, with friendly assurance. "Our main object in this investigation is to ascertain who that person was."

The woman's eyes were half-closed, and she stood rigid, as if transfixed by a sudden devastating thought.

"Yes . . . yes," she breathed. "Some one placed the scarab-pin there . . . some one. . . ." Her voice died out, and a cloud, as of pain, came over her face. But quickly she drew herself together and, taking a deep breath, looked resolutely into Vance's eyes.

"Whoever it was that did this terrible thing, I want you to find him." Her expression became set and hard. "And I will help you. Do you understand?—I will help you."

Vance studied her briefly before replying.

"I believe you will, Mrs. Bliss. And I shall call on you for that help." He bowed slightly. "But there is nothing you can do at this moment. A few prelimin'ry routine things must be done first. In the meantime, I would appreciate your waiting for us in the drawing-room—there will be several questions we shall want to ask you presently. . . . Hani may accompany you."

I had been watching the Egyptian with one eye during this little scene. When Mrs. Bliss had entered the museum he had barely turned in her direction, but when she had begun speaking to Vance he had moved silently toward them. He now stood, his arms folded, just behind the inlaid coffer, with his eyes fixed upon the woman, in an attitude of protective devotion.

"Come, Meryt-Amen," he said. "I will remain with you till these gentlemen wish to consult you. There is nothing to fear. Sakhmet has had her just revenge, and she is beyond the mundane power of Occidental law."

The woman hesitated a moment. Then, going to Bliss, she kissed him lightly on the forehead, and walked toward the front stairway, Hani servilely following her.



## 6. A FOUR-HOUR ERRAND

(Friday, July 13, 1:15 P.M.)

Scarlett's eyes followed her with a troubled, sympathetic look.

"Poor girl!" he commented, with a sigh. "You know, Vance, she was devoted to Kyle—her father and Kyle were great cronies. When old Abercrombie died Kyle cared for her as though she'd been his daughter. . . . This affair is a terrible blow to her."

"One can well understand that," Vance murmured perfunctorily. "But she has Hani to console her. . . . By the by, doctor, your Egyptian servant appears to be quite *en rapport* with Mrs. Bliss."

"What's that—what's that?" Bliss lifted his head and made an effort at concentration. "Ah, yes . . . Hani. A faithful dog—where my wife's concerned. He practically brought her up, after her father's death. He's never forgiven me for marrying her." He smiled grimly and lapsed into a state of brooding despondency.

Heath's cigar had gone out, but he still chewed viciously on it.

He was standing beside Kyle's body, his legs apart, his hands in his pockets, glaring with frustrated animosity at the doctor.

"What's all this palaver about, anyhow?" he asked sullenly. He faced Markham. "Listen, Chief: haven't you got enough evidence for an indictment?"

Markham was sorely troubled. His instinct was to order Bliss's arrest, but his faith in Vance halted him. He knew that Vance was not satisfied with the situation, and he no doubt felt, as a result of Vance's attitude, that there were certain things connected with Kyle's murder which did not show on the surface. Moreover, there was perhaps an uncertainty in his own mind as to the authenticity of the evidence that pointed to the Egyptologist.

He was on the point of answering Heath when Hennessey put his head in the door and called out:

"Hey, Sergeant; the buggy from the Department of Public Welfare is here."

"Well, it's about time." Heath was in a vicious mood. He turned to Markham. "Any reason, sir, why we shouldn't get the body outa the way?"

Markham glanced toward Vance, who nodded.

"No, Sergeant," he answered. "The sooner it reaches the mortuary, the sooner we'll have the *post-mortem* report."

"Right!" Heath cupped his hands to his mouth and bawled to Hennessey:

"Send 'em in."

A moment later two men—one the driver of the car, the other an unkempt "pick-up"—came down the stairs carrying a large wicker basket shaped like a coffin. Without a word they callously lifted Kyle's body into it, and started toward the front door with their gruesome burden, the "pick-up" at the rear end of the basket doing a playful dance step as he moved across the hardwood floor.

"Sweet sympathetic laddie," grinned Vance.

With the removal of Kyle's body a pall seemed to lift from the museum. But there was still that pool of blood and the recumbent statue of Sakhmet to tell the terrible story of the tragedy.

Heath stood eyeing the huddled, silent figure of Doctor Bliss.

"Where do we go from here?" His question contained both disgust and resignation.

Markham was growing restless and, beckoning Vance to one side, spoke to him in low tones. I could not hear what was said; but Vance talked earnestly to the District Attorney for several minutes. Markham listened attentively and then shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he answered, as they strolled back toward us. "But unless you reach some conclusion pretty soon we'll have to take action. . . ."

"Action—oh, my aunt!" Vance sighed deeply. "Always action—always pyrotechnics. The Rotarian ideal! Get busy—stir things up. Efficiency! . . . Why do the powers of justice have to emulate the whirling dervish? The human brain, after all, has certain functions."

He paced slowly back and forth in front of the cabinets, his eyes on the floor, while the rest of us watched him. Even Doctor Bliss roused himself and gazed at him with a curious and hopeful expression.

"None of these clews ring true, Markham," Vance said. "There's something here that doesn't meet the eye. It's like a cypher that says one thing and means another. I tell you the obvious explanation is the wrong one. . . . There's a key to this affair—somewhere. And it's staring us in the face . . . yet we can't see it."

He was deeply perplexed and dissatisfied, and he walked to and fro with that quiet, disguised alertness which I had long since come to recognize.

Suddenly he halted in front of the pool of blood before the end cabinet, and bent over. He studied it for a moment, and then his eyes moved to the cabinet. Slowly his gaze ascended the partly drawn curtain and came to rest on the beaded wooden ledge above the curtain rod. After a while his eyes drifted back to the pool of blood, and I got the impression that he was measuring distances and trying to determine the exact relationship between the blood, the cabinet, the curtain, and the moulding along the top of the shelves.

Presently he straightened up and stood very close to the curtains, his back to us.

"Really, now, that's most interestin'," he murmured. "I wonder. . . ."

He turned, and, drawing up one of the folding wooden chairs, placed it directly in front of the cabinet on the exact spot where Kyle's head had lain. Then he mounted the chair, and stood for a considerable time inspecting the top of the cabinet.

"My word! Extr'ordin'ry!" His voice was barely audible.

Taking out his monocle, he placed it in his eye. Then his hand reached out over the edge of the cabinet, and he picked up something very near to where Hani said he had placed the small statue of Sakhmet. Just what it was none of us could see; but presently he slipped the object into his coat pocket. A moment later he descended from the chair and faced Markham with a grim, satisfied look.

"This murder has amazin' possibilities," he observed.

Before he could explain his cryptic remark Hennessey again appeared at the head of the stairs and called out to Sergeant Heath:

"There's a guy named Salveter who says he wants to see Doc Bliss."

"Ah—*bon!*" Vance, for some reason, seemed highly pleased. "Suppose we have him in, Sergeant."

"Oh, sure!" Heath made an elaborate grimace of boredom. "O.K., Hennessey. Show in the gent. The more the merrier. . . . What is this, anyway?" he groused. "A convention?"

Young Salveter walked down the stairs and approached us with a startled, questioning air. He gave Scarlett a curt, cold nod; then he caught sight of Vance.

"How do you do?" he said, obviously surprised at Vance's presence. "It's been a long time since I saw you . . . in Egypt. . . . What's all the excitement about? Have we been invested by the military?" His pleasantry did not ring true.

Salveter was an earnest, aggressive-looking man of about thirty, with sandy hair, wide-set gray eyes, a small nose, and a thin, tight mouth. He was of medium height, stockily built, and might have been an athlete in his college days. He was dressed simply in a tweed suit that did not fit him, and the polka-dot tie in his soft-shirt collar was askew. I doubt if his cordovan blucher oxfords had ever been polished. My first instinct was to like him. The impression he gave was that of boyish frankness; but there was a quality in his make-up,—I could not analyze it at the time,—that signalled to one to be wary and not attempt to force an issue against his stubbornness.

As he spoke to Vance his eyes shifted with intense curiosity about the room, as if he were looking for something amiss.

Vance, who had been watching him appraisingly, answered after a slight pause in a tone that struck me an unnecessarily devoid of sympathy.

"No, it's not the milit'ry, Mr. Salveter. It's the police. The fact is, your uncle is dead—he has been murdered."

"Uncle Ben!" Salveter appeared stunned by the news; but presently an angry scowl settled on his forehead. "So—that's it!" He drew in his head and squinted pugnaciously at Doctor Bliss. "He had an appointment with you this morning, sir. . . . When—and how—did it happen?"

It was Vance, however, who made reply.

"Your uncle, Mr. Salveter, was struck over the head with that statue of Sakhmet, about ten o'clock. Mr. Scarlett found the body here at the foot of Anûbis, and notified me. I, in turn, notified the District Attorney. . . . This, by the by, is Mr. Markham—and this is Sergeant Heath of the Homicide Bureau."

Salveter scarcely glanced in their direction.

"A damned outrage!" he muttered, setting his square, heavy jaw.

"An outrage—yes!" Bliss lifted his head, and his eyes, pitifully discouraged, met Salveter's. "It means the end of all our excavations, my boy—"

"Excavations!" Salveter continued to study the older man. "What do they matter! I want to lay my hands on the dog who did this thing." He swung about aggressively and faced Markham. "What can I do, sir, to help you?" His eyes were mere slits—he was like a dangerous wild beast waiting to pounce.

"Too much energy, Mr. Salveter," Vance drawled, sitting down indolently. "Far too much energy. I can apprehend exactly how you feel, don't y' know. But aggressiveness, while bein' a virtue in some circumstances, is really quite futile in the present situation. . . . I say; why not walk round the block vigorously a couple of times, and then return to us? We crave a bit of polite intercourse with you, but calmness and self-control are most necess'ry."

Salveter glared ferociously at Vance, who met his gaze with languid coldness; and for fully thirty seconds there was an unflinching ocular clash between them. But I have seen other men attempt to stare Vance out of countenance—without the least success. His quiet power and strength of character were colossal, and I would wish no one the task of outgazing him.

Finally Salveter shrugged his broad shoulders. A slight, compromising grin flickered along his set mouth.

"I'll pass up the promenade," he said, with admiring sheepishness. "Fire away."

Vance took a deep inhalation on his cigarette, and let his eyes wander lazily along the great frieze of Pen-ta-Weret's Rhapsody.

"What time did you leave the house this morning, Mr. Salveter?"

"About half past nine." Salveter was now standing relaxed, his hands in his coat pockets. All of his aggressiveness was gone, and, though he watched Vance closely, there was neither animosity nor tenseness in his manner.

"And you did not, by any chance, leave the front door unlatched—or open?"

"No! . . . Why should I?"

"Really, y' know, I couldn't say." Vance conferred on him a disarming smile. "A more or less vital question, however. Mr. Scarlett, d' ye see, found the door open when he arrived between ten and ten-thirty."

"Well, I didn't leave it that way. . . . What next?"

"You went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I understand."

"Yes. I went to inquire about some reproductions of the tomb furniture of Hotpeheres."

"And you got the information?"

"I did."

Vance looked at his watch.

"Twenty-five after one," he read. "That means you have been absent about four hours. Did you, by any hap, walk to Eighty-second Street and back?"

Salveter clamped his teeth tight for a moment, and stared antagonistically at Vance's nonchalant figure.

"I didn't walk either way, thank you." (I could not determine whether he was merely exerting great self-control or whether he was actually frightened.) "I took a 'bus up the Avenue, and came back in a taxi."

"Let us say one hour coming and going, then. That allowed you three hours to obtain your information, eh, what?"

"Mathematically correct." Again Salveter grinned savagely. "But it happened I dropped into the rooms on the right of the entrance to take a look at Per-nêb's Tomb. I'd heard recently that they'd added some objects to their collection of the contents of the burial-chamber. . . . Per-nêb, you see, was Fifth Dynasty—"

"Yes, yes. . . . And as Khufu, Hetep-hir-es' offspring, belonged to the preceding dynasty, you were aesthetically interested in the burial-chamber contents. Quite natural. . . . And how long did you prow and commune among the Per-nêb fragments?"

"See here, Mr. Vance"—Salveter was growing apprehensive—"I don't know what you're trying to get at; but if it's going to help you in your investigation of Uncle Ben's death, I'll take your gaff. . . . I hung around the cabinets in the Egyptian rooms for nearly an hour. Got interested and didn't hurry—I knew Uncle Ben had an appointment with Doctor Bliss this morning, and I figured that if I got back at lunchtime it would be all right."

"But you didn't get back at lunch time," Vance remarked.

"What if I didn't? I had to cool my feet for nearly an hour in the Curator's outer office after I went upstairs—Mr. Lythgoe was talking with Lindsley Hall about some drawings. And then I had to hang around another half hour or so while he was phoning to Doctor Reisner at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. I'm lucky to be back now."

"Quite. . . . I know how those things are. Very tryin'."

Vance apparently accepted his story without question. He rose lazily and drew a small note-book from his pocket, at the same time feeling in his waistcoat as if for something with which to write.

"Sorry and all that, Mr. Salveter; but could you lend me a pencil? Mine seems to have disappeared."

(I immediately became interested, for I knew Vance never carried a pencil but invariably used a small gold fountain-pen which he always wore on his watch-chain.)

"Delighted." Salveter reached in his pocket and held out a long hexagonal yellow pencil.

Vance took it and made several notations in his book. Then, as he was about to return the pencil, he paused and looked at the name printed on it.

"Ah, a Mongol No. 1, what?" he said. "Popular pencils these Fabers-482. . . . Do you always use them?"

"Never anything else. . . ."

"Thanks awfully." Vance returned the pencil, and dropped the note-book into his pocket. "And now, Mr. Salveter, I'd appreciate it if you'd go to the drawing-room and wait for us. We'll want to question you again. . . . Mrs. Bliss, by the by, is there," he added casually.

Salveter's eyelids dropped perceptibly, and he gave Vance a swift sidelong glance.

"Oh, is she? Thanks. . . . I'll wait for you in the drawing-room." He went up to Bliss. "I'm frightfully sorry, sir," he said. "I know what this means to you. . . ." He was going to add something but halted himself. Then he walked doggedly toward the front door.

He was half-way up the stairs when Vance, who now stood regarding the statue of Sakhmet meditatively, suddenly turned and called to him.

"Oh, I say, Mr. Salveter. Tell Hani we'd like to see him here—there's a good fellow."

Salveter made a gesture of assent, and passed through the great steel door without looking back.

## 7. THE FINGER-PRINTS

(Friday, July 13, 1:30 P.M.)

Hani joined us a few moments later.

"I am at your service, gentlemen," he announced, looking from one to the other of us superciliously.

Vance had already drawn up a second chair beside the one on which he had stood during his inspection of the top of the cabinet; and he now made a beckoning gesture to the Egyptian.

"We appreciate your passionate spirit of co-operation, Hani," he replied lightly. "Would you be so amiable as to stand on this chair and point out to me exactly where you set the statue of Sakhmet yesterday?"

I was watching Hani closely, and I could have sworn that his eyebrows contracted slightly. But there was almost no hesitation in his compliance with Vance's request. Making a slow, deep bow, he approached the cabinet.

"Don't put your hands on the woodwork," Vance admonished. "And don't touch the curtain."

Awkwardly, because of his long flowing kaftan, Hani mounted one of the chairs; and Vance stepped upon the seat of the other.

The Egyptian squinted for a moment at the top of the cabinet, and then pointed a bony finger to a spot near the edge, exactly half-way across the two-and-a-half-foot opening.

"Just here, *effendi*," he said. "If you look closely you can see where the base of Sakhmet disturbed the dust. . . ."

"Oh, quite." Vance, though in an attitude of concentration, was nevertheless studying Hani's face. "But if one looks even more closely one can see other disturbances in the dust."

"The wind, perhaps, from yonder window. . . ."

Vance chuckled.

"Blasen ist nicht flöten, ihr müsst die Finger bewegen—to quote Goethe figuratively. . . . Your explanation, Hani, is a bit too poetic." He indicated a point near the moulding at the edge of the cabinet. "I doubt if even your simoon—or, as you may prefer to call it, samûn[14]—could have made that scratch at the edge of the statue's base, what? . . . Or, it may be, you set down the statue with undue violence."

"It is possible, of course—though not likely."

"No, not likely—considerin' your superstitious reverence for the leonine lady." Vance descended from his perch. "However, Sakhmet seems to have been standing on the very edge of the cabinet, directly in the centre, when Mr. Kyle arrived this morning to inspect the new treasures."

We had all been watching him with curiosity. Heath and Markham were especially interested, and Scarlett—frowning and immobile—had not taken his eyes from Vance. Even Bliss, who had seemed utterly broken by the tragedy and in a state of complete hopelessness, had followed the episode with intentness. That Vance had discovered something of importance was evident. I knew him too well to underestimate his persistence, and I waited, with a sense of inner excitement, for the time when he would share his new knowledge with us.

Markham, however, voiced his impatience.

"What have you in mind, Vance?" he asked irritably. "This is hardly the time to be secretive and dramatic."

"I'm merely delving into the subtler possibilities of this inveiglin' case," he replied, in an offhand manner. "I'm a complex soul, Markham old dear. I don't, alas! possess a simple, forthright nature. I'm a sworn enemy of the obvious and the trite. . . . You remember what the heart of the young man said to the Psalmist?—'Things are not what they seem.'"

Markham had long since come to understand this kind of evasive garrulousness on Vance's part, and no further question was asked. Moreover, there was an interruption at this moment, which was to place an even more complicated and more sinister aspect on the entire case.

The front door was opened by Hennessey, and Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy, the finger-print experts, clattered down the stairs.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Sergeant," Dubois said, shaking hands with Heath; "but I was tied up with a safe-breaking job on Fulton Street." He looked about him. "How d' ye do, Mr. Markham?" He extended his hand to the District Attorney. . . . "And Mr. Vance, is it?" Dubois spoke civilly but without enthusiasm: I believe his tiff with Vance during the "Canary" murder case still rankled in him.

"There ain't much of a job for you here, Captain," Heath interrupted impatiently. "The only thing I want you to check up on is that black statue laying there."

Dubois at once became seriously professional.

"That won't take long," he muttered, bending over the diorite figure of Sakhmet. "What might it be, Sergeant?—one of those Futuristic works of art that don't mean anything?"

"It don't mean anything to me," the Sergeant growled, "unless you can find some nice identifiable prints on it."

Dubois grunted and snapped his fingers toward his assistant. Bellamy, who had stood imperturbably in the background during the exchange of greetings, came ponderously forward and opened a black hand-bag which he had brought with him. Dubois, using a large handkerchief and the palms of his hands, carefully lifted the statue and placed it upright on the seat of a chair. Then he reached in the hand-bag and took out an insufflator, or tiny hand-bellows, and puffed a fine pale-saffron powder over the entire figure. Following this operation, he gently blew away all the surplus powder, and fixing a jeweller's-glass in his eye, knelt down and made a close inspection of every part of the statue.

Hani had watched the performance with the keenest interest. He had slowly moved toward the finger-print men until now he stood within a few feet of them. His eyes were concentrated on their labors, and his hands, which hung at his sides, were tightly flexed.

"You'll find no finger-prints of mine on Sakhmet, gentlemen," he proclaimed in a low, tense voice. "I polished them off. . . . Nor will

there be any finger-prints to guide you. The Goddess of Vengeance strikes of her own volition and power, and no human hands are needed to assist her in her acts of justice."

Heath threw the Egyptian a glance of scathing contempt; but Vance turned in his direction with a considerable show of interest.

"How do you know, Hani," he asked, "that your sign-manuals will not appear on the statue? It was you who placed it upon the cabinet yesterday."

"Yes, *effendi*," the man answered, without taking his eyes from Dubois. "I place it there—but with reverence. I rubbed and polished it from top to bottom when it was unpacked. And then I took it in my hands and stood it on the top of the cabinet, as Bliss *effendi* had directed. But when it was in place I could see where my hands had made marks upon its polished surface; and again I rubbed it with a chamois cloth so that it would be pure and untouched while the spirit of Sakhmet looked down sorrowfully over the stolen treasures of this room. . . . There was no mark or print on it when I left it."

"Well, my friend, there's finger-prints on it now," declared Dubois unemotionally. He had taken out a powerful magnifying glass and was centring his gaze on the thick ankles of the statue. "And they're damn clear prints, too. . . . Looks to me like they'd been made by some guy who'd lifted up this statue. . . . Both hands show around the ankles. . . . Pass me the camera, Bellamy."

Bliss had paid scant heed to the entrance of the finger-print men, but when Hani had begun to speak, he had roused himself from his despondent lethargy and concentrated his attention on the Egyptian. Then, when Dubois had announced the presence of finger-prints, he had stared, with terrible intentness, at the statue. A startling change had come over him. He was like a man in the grip of some consuming fear; and before Dubois had finished speaking he leapt to his feet and stood in a frozen attitude of stark horror.

"God help me!" he cried; and the sound of his voice sent a chill over me. "Those are *my* finger-prints on that statue!"

The effect of this admission was dumbfounding. Even Vance seemed momentarily shaken out of his habitual calm, and going to a small standard ashtray he abstractedly crushed out his cigarette, though he had smoked less than half of it.

Heath was the first to break the electric silence that followed Bliss's cry of anguish. He took his dead cigar from his lips, and thrust out his chin.

"Sure, they're your finger-prints!" he snapped unpleasantly. "Who else's would they be?"

"Just a moment, Sergeant!" Vance had wholly recovered himself, and his voice was casual. "Finger-prints can be very misleadin', don't y' know. And a few digital signatures on a lethal weapon don't mean that their author is necessarily a murderer. It's most important, d' ye see, to ascertain when and under what circumstances the signatures were made."

He approached Bliss, who had remained staring at the statue of Sakhmet like a stricken man.

"I say, doctor,"—he had assumed an easy, off-hand manner—"how do you know those finger-prints are yours?"

"How do I know?" Bliss repeated the question in a resigned, colorless tone. He appeared to have aged before our very eyes; and his white, sunken cheeks made him resemble a death's-head. "Because—oh, my God!—because I made them! . . . I made them last night—or, rather, early this morning, before I turned in. I took hold of the statue—around the ankles—exactly where that gentleman says there are the marks of two hands."

"And how did you happen to do that, doctor?" Vance asked quietly.

"I did it without thought—I'd even forgotten doing it till the finger-prints were mentioned." Bliss spoke with feverish earnestness: he seemed to feel that his very life depended on his being believed. "When I had finished arranging all the figures of the report early this morning, at about three o'clock, I came down here to the museum. I'd told Kyle about the new shipment, and I wanted to make sure that everything was in order for his inspection. . . . You see, Mr. Vance, a great deal depended on the impression the new treasures made on him. . . . I looked over the items in that end cabinet, and then re-drew the curtain. Just as I was about to depart I noticed that the statue of Sakhmet had not been placed evenly on the top of the cabinet—it was not in the exact centre, and was slightly sidewise. So I reached up and straightened it—taking hold of it by the ankles. . . ."

"Pardon me for intruding, Vance,"—Scarlett, a troubled look on his face, had stepped forward—"but I can assure you that such an act was quite natural with Doctor Bliss. He's a stickler for orderliness—it's a good-natured joke among the rest of us. We never dare leave anything out of place: he's constantly criticising us and rearranging things after us."

Vance nodded.

"Then, as I understand you, Scarlett, if a statue was left a bit askew, it would be practically inevitable that Doctor Bliss, on seeing it, would set it right."

"Yes—I think that's a reasonable conclusion."

"Many thanks." Vance turned again to Bliss. "Your explanation is that you adjusted the statue of Sakhmet, by taking hold of its ankles, and forthwith went to bed?"

"That's the truth—so help me God!" The man searched Vance's eyes eagerly. "I turned out the lights and went up-stairs. And I've not set foot in the museum till you knocked on my study door."

Heath was obviously not satisfied with this story. It was plain that he had no intention of relinquishing his belief in Bliss's guilt.

"The trouble with that alibi," he retorted doggedly, "is that you haven't got any witnesses. And it's the sort of alibi any one would pull when they'd got caught with the goods."

Markham diplomatically intervened. He himself was patently not convinced one way or the other.

"I think, Sergeant," he said, "that it might be advisable to have Captain Dubois verify the identity of those finger-prints. We'll at least know definitely then if the prints are the ones Doctor Bliss made. . . . Can you do that now, Captain?"

"Sure thing."

Dubois reached in the hand-bag and drew forth a tiny inked roller, a narrow glass slab, and a small paper pad.

"I guess the thumbs'll be enough," he said. "There's only one set of hands showing on the statue."

He ran the inked roller over the glass slab, and going to Bliss, asked him to hold out his hands.

"Press your thumbs on the ink and then put 'em down on this paper," he ordered.

Bliss complied without a word; and when the impressions had been made Dubois again placed the jeweller's-glass in his eye and inspected the marks.

"Looks like 'em," he commented. "Ulnar loops—same like those on the statue. . . . Anyhow, I'll check 'em."

He knelt down beside the statue and held the pad close to its ankles. For a minute or so he studied the two sets of finger-prints.

"They match," he announced at length. "No doubt about it. . . . And there ain't another visible mark on the statue. This gentleman"—he gestured contemptuously toward Bliss—"is the only person who's laid hands on the statue, so far as I can see."

"That's bully with me," grinned Heath. "Let me have the enlargements as soon as you can—I got a feeling I'm going to need 'em." He took out a fresh cigar and bit the end off with gloating satisfaction. "I guess that'll be all Captain. Many thanks. . . . Now you can go and victual up."

"And let me tell you I need it." Dubois passed his camera and paraphernalia to Bellamy, who packed them with stodgy precision; and the two of them walked noisily out of the museum.

Heath finally got his cigar going, and for several moments stood puffing on it voluptuously, one eye cocked at Vance.

"That sorta sews things up—don't it, sir?" he asked. "Or maybe you've swallowed the doctor's abili." He addressed himself to Markham. "I put it up to you, sir. There's only one set of finger-prints on that statue; and if those prints were made last night, I'd like to have somebody drive up in a hearse and tell me what became of the finger-prints of the bird who cracked Kyle over the head. Kyle was hit with the top of the statue, and whoever did it musta had hold of it by the legs. . . . Now, Mr. Markham, I ask you: is any one going to rub off his own finger-prints and leave those of the doctor? He couldn't have done it if he'd wanted to."

Before Markham could reply, Vance spoke.

"How do you know, Sergeant, that the person who killed Mr. Kyle actually wielded the statue?"

Heath gave Vance a look of amazement.

"Say! You don't seriously think, do you, that this lion-headed dame did the job by herself—like this Yogi says?" He jerked his thumb at Hani without turning his eyes.

"No, Sergeant." Vance shook his head. "I haven't yet gone in for the supernatural. And I don't think the murderer erased his finger-prints and left those of Doctor Bliss. But I do think, d' ye see, that there's some explanation which will account for all the contradict'ry phases of this astonishin' case."

"Maybe there is." Heath felt that he could be tolerant and magnanimous. "But I'm pinning my opinion on finger-prints and tangible evidence."

"A very dangerous procedure, Sergeant," Vance told him, with unwonted seriousness. "I doubt if you could ever get a conviction against Doctor Bliss on the evidence you possess. It's far too obvious—too imbecile. You're bogged with an *embarras de richesse*—meanin' that no sane man would commit a crime and leave so many silly bits of damnin' evidence around. . . . And I believe Mr. Markham will agree with me."

"I'm not so sure," said Markham dubiously. "There's something in what you say, Vance; but on the other hand—"

"Excuse *me*, gentlemen!" Heath had suddenly become animated. "I gotta see Hennessey—I'll be back in a minute." And he stalked with vigorous determination to the front door and disappeared.

Bliss, to all appearances, had taken no interest in the discussion of his possible guilt. He had sunk back in his chair, where he sat staring resignedly at the floor—a tragic, broken figure. When the Sergeant had left us he moved his head slowly toward Vance.

"Your detective is fully justified in his opinion," he said. "I can see his point of view. Everything is against me—everything!" His tone, though flat and colorless, was bitter. "If only I hadn't fallen asleep this morning, I'd know the meaning of all this. . . . My scarab-pin, that financial report, those fingerprints. . . ." He shook his head like a man in a daze. "It's damnable—damnable!" His trembling hands went to his face, and he placed his elbows on his knees, bending forward in an attitude of utter despair.

"It's too damnable, doctor," Vance replied soothingly. "Therein lies our hope of a solution."

Again he walked to the cabinet and remained for some time in *distract* contemplation. Hani had returned to his ascetic adoration of Teti-shiret; and Scarlett, frowning and unhappy, was pacing nervously up and down between the delicate state chair and the shelves holding the *shawabtis*. Markham stood in a brown study, his hands clasped behind him, gazing at the shaft of sunshine which had fallen diagonally through the high rear windows.

I noted that Hennessey had silently entered the main door and taken his post on the stair landing, one hand resting ominously in his right coat pocket.

Then the little metal door at the head of the iron spiral stairs swung open, and Heath appeared at the entrance to Doctor Bliss's study. One hand was behind him, out of sight, as he descended to the floor of the museum. He walked directly to Bliss and stood for a moment glowering grimly at the man whose guilt he believed in. Suddenly his hand shot forward—it was holding a white canvas tennis shoe.

"That yours, doctor?" he barked.

Bliss gazed at the shoe with perplexed astonishment.

"Why . . . yes. Certainly it's mine. . . ."

"You bet your sweet life it's yours!" The Sergeant strode to Markham and held up the sole of the shoe for inspection. I was standing at the District Attorney's side, and I saw that the rubber sole was criss-crossed with ridges and that there was a pattern of small hollow circles on the heel. But that which sent an icy breath of horror through me was the fact that the entire sole was red with dried blood.

"I found that shoe in the study, Mr. Markham," Heath was saying. "It was wrapped in a newspaper at the bottom of the waste-basket, covered up with all kinds of trash . . . hidden!"

It was several moments before Markham spoke. His eyes moved from the shoe to Bliss and back again; finally they rested on Vance.

"I think that clinches it." His voice was resolute. "I have no alternative in the matter now—"

Bliss sprang to his feet and hurried toward the Sergeant, his hypnotized gaze fastened on the shoe.

"What is it?" he cried. "What has that shoe to do with Kyle's death. . . ?" He caught sight of the blood. "Oh, God in Heaven!" he moaned.

Vance placed a hand on the man's shoulder.

"Sergeant Heath found footprints here, doctor. They were made by one of your canvas shoes. . . ."

"How can that be?" Bliss's fascinated eyes were riveted on the bloody sole. "I left those shoes upstairs in my bedroom last night, and I came down this morning in my slippers. . . . *There's something diabolical going on in this house.*"

"Something diabolical, yes!—something unspeakably devilish. . . . And rest assured, Doctor Bliss, I am going to find out what it is. . . ."

"I'm sorry, Vance," Markham's stern voice rang forth ominously. "I know you don't believe Doctor Bliss is guilty. But I have a duty to perform. I'd be betraying the people who elected me if, in view of the evidence, I didn't take action—And, after all, you may be wrong." (He said this with the kindliness of an old friend.) "In any event, my duty is clear."

He nodded to Heath.

"Sergeant, place Doctor Bliss under arrest, and charge him with the murder of Benjamin H. Kyle."

## 8. IN THE STUDY

(Friday, July 13; 2 P.M.)

I had often seen Vance in crucial moments of violent disagreement with Markham's judgment, but, whatever his feelings had been, he had always assumed a cynical and nonchalant attitude. Now, however, no lightness or playfulness marked his manner. He was grim and serious: a deep frown had settled on his forehead, and a look of baffled exasperation had come into his cold gray eyes. He compressed his lips tightly and crammed his hands deep into his coat pockets. I expected him to protest vigorously against Markham's action, but he remained silent, and I realized that he was confronted by one of the most difficult and unusual problems in his career.

His eyes drifted from Bliss to the immobile back of Hani and rested there. But they were unseeing eyes—eyes that were turned inward as if seeking for some means of counteracting the drastic step about to be taken against the great Egyptologist.

Heath, on the contrary, was elated. A grin of satisfaction had overspread his dour face at Markham's order, and without moving from in front of Bliss, he called stridently to the ominous figure of the detective on the stair landing.

"Hey, Hennessey! Tell Snitkin to phone Precinct Station 8 for a wagon. . . . Then go out back and get Emery, and bring him in here."

Hennessey disappeared, and Heath stood watching Bliss like a cat, as though he expected the doctor to make a dash for liberty. Had the situation not been so tragic the Sergeant's attitude would have appeared humorous.

"You needn't book and finger-print the doctor at the local station," Markham told him. "Send him direct to Headquarters. I'll assume all responsibility."

"That's fine with me, sir." The Sergeant seemed greatly pleased. "I'll want to talk confidentially with this baby myself later on."

Bliss, once the blow had fallen, had drawn himself together. He sat upright, his head thrown slightly back, his eyes gazing defiantly out of the rear windows. There was no cowering, no longer any fear, in his manner. Faced with the inevitable, he had apparently decided to accept it with stoical intrepidity. I could not help admiring the man's fortitude in extremity.

Scarlett stood like a man paralyzed, his mouth hanging partly open, his eyes fixed on his employer with a kind of unbelieving horror. Hani, of all the persons in the room, was the least perturbed: he had not even turned round from his rapt contemplation of Teti-shiret.

Vance, after several moments, dropped his chin on his chest, and his perplexed frown deepened. Then, as if on sudden impulse, he swung about and walked to the end cabinet. He stood absorbed, leaning against the statue of Anûbis; but soon his head moved slowly up and down and from side to side as he inspected various parts of the cabinet and its partly-drawn curtain.

Presently he came back to Heath.

"Sergeant, let me have another look at that tennis slipper." His voice was slow and strained.

Heath, without relaxing his vigilance, reached in his pocket and held out the shoe. Vance took it and, again adjusting his monocle, scrutinized the sole. Then he returned the shoe to the Sergeant.

"By the by," he said, "the doctor has more than one foot. . . . What about the other slipper?"

"I didn't look for it," snapped Heath. "This one was enough for me. It's the right shoe—the one that made the footprints."

"So it is." Vance's drawl informed me that his mind was more at ease. "Still, I could bear to know where the other shoe is."

"I'll find it—don't worry, sir." Heath spoke with contemptuous cocksureness. "I've got a little investigating to do as soon as I get the doctor safely booked at Headquarters."

"Typical police procedure," murmured Vance. "Book your man and then investigate. A sweet practice."

Markham was ruffled by this comment.

"It seems to me, Vance," he remarked with angry indignity, "that the investigation has already led to something fairly definite. Whatever else we find will be in the nature of supplementary evidence."

"Oh, will it now? Fancy that!" Vance smiled tauntingly. "I observe you've gone in for fortune-telling. Do you crystal-gaze in your moments of leisure, by any chance? . . . I myself am not what you'd call clairvoyant, but, Markham old dear, I can read the future better than you. And I assure you that when this investigation is continued there will be no supplement'ry evidence against Doctor Bliss. Indeed, you'll be amazed at what will turn up."

He came nearer to the District Attorney and dropped his scoffing tone.

"Can't you see, Markham, that you're playing into the murderer's hands? The person who killed Kyle planned the affair so you'd do exactly what you are doing. . . . And, as I've already told you, you'll never get a conviction with the preposterous evidence you have."

"I'll come mighty close to it," Markham retorted. "In any event, my duty is plain. I'll have to take a chance on the conviction. . . . But for once, Vance, I think you've permitted your theories to override a simple, obvious fact."

Before Vance could reply Hennessey and Emery came into the museum.

"Here, boys," the Sergeant ordered, "take this bird up-stairs and get some clothes on him, and bring him back here. Make it snappy."

Bliss went out between the two detectives.

Markham turned to Scarlett.

"You'd better wait in the drawing-room. I'll want to question every one, and I think you can give us some of the information we want. . . . And take Hani with you."

"I'll be glad to do what I can." Scarlett spoke in an awed voice. "But you're making a terrible mistake—"

"I'll settle that point for myself," Markham interrupted coldly. "Be good enough to wait in the drawing-room."

Scarlett and Heath walked slowly up the museum and passed out through the great steel door.

Vance had gone to the front of the spiral stairs and was pacing up and down with suppressed anxiety. A tense atmosphere had settled over the room. No one spoke. Heath was inspecting the small statue of Sakhmet with forced curiosity; and Markham had lapsed into a state of solemn abstraction.

A few minutes later Hennessey and Emery returned with Doctor Bliss in street clothes. They had hardly reached the rear of the



museum when Snitkin put his head in the front door and called:

"The wagon's here, Sergeant."

Bliss turned immediately, and the two detectives swung about alertly. The three men had taken only a few steps when Vance's voice cracked out like a whip.

"Stop!" He looked squarely at Markham. "You can't do this! The thing is a farce. You're making an unutterable ass of yourself."

I had never seen Vance so fiery—he was quite unlike his usual frigid self—and Markham was noticeably taken aback.

"Give me ten minutes," Vance hurried on. "There's something I want to find out—there's an experiment I want to make. Then, if you're not satisfied, you can go ahead with this imbecile arrest."

Heath's face grew red with anger.

"Look here, Mr. Markham," he protested; "we've got the goods—"

"Just a minute, Sergeant." Markham held up his hand: he had obviously been impressed by Vance's unusual earnestness. "Ten minutes is not going to make any material difference. And if Mr. Vance has any evidence we don't know of, we might as well learn it now." He turned brusquely to Vance. "What's on your mind? I'm willing to give you ten minutes. . . . Has your request anything to do with what you found on top of the cabinet and put in your pocket?"

"Oh, a great deal." Vance had again assumed his habitual easy-going manner. "And many thanks for the respite. . . . I'd suggest, however, that these two myrmidons take the doctor into the front hall and hold him there for further instructions."

Markham, after a brief hesitation, nodded to Heath, who gave Hennessey and Emery the necessary order.

When we were alone Vance turned toward the spiral stairs.

"Imprimis," he said almost gaily, "I passionately desire to make a curs'ry inspection of the doctor's study. I've a premonition that we will find something there of the most entrancin' interest."

He was now half-way up the stairs, with Markham, Heath and me following.

The study was a spacious room, about twenty feet square. It had two large windows at the rear and a smaller window on the east side giving on a narrow court. There were several massive embayed bookcases about the walls; and stacked in the corners were piles of paper pamphlets and cardboard folders. Along the wall which contained the door leading into the hall, stretched a long divan. Between the two rear windows stood a large flat-topped mahogany desk, before which was a cushioned swivel chair. Several other chairs were drawn up about the desk—evidences of the conference that had been held the previous night.

It was an orderly room, and there was a striking neatness about all of its appointments. Even the papers and books on the desk were carefully arranged, attesting to Bliss's meticulous nature. The only untidiness in the study was where Heath had upset the wicker waste-basket in his search for the tennis shoe. The curtains of the rear windows were up, and the afternoon sunlight flooded in.

Vance stood for a while just inside the door glancing slowly about him. His eyes tarried for a moment on the disposition of the chairs, but more especially, I thought, on the doctor's swivel seat, which stood several feet away from the desk. He looked at the heavily padded hall door, and let his gaze rest on the drawn curtain of the side window. After a pause he went to the window and raised the shade,—the window was shut.

"Rather strange," he commented. "A torrid day like this—and the window closed. Bear that in mind, Markham. . . . You observe, of course, that there's a window opposite in the next house."

"What possible significance could that have?" asked Markham irritably.

"I haven't the foggiest notion, don't y' know. . . . Unless," Vance added whimsically, "something went on in here that the occupant—or occupants—of the room didn't wish the neighbors to know about. The trees in the yard completely preclude any spying through the rear windows."

"Huh! That looks like a point in our favor," Heath rejoined. "The doc shuts the side window and pulls the shade down so's nobody'll hear him going in and out of the museum, or'll see him hiding the shoe."

Vance nodded.

"Your reasoning, Sergeant, is good as far as it goes. But you might carry the equation to one more decimal point. Why, for instance, didn't your guilty doctor open the window and throw up the shade after the dire deed was done? Why should he leave another obvious clew indicating his guilt?"

"Guys who commit murder, Mr. Vance," argued the Sergeant pugnaciously, "don't think of everything."

"The trouble with this crime," Vance returned quietly, "is that the murderer thought of too many things. He erred on the side of prodigality, so to speak."

He stepped to the desk. On one end lay a low starched turn-over collar with a dark-blue four-in-hand pulled through it.

"Behold," he said, "the doctor's collar and cravat which he removed last night during the conference. The scarab pin was in the cravat. Any one might have taken it—eh, what?"

"So you remarked before." Markham's tone held a note of bored sarcasm. "Did you bring us here to show us the necktie? Scarlett told us it was here. Forgive me, Vance, if I confess that I am not stunned by your discovery."

"No, I didn't lead you here to exhibit the doctor's neckwear." Vance spoke with calm assurance. "I merely mentioned the four-in-hand *en passant*."

He brushed the spilled papers of the waste-basket back and forth with his foot.

"I am rather anxious to know where the doctor's other tennis shoe is. I have a feelin' its whereabouts might tell us something."

"Well, it ain't in the basket," declared Heath. "If it had been I'd have found it."

"Ah! But, Sergeant, why wasn't it in the basket? That's a point worth considerin', don't y' know."

"Maybe it didn't have any blood on it. And that being the case, there wasn't any use in hiding it."

"But, my word! It strikes me that the blameless left shoe is hidden even better than was the incriminatin' right shoe." (During the discussion Vance had made a fairly thorough search of the study for the missing tennis shoe.) "It's certainly not round here."

Markham, for the first time since we quitted the museum, showed signs of interest.

"I see your point, Vance," he conceded reluctantly. "The telltale shoe was hidden here in the study, and the other one has

disappeared. . . . I admit that's rather odd. What's your explanation?"

"Oh, I say! Let's locate the shoe before we indulge in speculation. . . ." Vance then addressed himself to Heath. "Sergeant, if you should get Brush to conduct you to Doctor Bliss's bedchamber, I'm rather inclined to think you'll find the missing shoe there. You remember the doctor said he wore his tennis shoes up-stairs last night and came down this morning in his house slippers."

"Huh!" Heath scouted the suggestion. Then he gave Vance a sharp, calculating look. After a moment he changed his mind. Shrugging his shoulders in capitulation, he went swiftly out into the hall, and we could hear him calling down the rear stairs for the butler.

"If the Sergeant finds the shoe up-stairs," Vance observed to Markham, "it will be fairly conclusive evidence that the doctor didn't wear his tennis shoes this morning; for we know that he did not return to his bedroom after descending to his study before breakfast."

Markham looked perplexed.

"Then who brought the other shoe from his room this morning? And how did it get in the waste-basket? And how did it become blood-stained? . . . Surely, the murderer wore the shoe that Heath found here. . . ."

"Oh, yes—there can be no doubt of that," Vance nodded gravely. "And my theory is that the murderer wore only the one tennis shoe and left the other up-stairs."

Markham clicked his tongue with annoyance.

"Such a theory doesn't make sense."

"Forgive me, Markham, for disagreeing with you," Vance returned dulcetly. "But I think it makes more sense than the clews on which you're so trustfully counting to convict the doctor."

Heath burst into the room at this moment, holding the left tennis shoe in his hand. His expression was sheepish, but his eyes blinked with excitement.

"It was there, all right," he announced, "—at the foot of the bed. . . . Now, how did it get there?"

"Perhaps," softly suggested Vance, "the doctor wore it up-stairs last night, as he said."

"Then how the hell did the other shoe get down here?" The Sergeant was now holding the two shoes, one in each hand, staring at them in wrathful bewilderment.

"If you knew who brought that other shoe downstairs this morning," returned Vance, "you'd now who killed Kyle." Then he added: "Not that it would do us any particular good at the present moment."

Markham had been standing scowling at the floor and smoking furiously. The shoe episode had disconcerted him. But now he looked up and made an impatient gesture.

"You're making a mountain out of this affair, Vance," he asserted aggressively. "A number of simple explanations suggest themselves. The most plausible one seems to be that Doctor Bliss, when he came down-stairs this morning, picked up his tennis shoes to have them handy in his study, and in his nervousness—or merely accidentally—dropped one, or even failed to pick both of them up, and did not discover the fact until he was here—"

"And then," continued Vance, with a japing grin, "he took off one slipper and put on the tennis shoe, murdered Kyle, re-exchanged it for his temporarily discarded slipper, and tucked the tennis shoe in the waste-basket."

"It's possible."

Vance sighed audibly.

"Possible—yes. I suppose that almost anything is possible in this illogical world. But really, Markham, I can't subscribe enthusiastically to your touchin' theory of the doctor's having picked up one shoe instead of two and not having known the difference. He's much too orderly and methodical—too conscious of details."

"Let us assume then," Markham persisted, "that the doctor actually wore one tennis shoe and one bedroom slipper when he came to the study this morning. Scarlett told us his feet troubled him a great deal."

"If that hypothesis is correct," countered Vance, "how did the other bedroom slipper get down-stairs? He would hardly have put it in his pocket and carried it along."

"Brush perhaps. . . ."

Heath had been following the discussion closely, and now he went into action.

"We can check that one *pronto*, Mr. Vance," he said; and going briskly to the hall door, he called down the stairs to the butler.

But no help came from Brush. He declared that neither he nor any member of the household had been near the study after Bliss had gone there at eight o'clock, with the exception of the time when he carried the doctor's breakfast to him. When asked what shoes the doctor was wearing, Brush answered that he had taken no notice.

When the butler had gone Vance shrugged his shoulders.

"Let's not fume and whirret ourselves over the mysteriously separated pair of tennis shoes. My prim'ry reason for luring you to the study was to inspect the remains of the doctor's breakfast."

Markham gave a perceptible start, and his eyes narrowed.

"Good Heavens! You don't believe. . . ? I'll confess I thought of it, too. But then came all that other evidence. . . ."

"Thought of what, sir?" Heath was frankly exasperated, and his tone was irritable.

"Both Mr. Markham and I," explained Vance soothingly, "noted the dazed condition of Doctor Bliss when he appeared this morning in answer to my continued pounding on the door."

"He'd been asleep. Didn't he tell us so?"

"Quite. And that's why I'm so dashed interested in his matutinal coffee." Vance walked to the end of the desk upon which rested a small silver tray containing a rack of toast and a cup and saucer. The toast had not been touched, and the cup was practically empty. Only the congealed brown dregs of what had evidently been coffee remained in the bottom. Vance leant over and looked into the cup. Then he lifted it to his nose.

"There's a slightly acrid odor here," he remarked.

He touched the tip of his finger to the inside of the cup and placed it on his tongue.

"Yes! . . . Just what I thought," he nodded, setting the cup down. "Opium. And it's powdered opium—the kind commonly used in Egypt. The other forms and derivatives of opium—such as laudanum, morphine, heroin, thebain, and codein—are not easily obtainable there."

Heath had come forward and stood peering belligerently into the cup.

"Well, suppose there was opium in the coffee," he rumbled. "What does that mean?"

"Ah, who knows?" Vance was lighting a cigarette, his eyes in space. "It might, of course, account for the doctor's long siesta this morning and for his confused condition when he answered my knock. Also, it might indicate that some one narcotized his coffee for a purpose. The fact is, Sergeant, the opium in the doctor's coffee might mean various things. At the present moment I'm expressing no opinion. I'm merely calling Mr. Markham's attention to the drug. . . . I'll say this, however: as soon as I saw the doctor this morning and observed the way he acted, I guessed that there would be evidences of an opiate in the study. And, being fairly familiar with conditions in Egypt, I surmised that the opiate would prove to be powdered opium—*opii pulvis*. Opium makes one very thirsty: that is why I wasn't in the least astonished when the doctor asked for a drink of water." He looked at Markham. "Does this discovery of the opium affect the doctor's legal status?"

"It's certainly a strong point in his favor," Markham returned after several moments.

That he was deeply perplexed was only too apparent. But he was loath to forgo his belief in Bliss's guilt; and when he spoke again it was obvious that he was arguing desperately against Vance's new discovery.

"I realize that the presence of the opium will have to be explained away before a conviction can be assured. But, on the other hand, we don't know how much opium he took. Nor do we know when he took it. He may have drunk the coffee *after* the murder—we have only his word that he drank it at nine o'clock. . . . No, it certainly doesn't affect the fundamental issue—though it does raise a very grave question. But the evidence against him is too strong to be counterbalanced by this one point in his favor. Surely, you must see, Vance, that the mere presence of opium in that cup is not conclusive evidence that Bliss was asleep from nine o'clock until you knocked on the study door."

"The perfect Public Prosecutor," sighed Vance. "But a shrewd defense lawyer could sow many fecund seeds of doubt in the jurors' so-called minds—eh, what?"

"True." The admission came after a moment's thought. "But we can't overlook the fact that Bliss was practically the only person who had the opportunity to kill Kyle. Every one else was out of the house, with the exception of Hani; and Hani impresses me as a harmless fanatic who believes in the supernatural power of his Egyptian dieties. So far as we know, Bliss was the only person who was actually on hand when Kyle was murdered."

Vance studied Markham for several seconds. Then he said:

"Suppose it had not been necessary for the murderer to have been anywhere near the museum when Kyle was killed with the statue of Sakhmet."

Markham took his cigar slowly from his mouth.

"What do you mean? How could that statue have been wielded by an absent person? It strikes me you're talking nonsense."

"Perhaps I am." Vance was troubled and serious. "And yet, Markham, I found something on top of that end cabinet which makes me think that maybe the murder was planned with diabolical cleverness. . . . As I told you, I want to make an experiment. Then, when I have made it, your course of action must rest entirely on your own convictions. . . . There's something both terrible and subtle about this crime. All its outward appearances are misleading—deliberately so."

"How long will this experiment take?" Markham was patently impressed by Vance's tone.

"Only a few minutes. . . ."

Heath had taken a sheet of newspaper from the basket and was carefully wrapping up the cup.

"This goes to our chemist," he explained sullenly. "I'm not doubting you, Mr. Vance, but I want an expert analysis."

"You're quite right, Sergeant."

Vance's eye at that moment caught sight of a small bronze tray on the desk, containing several yellow pencils and a fountain pen. Leaning over casually, he picked up the pencils, glanced at them, and put them back on the tray. Markham noted the action, as did I, but he refrained from asking any questions.

"The experiment will have to be made in the museum," Vance said; "and I'll need a couple of sofa pillows for it."

He walked to the divan and tucked two large pillows under his arm. Then he went to the steel door and held it open.

Markham and Heath and I passed down the spiral stairs; and Vance followed us.

## 9. VANCE MAKES AN EXPERIMENT

(Friday, July 13, 2:15 P.M.)

Vance went direct to the end cabinet before which Kyle's body had been found, and dropped the two sofa pillows on the floor. Then he looked again speculatively at the upper edge of the cabinet.

"I wonder. . . ." he murmured. "Dash it all! I'm almost afraid to carry on. If I should be wrong, this entire case would come topplin' about my head. . . ."

"Come, come!" Markham was growing impatient. "Soliloquies have gone out of date, Vance. If you have anything to show me, let's get it over with."

"Right you are."

Vance stepped to the ash-tray and resolutely crushed out his cigarette. Returning to the cabinet he beckoned to Markham and Heath.

"By way of *praeludium*," he began, "I want to call your attention to this curtain. You will observe that the brass ring at the end has been slipped off of the rod and is now hanging down."

For the first time I noticed that the small ring on the corner of the curtain was not strung on the rod, and that the left edge of the curtain sagged correspondingly.

"You will also observe," Vance continued, "that the curtain of this cabinet is only half drawn. It's as if some one had started to draw the curtain and, for some reason, had stopped. When I saw the partly-drawn curtain this morning it struck me as a bit peculiar, for obviously the curtain should have been entirely closed or else entirely open. We may assume that the curtain was closed when Kyle arrived here—we have Hani's word for it that he had pulled shut the curtain of this particular cabinet because of the disorder of its contents; and Doctor Bliss mentioned to Kyle on the telephone that the new treasures were in the end cabinet—the cabinet with the drawn curtain. . . . Now, in order to open the curtain, one has only to make a single motion of the arm—that is to say, one has only to take hold of the left-hand edge of it and pull it to the right: the brass rings would slide easily over the metal pole. . . . But what do we find? We find the curtain only half drawn! Kyle unquestionably would not have opened the curtain half-way to inspect the contents of the cabinet. Therefore, I concluded that something must have halted the curtain at the half-way point, and that Kyle died before he could draw the curtain entirely open. . . . I say, Markham; are you with me?"

"Go on." Markham had become interested. Heath, too, was watching Vance with close attention.

"Perpend, then. Kyle was found dead directly in front of this end cabinet; and he had died as the result of having been struck over the head by the heavy diorite statue of Sakhmet. This statue, as we know, had been placed by Hani on the top of the cabinet. When I observed that the curtain of the cabinet had been only partly opened and then discovered that the first brass ring of the curtain—the ring on the extreme left end—was not on the rod, I began to speculate—especially as I was familiar with Doctor Bliss's orderly habits. Had the ring been off of the rod last night when Doctor Bliss came into the museum, you may rest assured he would have seen it. . . ."

"Are you suggesting, Vance," asked Markham, "that the ring was deliberately taken off of the rod sometime this morning—and for a purpose?"

"Yes! At some time between Doctor Bliss's phone call to Kyle last night and Kyle's arrival this morning, I believe that some one removed the ring from the rod—and, as you say, for a purpose!"

"What purpose?" Heath put the question. His voice was aggressive and antagonistic.

"That remains to be seen, Sergeant." Vance spoke with scarcely any modulation of tone. "I'll admit I have a rather definite theory about it. In fact, I had a theory about it the moment I saw the position in which Kyle's body lay and learned that Hani had placed the statue atop the end cabinet. The partly drawn curtain and the unstrung brass ring substantiated that theory."

"I think I understand what's in your mind, Vance." Markham nodded slowly. "Was that why you inspected the top of the cabinet and got Hani to show you exactly where he had placed the statue?"

"Precisely. And not only did I find what I was looking for, but Hani confirmed my suspicions when he pointed to the spot where he had set the statue. That spot was several inches back from the edge of the cabinet; but there was also a deep scratch at the very edge and a second outline of the statue's base in the dust, showing that the statue had been moved forward after Hani had put it in place."

"But Doctor Bliss admitted he moved it last night before retiring," suggested Markham.

"He said only that he had straightened the statue," Vance answered. "And the two impressions made in the dust by the front of the statue's base are exactly parallel, so that the adjustment to which Doctor Bliss referred could not have been the moving of the statue six inches forward."

"I see what you mean. . . . Your theory is that some one moved the statue to the very edge of the cabinet after Doctor Bliss had straightened it. And it's not an unreasonable assumption."

Heath, who had been listening sullenly with half-shut eyes, suddenly mounted one of the chairs in front of the cabinet and peered over the moulding.

"I want to see this," he mumbled. Presently he descended and wagged his head heavily at Markham. "It's like Mr. Vance says, all right. . . . But what's all this hocus-pocus got to do with the case?"

"That's what I'm endeavorin' to ascertain, Sergeant," smiled Vance. "It may have nothing to do with it. On the other hand. . . ."

He leaned over and, with considerable effort, lifted the statue of Sakhmet. (As I have said, the statue was about two feet high. It was solidly sculptured and had a heavy thick base. I later lifted the statue to test it, and I should say it weighed at least thirty pounds.) Vance, stepping on a chair, placed the statue, with great precision, on top of the cabinet at the very edge of the moulding. Having carefully superimposed its base over the outlines in the dust, he drew the curtain shut. Then he took the free brass ring in his left hand, turned the corner of the curtain back until the ring reached the left-hand edge of the statue, tipped the statue to the right, and placed the ring just under the forward edge of the statue's base.

Having done this, he reached into his coat pocket and drew forth the object he had found on the top of the cabinet. He held it up to us.

"What I discovered, Markham," he explained, "was a three-inch section of a pencil, carefully cut and trimmed. I assumed that it was a home-made 'upright' such as is used in figure-4 traps. . . . Let us see if it works."

He tipped the statue forward and propped the piece of pencil under the rear edge of the statue's base. He took his hands away, and the statue stood leaning toward us, perilously balanced. For a moment it seemed as if it might topple over of its own accord, but the prepared pencil was apparently the exact length necessary to tilt the statue forward without quite upsetting its equilibrium.

"So far my theory checks," Vance stepped down from the chair. "Now, we will proceed with the experiment."

He moved the chair to one side, and arranged the two sofa pillows over the spot where Kyle's head had lain at the foot of Anûbis. Then he straightened up, and faced the District Attorney.

"Markham," he said sombrely, "I present you with a possibility. Regard the position of that curtain; consider the position of the loose brass ring—under the edge of the statue; observe the tilting attitude of Our Lady of Vengeance; and then picture the arrival of Kyle this morning. He had been informed that the new treasures were in the end cabinet, with the curtain drawn. He told Brush not to disturb Doctor Bliss because he was going into the museum to inspect the contents of the recent shipment."

He paused and deliberately lighted a cigarette. By his slow, lazy movements I knew that his nerves were tense.

"I am not suggesting," he continued, "that Kyle met his end as the result of a death trap. In fact, I do not even know if my reconstructed trap will work. But I am advancing the theory as a possibility; for if the defense attorneys can show that Kyle could have been murdered by some one other than Doctor Bliss—that is, *by an absent person*—then your case against him would receive a decided setback. . . ."

He stepped over to the statue of Anûbis. Lifting up the lower left-hand corner of the curtain, he stood close against the west wall of the museum.

"Let us say that Kyle, after taking his position before this end cabinet, reached out and drew the curtain aside. Now, what would have happened—provided the death trap had actually been set? . . ."

He gave the curtain a sharp jerk to the right. It moved over the rod until it was caught and held half-way across by the brass ring that had been inserted beneath Sakhmet's base. The jar dislodged the statue from its perilously balanced position. It toppled forward and fell with a terrific thud upon the sofa pillows, in the exact spot where Kyle's head had lain.

There were several moments of silence. Markham continued to smoke, his eyes focussed on the fallen statue. He was frowning and thoughtful. Heath, however, was frankly astounded. Apparently he had not considered the possibility of a death trap, and Vance's demonstration had everted, to a great extent, all his set theories. He glared at the statue of Sakhmet with perplexed amazement, his cigar held tightly between his teeth.

Vance was the first to speak.

"The experiment seems to have worked, don't y' know. Really, I think I've demonstrated the possibility of Kyle's having been killed while alone in the museum. . . . Kyle was rather short in stature, and there was sufficient distance between the top of the cabinet and Kyle's head for the statue to have gained a deadly momentum. The width of the cabinet is only a little over two feet, so that it would have been inevitable that the statue would hit him on the head, provided he had been standing in front of it. And he obviously would have stood directly in front of it when he pulled the curtain. The weight of the statue is sufficient to have caused the terrific fracture of his skull; and the position of the statue across the back of his head is wholly consistent with his having been killed by a carefully planned trap."

Vance made a slight gesture of emphasis.

"You must admit, Markham, that the demonstration I've just given you makes plausible the guilt of any absent person, and consequently removes one of your strongest counts against Doctor Bliss—namely, proximity and opportunity. . . . And this fact, taken in connection with the opium found in the coffee, gives him a convincing, though not an absolute, alibi."

"Yes. . . ." Markham spoke with deliberate and pensive slowness. "The negative clues you have found tend to counteract the direct clues of the scarab and the financial report and the bloody footprints. There's no doubt about it: the doctor could present a strong defense. . . ."

"A reasonable doubt, as it were—eh, what?" Vance grinned. "A beautiful phrase—meaningless, of course, but typically legal. As if the mind of man were ever capable of being reasonable! . . . And don't overlook the fact, Markham, that, if the doctor had merely intended to brain Kyle with the statue of Sakhmet, the evidences of the death trap would not have been present. If his object was only to kill Kyle, why should the whittled pencil—in the shape of an 'upright'—have been on top of the cabinet?"

"You're perfectly right," Markham admitted. "A shrewd defense attorney could make a shambles of the case I have against the doctor."

"And consider your direct evidence for a moment." Vance seated himself and crossed his legs. "The scarab pin, which was found beside the body, could have been palmed by any one at the conference last night, and deliberately placed beside the murdered body. Or, if the doctor had been put to sleep by the opium in his coffee, it would have been an easy matter for the murderer to have taken the pin from the desk this morning—the door into the study, y' know, was never locked. And what would have been simpler than to have taken the financial report at the same time, and slipped it into Kyle's dead hand? . . . As for the bloody footprints: any member of the household could have taken the tennis shoe from Doctor Bliss's bedroom and made the prints in the blood and then chucked the shoe in the waste-basket while the doctor slept under the influence of the opiate. . . . And that closed east window on the court: doesn't that closed window, with its drawn shade, indicate that someone in the study didn't want the neighbors next door to see what was going on?"

Vance took a slow draw on his cigarette and blew out a long spiral of smoke.

"I'm no Demosthenes, Markham, but I'd take Doctor Bliss's case in any court, and guarantee him an acquittal."

Markham had begun walking up and down, his hands behind his back.

"The presence of this death trap and of the opium in the coffee cup," he conceded at length, "casts an entirely new light on the case."

It throws the affair wide open and makes possible and even plausible some one else's guilt." He stopped suddenly and looked sharply at Heath. "What's your opinion, Sergeant?"

Heath was obviously in a quandary.

"I'm going cuckoo," he confessed, after a pause. "I thought we had the damn affair sewed up in an air-tight bag, and now Mr. Vance pulls a lot of his subtle stuff and hands the doc a loophole." He gave Vance a belligerent glare. "Honest to Gawd, Mr. Vance, you shoulda been a lawyer." His contempt was devastating.

Markham could not help smiling, but Vance shook his head sadly and looked at the Sergeant with an exaggeratedly injured air.

"Oh, I say, Sergeant; must you be insultin'?" he protested whimsically. "I'm only tryin' to save you and Mr. Markham from making a silly blunder. And what thanks do I get? I'm told I should have been a lawyer! Alack and welladay!"

"Let's forgo the cynicism." Markham was too upset to fall in with Vance's frivolous attitude. "You've made your point. And, in doing so, you've saddled me with a serious and weighty problem."

"Still and all," pursued Heath, "there's plenty of evidence against Bliss."

"Quite true, Sergeant." Vance had again become thoughtful. "But I'm afraid that evidence will not bear the closest scrutiny."

"You think, I take it," said Markham, "that the evidence was deliberately planted—that the actual murderer maliciously placed these clues so that they would point to Doctor Bliss."

"Is such a technic so unusual?" asked Vance. "Hasn't many a murderer sought to throw suspicion on some one else? Isn't criminal history filled with cases of innocent men being convicted on convincing circumstantial evidence? And is it not entirely possible that the misleading evidence in such cases was deliberately planted by the real culprits?"

"Still," Markham returned, "I can't afford, at this stage of the game, to ignore entirely the indicatory evidence pointing to Doctor Bliss. I must be able to prove a plot against him before I can completely exonerate him."

"And the arrest?"

Markham hesitated. He realized, I think, the hopelessness of his case now that Vance had unearthed so many contradictory bits of evidence.

"It's impossible, of course," he concluded, "to order the doctor's arrest at present, in view of the extenuating factors you've brought to light. . . . But," he added grimly, "I'm certainly not going to ignore altogether the evidence against him."

"And just what does one do in such legalistically complicated circumstances?"

Markham smoked for a while in troubled silence.

"I'm going to keep Bliss under close surveillance," he pronounced finally. Then he turned to Heath. "Sergeant, you may order your men to release the doctor. But make arrangements to have him followed day and night."

"That suits me, sir." Heath started toward the front stairs.

"And Sergeant," Markham called; "tell Doctor Bliss he is not to leave the house until I have seen him."

Heath disappeared on his errand.

## 10. THE YELLOW PENCIL

(Friday, July 13, 2:30 P.M.)

Markham slowly lighted a fresh cigar and sat down heavily on one of the folding chairs near the inlaid coffer, facing Vance.

"The situation is beginning to look serious—and complex," he said, with a weary sigh.

"More serious than you think," Vance returned. "And far more complex. . . . I assure you, Markham, that this murder is one of the most astounding and subtle criminal plots you have ever been faced with. Superficially it appears simple and direct—it was intended to appear that way, d'ye see—and your first reading of the clues was exactly what the murderer counted on."

Markham regarded Vance shrewdly.

"You have an idea of what that plot is?" His words were more a statement than a question.

"Yes . . . oh, yes." Vance at once became aloof. "An idea? . . . Quite. But not what you'd term a blindin' illumination. I immediately suspected a plot; and all the subsequent findings verified my theory. But I've only a nebulous idea regardin' it. And the precise object of the plot is totally obfuscated. However, since I know that the surface indications are deliberately misleading, there's a chance of getting at the truth."

Markham sat up aggressively.

"What's on your mind?"

"Oh, my dear chap! You flatter me abominably." Vance smiled blandly. "My mind is beclouded and adumbrated. It is shot with mist and mizzle, with vapor and haze and steam; it is cirrous and nubiferous, cumulous and vaporous; it is filled with woolpacks, mare's-tails, colt's-tails, cat's-tails, frost smoke, and spindrift. 'The lowring element scowls o'er the darkened landscip.' . . . My mind, in fact, is nephological—"

"Spare me your meteorological vocabulary. Remember, I'm only an ignorant District Attorney." Markham's sarcasm was measured by his exasperation. "Perhaps, however, you can suggest our next step. I frankly admit that, aside from cross-examining the members of the Bliss household, I can't see any means of approach to this problem; for, if Bliss isn't guilty, the crime was obviously committed by some one who was not only intimate with the domestic situation here but who had access to the house."

"I think, don't y' know," suggested Vance, "that we should first acquaint ourselves with the conditions and relationships existing in the ménage. It would give us a certain equipment, what? And it might indicate some fertile line of inquiry." He bent forward in his chair. "Markham, the solution of this problem depends almost entirely on our finding the motive. And there are sinister ramifications to that motive. Kyle's murder was no ordin'ry crime. It was planned with a finesse and a cunning amounting to genius. Only a tremendous incentive could have produced it. There's fanaticism behind this crime—a powerful, devastating *idée fixe* that is cruel and unspeakably ruthless. The actual murder was merely a prelimin'ry to something far more devilish—it was the means to an end. And that ultimate object was infinitely more terrible and despicable than Kyle's precipitous demise. . . . A nice, clean, swift murder can sometimes be justified, or at least extenuated. But the criminal in this instance did not stop with murder: he used it as a weapon to crush and ruin an innocent person. . . ."

"Granted what you say is true,"—Markham rose uneasily and leaned against the shelves containing the *shawabtis*—"how can we discover the interrelationships of this household without interviewing its members?"

"By questioning the one man who stands apart from the actual inmates."

"Scarlett?"

Vance nodded.

"He undoubtedly knows more than he has told us. He has been with the Bliss expedition for two years. He has lived in Egypt, and is acquainted with the family history. . . . Why not have him in here for a brief *causerie* before tackling the members of the establishment? There are several points I could endure to know ere the investigation proceeds."

Markham was watching Vance closely. Presently he moved his head up and down slowly.

"You've something in mind, Vance, and it's neither nimbus, cumulus, stratus, nor cirrus. . . . Very well. I'll get Scarlett here and let you question him."

Heath returned to the museum at this moment.

"Doc Bliss has gone to his bedroom, with orders to stay there," he reported. "The rest of 'em are in the drawing-room, and Hennessey and Emery are keeping their eye on things. Also, I sent the wagon away—and Snitkin's watching the front door." I had rarely seen Heath in so discouraged a mood.

"How did Doctor Bliss act when you ordered his release?" Vance asked.

"Didn't seem to care one way or another," the Sergeant told him, with an intonation of disgust. "Didn't even say anything. Just went up-stairs with his head down, stunned-like. . . . Queer bird, if you ask me."

"Most Egyptologists are queer birds, Sergeant," Vance remarked consolingly.

Markham was again growing impatient. He addressed himself curtly to Heath.

"Mr. Vance and I have decided to find out what Mr. Scarlett can tell us before going on with the investigation. Will you ask him to step here?"

The Sergeant extended his arms and let them fall in a broad gesture of resignation. Then he went from the museum. In a few moments he returned with Scarlett in tow.

Vance drew up several chairs. By his serious, deliberate manner I realized that he regarded the conference with Scarlett as highly important. At the time I was not aware of what was in his mind; nor did I understand why he had chosen Scarlett as his chief source of information. But before the day was over it was only too clear to me. With subtle accuracy and precision he had chosen the one man who could supply the data that were needed to solve the murder of Kyle. And the things Vance learned from Scarlett that afternoon

proved to be the determining factors in his solution of the case.

Without preliminaries Vance informed Scarlett of the altered status of Doctor Bliss.

"Mr. Markham has decided to postpone the doctor's arrest. The evidence at present is most conflicting. We've discovered several things, which, from the legal point of view, throw serious doubt on his guilt. The fact is, Scarlett, we've come to the conclusion that further investigation is necessary before we can make any definite move."

Scarlett appeared greatly relieved.

"By Jove, Vance, I'm frightfully glad of that!" he exclaimed with complete conviction. "Doctor Bliss's guilt is unthinkable. What could possibly have been the man's motive? Kyle was his benefactor—"

"Have you any ideas on the subject?" Vance interrupted.

Scarlett shook his head emphatically.

"Not the ghost of an idea. The thing has stunned me. I can't imagine how it could have happened."

"Yes . . . most mysterious," Vance murmured. "We'll have to get at the matter by tryin' to discover the motive. . . . That's why we're appealin' to you. We want to know just what the inner workings are in the Bliss ménage. You, bein' more or less of an outsider, can possibly lead us to the truth. . . . For instance, you mentioned an intimate relationship between Kyle and Mrs. Bliss's father. Let us have the whole story."

"It's a bit romantic, but quite simple." Scarlett paused and took out his briar pipe. When he had got it going he continued: "You know the story of old Abercrombie, Meryt's father. He went to Egypt in 1885, and became Grébaut's assistant the following year when Sir Gaston Maspero returned to France to resume his chair at the Collège de France. Maspero returned to Egypt in 1899 and retained his position as head of the Egyptian *Service des Antiquités* at Cairo until his resignation in 1914, at which time he was elected permanent Secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in Paris. Abercrombie then succeeded Maspero as Director of Antiquities at the Cairo Museum. In 1898, however, Abercrombie had fallen in love with a Copt lady, and had married her. Meryt was born two years later—in 1900."

Scarlett seemed to be having difficulty with his pipe, and used two matches to relight it.

"Kyle entered the picture four years before Meryt's birth," he went on. "He came to Egypt in 1896 as a representative of a group of New York bankers who had become financially interested in the proposed Nile irrigation system.<sup>[15]</sup> He met Abercrombie—then Grébaut's assistant—and their acquaintance developed into a close friendship. Kyle returned to Egypt nearly every year during the process of the dam's construction—that is, until 1902. He naturally met the Coptic lady whom Abercrombie subsequently married, and, I have every reason to believe, was much smitten with her. But being Abercrombie's friend and a gentleman, he refrained from any trespassing. However, when the lady died, at Meryt's birth, he quite openly transferred his affections from the mother to the daughter. He became Meryt's godfather and, in a big-hearted way, looked out for her as though she had been his own child. . . . Kyle wasn't a bad scout."

"And Bliss?"

"Bliss first went to Egypt in the winter of 1913. He met Abercrombie at that time, and they became friendly. He also met Meryt, who was then only thirteen years old. Seven years later—in 1920—young Salveter introduced Bliss to Kyle; and the first expedition to Egypt was made in the winter of 1921-22. Abercrombie died in Egypt in the summer of 1922, and Meryt was fathered, after a fashion, by Hani, who had been an old family retainer. The second Bliss expedition was in 1922-23; and Bliss again met Meryt. She was now twenty-three; and the following spring Bliss married her. . . . You met Meryt, Vance, on the third Bliss expedition in 1924. . . . Bliss brought Meryt back to America with him after the second expedition; and last year he added Hani to his personal staff. Hani had then been made an under inspector by the Egyptian Government. . . . That sums up the relationship between Bliss and Kyle and Abercrombie and Meryt. Is it what you wanted?"

"Exactly." Vance looked at the tip of his cigarette thoughtfully. "Briefly, then, Kyle was interested in Mrs. Bliss because of his love for her mother and his friendship for her father; and no doubt he had an added interest in financing Bliss's later expeditions because of the fact that Bliss married the daughter of his lost love."

"Yes, the assumption is perfectly reasonable."

"That bein' the case, Kyle probably has not forgotten Mrs. Bliss in his will. Do you happen to know, Scarlett, if he made any provision for her?"

"As I understand it," Scarlett explained, "he left a very considerable fortune to Meryt. I have only Hani's word for it; but he once mentioned to me that Kyle had willed her a large amount. Hani was elated over the fact, for there's no doubt he has a very deep, dog-like affection for her."

"And what of Salveter?"

"I presume that Kyle has taken care of him generously. Kyle was not married—whether his loyalty to Meryt's mother was responsible for his bachelorhood, I can't say—and Salveter was his only nephew. Moreover, he liked Salveter immensely. I'm inclined to think that, when the will is read, it'll be found he left Meryt and Salveter equal amounts."

Vance turned to Markham.

"Could you have one of your various diplomatic coadjutors find out confidentially about Kyle's will? I've a notion the data would help us materially."

"It might be done," Markham returned. "The moment this thing breaks in the papers Kyle's attorneys will come forward. I'll use a little pressure."

Vance again addressed Scarlett.

"I believe you told me that Kyle had recently begun to balk at the expenses of the Bliss expeditions.—Can you suggest any reason for his deflection other than lack of immediate results?"

"No-o." Scarlett pondered a moment. "You know, expeditions such as Doctor Bliss had planned are deucedly expensive luxuries, and the results, of course, are highly problematic. Furthermore, however successful they are, it takes a long time to produce any tangible evidence of their value. Kyle was getting impatient; he was not an Egyptologist and knew little of such matters; and he may have



thought that Doctor Bliss was on an extravagant wild-goose chase at his expense. Fact is, he intimated last year that unless some definite results were obtained during the new excavations he'd not go on doling out money. That was why the doctor was so anxious last night to present a financial report and to have Kyle see the new treasures that arrived yesterday."

"There was nothing personal in Kyle's attitude?"

"To the contrary. All the relationships were very friendly. Kyle liked Bliss personally and respected him immensely. And Bliss had only praise and gratitude for Kyle. . . . No, Vance, you'll find nothing by going at it from that angle."

"How did the doctor feel last night about the possible outcome of his interview with Kyle?—Was he worried or sanguine?"

Scarlett knit his brows and puffed at his pipe.

"Neither, I should say," he answered at length. "His state of mind was what might be described as philosophic. He's inclined to be easy-going—takes things as they come—and he has a rare amount of self-control. The serious scholar at all times—if you comprehend me."

"Quite. . . ." Vance put out his cigarette and folded his hands behind his head. "But what do you think would have been the effect on Doctor Bliss if Kyle had refused to finance the expedition further?"

"That's hard to say. . . . He'd probably have looked for capital elsewhere—remember, he had made great strides in his work despite the fact that he had not actually entered Intef's tomb."

"And what was young Salveter's attitude in the face of a possible cessation of the excavations?"

"He was more upset about it than the doctor. Salveter has unbounded enthusiasm, and he made several pleas to his uncle to continue financing the work. If Kyle had refused to go on, it would have come pretty near breaking the lad's heart. I understand he even offered to forgo his inheritance if Kyle would see the expedition through."

"There's no mistakin' Salveter's earnestness," Vance acceded. Then he was silent for a considerable time. Finally he reached for his cigarette-case; but he did not open it, and sat tapping it with his fingers. "There's another point I want to ask you about, Scarlett," he said presently. "How does Mrs. Bliss regard her husband's work?"

The question was vague—purposely so, I imagine; and Scarlett was a little puzzled. But after moment he replied:

"Oh, Meryt is quite the loyal wife. During the first year or so of her marriage she was most interested in all the doctor did—in fact, she accompanied him, as you know, on his 1924 expedition. Lived in a tent and all that sort of thing, and seemed perfectly happy. But—to tell you the truth, Vance—her interest has been waning of late. A racial reaction, I take it. The Egyptian blood in her is a powerful influence. Her mother was almost fanatical on the subject of Egyptian sanctity, and very proud; resented the so-called desecration of the tombs of her ancestors by western barbarians—as she designated all Occidental scientists. But Meryt has never voiced her own opinions,—I'm merely assuming that some of the mother's antagonism has recently cropped out in her. Nothing serious though, please understand. Meryt has been absolutely loyal to Bliss and his chosen work."

"Hani may have had something to do with her state of mind," commented Vance.

Scarlett shot him a questioning look.

"It's barely possible," he admitted reluctantly, and lapsed into silence.

Vance tenaciously pursued the subject.

"Most probably, I'd say. And I'd go even further. I've a suspicion that Doctor Bliss himself recognized Hani's influence on his wife, and became bitterly resentful. You recall the tirade he launched against Hani when he came into the museum this morning. He openly accused Hani of poisoning Mrs. Bliss's mind."

Scarlett moved uneasily in his chair and chewed the stem of his pipe.

"There's never been any love between the doctor and Hani," he remarked evasively. "Bliss brought him to America solely because Meryt insisted on it. I think he believes Hani is spying on him for the Egyptian Government."

"Is it entirely unlikely?" Vance put the question offhandedly.

"Really, Vance, I can't answer that." Scarlett suddenly leaned forward, and his features became tense. "But I'll tell you this: Meryt is incapable of any fundamental disloyalty to her husband. Even though she may think she made a mistake in marrying Doctor Bliss—who's much older than she is and completely absorbed in his work—she'd stand by her bargain . . . like a thoroughbred."

"Ah . . . just so." Vance nodded slightly and selected a *Régie* from his case. "And that brings me to a most delicate question. . . . Do you think that Mrs. Bliss has any—what shall I say?—interests outside of her husband? That is, aside from Doctor Bliss's life work, is it possible that her more intimate emotions are involved elsewhere?"

Scarlett got to his feet and began spluttering.

"Oh, really, Vance. . . . Dash it all! . . . You've no right to ask me such a question. . . . I'm no quidnunc. . . . One doesn't talk about such things; it's not done—really it isn't, old man. . . . You put me in a most embarrassing position. . . ." (Scarlett's predicament roused my sympathy.)

"Neither is murder done in the best circles," returned Vance equably. "We're dealin' with a most unusual situation. And somebody translated Kyle from this world into the hereafter in a very distressin' fashion. . . . But since your sensitivities are so deuced lacerated I'll withdraw the question." He smiled disarmingly. "You're not entirely impervious to the lady's charms yourself—eh, what Scarlett?"

The man whirled about and glared at Vance ferociously. Before he could answer, Vance stood up and looked him steadily in the eyes.

"A man has been murdered," he said quietly; "and a devilish plot has been introduced into that murder. Another human life is at stake. And I'm here to find out who concocted this hideous scheme and to save an innocent person from the electric chair. Therefore I'm not going to let any squeamish conventional taboos stand in my way." His voice softened somewhat. "I appreciate your reticence. Under ordin'ry circumstances it would be most admirable. But just now it's rather silly."

Scarlett met Vance's gaze squarely, and after a few seconds he sat down again.

"You're quite right, old man," he acquiesced, in a low voice. "I'll tell you anything you want to know."

Vance nodded indifferently and smoked for a while.

"I think you've told me everything," he said finally. "But we may call on you later. . . . It's far past lunch time. Suppose you toddle

along home."

Scarlett drew a deep sigh of relief and got to his feet.

"Thanks awfully." And without another word he went out.

Heath followed him, and we could hear him giving instructions to Snitkin to let Scarlett leave the house.

"Well," said Markham to Vance, when the Sergeant had returned; "how has Scarlett's information helped you? I can't see that it has thrown any very dazzling light on our problem."

"My word!" Vance shook his head with commiserating incredulity. "Scarlett has put us infinitely forrader. He was most revealin'. We now have a definite foundation on which to stand when we chivy the members of the household."

"I'm glad you feel so confident." Markham rose and regarded Vance sternly. "You can't really believe—?" He broke off, as if he did not quite dare to articulate his thought.

"Yes, I believe this crime was merely a means to an end," Vance returned. "Its real object, I'm convinced, was to involve an innocent person and thus wash the slate clean of several annoyin' elements."

Markham stood stock-still for several seconds.

"I think I see what you mean," he nodded. "It's possible of course."

He walked up the museum and back again, his head clouded in cigar smoke.

"See here,"—he stood looking grimly down at Vance—"I want to ask you a question. I recall your asking Salveter for a pencil. . . . What make of pencil was used for the 'upright' which you found on top of the end cabinet?—Was it a Mongol No. 1?"

Vance shook his head.

"No. It was not a Mongol. It was a Koh-i-noor—an HB, a much harder lead than the No. 1 Mongol, which is very soft. . . . Y' know, Mongols and Koh-i-noors look exactly alike: they're both hexagonal and yellow. The Koh-i-noor is made by Hardtmuth in Czecho-Slovakia—one of the oldest firms in Europe. Originally the Koh-i-noors were Austrian pencils, but after the World War the Austrian empire was divided—"

"Never mind the kindergarten lesson in history." Markham's face became suddenly overcast. "So it wasn't a Mongol that was used in the death trap. . . ." He came closer to Vance. "Another question—and all your garrulousness about the Austrian Successor States can't divert me: What make of pencil were those you looked at on Doctor Bliss's desk in the study?"

Vance sighed.

"I feared you'd ask that question. And, y' know, I'm almost afraid to tell you—you're so impulsive. . . ."

Markham glowered with exasperation and started toward Bliss's study.

"Oh, it won't be necess'ry for you to trudge up the spiral stairs," Vance called after him. "I'll tell you. . . . They were Koh-i-noors."

"Ah!"

"But I say; are you goin' to let that fact influence you?"

There was a slight pause before Markham answered.

"No. . . . After all, the pencil is not a particularly convincing piece of evidence, especially as every one had access to the study."

Vance grinned and looked puckish.

"Such broadmindedness in a district attorney is positively amazin'," he said.

## 11. THE COFFEE PERCOLATOR

(Friday, July 13; 2:45 P.M.)

Markham resumed his seat. He was far too dismayed to resent Vance's good-natured irony. The murder of Kyle, which at first had appeared so straightforward and simple, was becoming more and more involved. Subtle and terrible undercurrents were beginning to make themselves felt; and it was now clear to everyone, I think, that the crime, instead of being a mere brutal braining, was a sinister factor in a deep, ramified plot. Even Heath had at last begun to sense the hidden significations of the obvious clues to which he had at first pinned his hope for a speedy solution.

"Yes," he admitted, his cigar bobbing up and down between his thin lips; "that pencil don't mean anything in particular. . . . This case—as you'd say, Mr. Vance—is getting a bit thick. Nobody with a brain is going to smear the whole works with clues pointing to himself, if he's guilty." He frowned at Markham. "What about that opium in the coffee, Chief?"

Markham pursed his lips.

"I was just thinking about that. And it might be advisable to try to find out at once who could have drugged Bliss. . . . What's your opinion, Vance?"

"A coruscatin' idea." Vance was smoking thoughtfully. "It's most essential to know who could have put the sleepin' powder in the doctor's coffee, for there's no doubt that the person who did it is the one who sent Kyle on his long pilgrimage. In fact, the key to the whole plot lies in the question of who had the opportunity to meddle with that cup of coffee."

Markham sat up decisively.

"Sergeant, get the butler. Bring him through the study so that the people in the drawing-room won't see him come in."

Heath rose with alacrity and swung up the spiral stairs three steps at a time. A minute or two later he reappeared at the study door, unceremoniously urging Brush before him.

The man was palpably in a state of fright; his face was very pale and he held his hands tightly clinched. He approached us unsteadily, but bowed with instinctive correctness and stood quite erect, like a well-trained servant waiting for orders.

"Sit down and relax, Brush." Vance busied himself with lighting a fresh cigarette. "I can't blame you for being wrought up, don't y' know. A most tryin' situation. If you'll try to be calm you can help us. . . . I say, stop fidgetin'! . . ."

"Yes, sir." The man sat down on the edge of a chair, and gripped his knees tensely with his hands. "Very good, sir. But I'm very much upset. I've been in the employ of gentlemen for fifteen years, and never before—"

"Oh, quite. I fully sympathize with your predicament." Vance smiled pleasantly. "Emergencies do arise, though. And this may be your great opportunity to enlarge your field of activities. The fact is, Brush, you may be able to lead us to the truth concerning this unfortunate affair."

"I hope so, sir." The butler had perceptibly calmed down under Vance's casual attitude.

"Tell us, then, about the breakfast arrangements in the house." Vance, with Markham's tacit consent, assumed the rôle of interrogator. "Where does the family indulge in its morning coffee?"

"In the breakfast-room down-stairs." Brush was now controlling himself admirably. "There's a small room at the front of the house in the basement, which Mrs. Bliss had decorated in Egyptian style. Only luncheon and dinner are served in the main dining-room upstairs."

"Ah! And does the family break its fast together?"

"Generally, sir. I call every one at eight; and at eight-thirty breakfast is served."

"And just who appears at this unearthly hour?"

"Doctor and Mrs. Bliss, and Mr. Salveter—and Mr. Hani."

Vance's eyebrows went up slightly.

"Does Hani eat with the family?"

"Oh, no, sir." Brush seemed perplexed. "I don't exactly understand Mr. Hani's status—if you know what I mean, sir. He is treated by Doctor Bliss as a servant, and yet he calls the mistress by her first name. . . . He has his meals in an alcove off the kitchen—he will not eat with me and Dingle." There was a certain resentment in his tone.

Vance sought to console him.

"Hani, you must realize, is a very old retainer of Mrs. Bliss's family—and he is also an official of the Egyptian Government. . . ."

"Oh, the arrangement suits Dingle and me perfectly, sir," was the evasive answer.

Vance did not pursue the subject, but asked:

"Does Mr. Scarlett ever breakfast with the Blisses?"

"Quite often, sir—especially when there's work to be done in the museum."

"Did he come this morning?"

"No, sir."

"Then, if Hani was in his room all the morning and Doctor Bliss was in his study, Mrs. Bliss and Mrs. Salveter must have breakfasted alone together, what?"

"That's correct, sir. Mrs. Bliss came down-stairs a little before half past eight and Mr. Salveter a few minutes later. The doctor had told me at eight o'clock on his way to the study that he had work to do and the others should not wait for him."

"And who informed you of Hani's indisposition?"

"Mr. Salveter, sir. He told me that Mr. Hani had asked him to tell me he wouldn't be down for breakfast. . . . Their rooms, you see, face each other on the third floor, and I have noticed that Mr. Hani always leaves his door open at night."

Vance nodded approvingly.

"You're most limpid, Brush. . . . Therefore, as I understand it, at half past eight this morning the disposition of the members of the house was as follows:—Mrs. Bliss and Mr. Salveter were in the breakfast-room downstairs; Hani was in his bedroom on the third floor; and Doctor Bliss was in his study. Mr. Scarlett was presumably at home. . . . And where were you and Dingle?"

"Dingle was in the kitchen, and I was between the kitchen and the breakfast-room, serving."

"And to your knowledge there was no one else in the house?"

The butler appeared mildly surprised.

"Oh, no, sir. There could not have been any one else in the house."

"But if you were down-stairs," Vance persisted, "how do you know no one came in the front door?"

"It was locked."

"You are quite sure?"

"Positive, sir. One of my duties is to see that the latch is thrown the last thing before retiring each night; and no one rang the bell or used the door this morning before nine o'clock."

"Very good." Vance smoked meditatively for several moments. Then he lay back lazily in his chair and closed his eyes. "By the by, Brush, how and where is the morning coffee prepared?"

"The coffee?" The man gave a start of astonishment, but quickly recovered himself. "The coffee is a fad of the doctor's—if you understand me, sir. He orders it from some Egyptian firm on Ninth Avenue. It's very black and damp, and somewhat burnt in the roasting. It tastes like French coffee—if you know how French coffee tastes."

"Unfortunately I do." Vance sighed and made a wry face. "An excruciatin' beverage. No wonder the French fill it full of hot milk. . . . And do you yourself drink this coffee, Brush?"

The butler looked a trifle disconcerted.

"No, sir. I can't say that I care for the taste of it. Mrs. Bliss has kindly given me and Dingle permission to make our own coffee in the old-fashioned way."

"Oh!" Vance half-closed his eyes. "So Doctor Bliss's coffee is not made in the old-fashioned way."

"Well, sir, I may have used the wrong word, but it's certainly not made in the customary way."

"Tell us about it." Vance again relaxed. "There's so much pother in this world about the correct way to make coffee. People get positively fanatical on the subject. I shouldn't be surprised if one day we had a civil war between the boilers and the non-boilers, or perhaps the drippers and the percolators. Silly notion . . . as if coffee were of any importance. Now, tea, on the other hand. . . . But go ahead and unfold the doctor's ideas on the subject."

Markham had begun beating an irritable tattoo with his foot, and Heath was wagging his head with elaborate impatience. But Vance, by his irrelevant loquacity, had produced exactly the effect he desired. He had succeeded in allaying Brush's nervousness and diverting his mind from the direct object of the interrogation.

"Well, sir," the man explained, "the coffee is made in a kind of percolator like a large samovar—"

"And where is this outlandish machine situated?"

"It always stands on the end of the breakfast table. . . . It has a spirit lamp under it to keep the coffee hot after it has—has—"

"Trickled" is probably the word."

"Trickled, sir. The percolator is in two sections—one fits into the other like a French coffee pot. You first lay a piece of filter paper over the holes and then put in the pulverized coffee—which Dingle grinds fresh every morning. Then there's a small plate which you set over the coffee—Doctor Bliss calls it the water-distributor. When that's in place you pour boiling water into the top of the samovar, and the coffee drips into the bottom. It is drawn off by a little spigot."

"Very interestin'. . . . And if one lifts off the top section of this apparatus one would have direct access to the liquid itself, what?"

Brush was frankly puzzled by this question.

"Yes, sir—but that isn't necessary because the spigot—"

"I can visualize the process perfectly, Brush. I was just wonderin' how one might go about doctorin' the coffee before it was drawn off."

"Doctoring the coffee?" The man appeared genuinely amazed.

"Just a passin' fancy." Vance spoke with utter negligence. "And now, Brush, to return to this morning's breakfast.—You say that Mrs. Bliss and Mr. Salveter were the only persons present. How much of the time were you actually in the breakfast-room during the repast?"

"Very little, sir. I merely brought in the breakfast and retired at once to the kitchen. Mrs. Bliss always serves the coffee herself."

"Did Hani go breakfastless this morning?"

"Not exactly, sir. Mrs. Bliss asked me to take him a cup of coffee."

"At what time was this?"

Brush thought a moment.

"At about quarter of nine, I should say, sir."

"And you of course took it to him."

"Certainly, sir. Mrs. Bliss had already prepared it when she called me."

"And what about the doctor's breakfast?"

"Mrs. Bliss suggested that I take his coffee and toast to the study. I would not have disturbed him myself unless he rang for me."

"And when was this suggestion made by Mrs. Bliss?"

"Just before she and Mr. Salveter left the breakfast-room."

"At about nine, I think you said."

"Yes, sir—perhaps a few minutes before."

"Did Mrs. Bliss and Mr. Salveter leave the breakfast-room together?"

"I couldn't say, sir. The fact is, Mrs. Bliss called me in just as she had finished breakfast, and told me to take some coffee and toast to

the doctor. When I returned to the breakfast-room to get the coffee, she and Mr. Salveter had gone."

"And had Mrs. Bliss prepared the coffee for the doctor?"

"No, sir. I drew it myself."

"When?"

"The toast was not quite ready, sir; but I drew the coffee within five minutes after Mrs. Bliss and Mr. Salveter had gone up-stairs."

"And during those five minutes you were, I presume, in the kitchen?"

"Yes, sir. That is to say, except when I was in the rear hall telephoning—the usual daily orders to the tradespeople."

Vance roused himself from his apparent lethargy and crushed out his cigarette.

"The breakfast-room, then, was empty for about five minutes between the time when Mrs. Bliss and Mr. Salveter went up-stairs and the time when you went in to draw Doctor Bliss's coffee?"

"Just about five minutes, sir."

"Now, focus your brain on those five minutes, Brush—Did you hear any sound in the breakfast-room during that time?"

The butler looked critically at Vance, and made an attempt at concentration.

"I wasn't paying much attention, sir," he replied at length. "And I was telephoning most of the time. But I can't recall hearing any sound. As a matter of fact, no one could have been in the breakfast-room during those five minutes."

"Mrs. Bliss or Mr. Salveter might have returned for some reason," Vance suggested.

"It's possible, sir," Brush admitted dubiously.

"Moreover, could not Hani have come down-stairs in the interim?"

"But he was not well, sir. I took him his coffee—"

"So you told us. . . . I say, Brush, was Hani in bed when you presented him with this abominable coffee?"

"He was lying down—on the sofa."

"Dressed?"

"He had on that striped robe he usually wears round the house."

Vance was silent for several moments. Presently he turned to Markham. "It's not what one would call a crystalline situation," he commented. "The samovar containing the coffee seems to have been in an almost indecent state of exposure this morning. Observe that Mrs. Bliss and Salveter were alone with it during breakfast, and that either one of 'em might have lingered behind for a few moments at the conclusion of the meal, or perhaps returned. Also, Hani could have descended to the breakfast-room as soon as Mrs. Bliss and Salveter came up-stairs. In fact, every one in the house had an opportunity to meddle with the coffee before Brush took the doctor's breakfast to him."

"It looks that way," Markham considered the matter morosely for a while. Then he addressed himself to the butler. "Did you notice anything unusual about the coffee you drew for Doctor Bliss?"

"Why no, sir." Brush sought unsuccessfully to hide his astonishment at the question. "It seemed perfectly all right, sir."

"The usual color and consistency?"

"I didn't see anything wrong with it, sir." The man's apprehension was growing, and again an unhealthy pallor overspread his sallow features. "It might have been a little strong," he added nervously. "But Doctor Bliss prefers his coffee very strong."

Vance got to his feet and yawned.

"I could bear to have a peep at this breakfast-room and its weird percolator. A bit of observation might help us, don't y' know."

Markham readily acceded.

"We'd better go through the doctor's study," said Vance, "so as not to rouse the curiosity of the occupants of the drawing-room. . . ."

Brush led the way silently. He looked ghastly, and as he ascended the spiral stairs ahead of us I noticed that he held tightly to the iron railing. I could not figure him out. At times he appeared to be entirely dissociated from the tragic events of the forenoon; but at other times I got the distinct impression that some racking secret or suspicion was undermining his poise.

The breakfast-room extended, except for a small hallway, across the entire front of the house; but it was no more than eight feet deep. The front windows, which gave on the areaway of the street, were paned with opaque glass and heavily curtained. The room was fitted in exotic fashion and decorated with Egyptian designs. The breakfast-table was at least twelve feet long and very narrow, inlaid and painted in the decadent, rococo-esque style of the New Empire—not unlike the baroque furniture found in the tomb of Tut-ankh-Amûn.

On the end of the table stood the coffee samovar. It was of polished copper and about two feet high, elevated on three sprawling legs. Beneath it was an alcohol lamp.

Vance, after one glance, paid scant attention to it, much to my perplexity. He seemed far more interested in the arrangement of the lower rooms. He put his head in the butler's pantry between the breakfast-room and the kitchen, and stood for several moments in the main doorway looking up and down the narrow hallway which led from the rear stairs to the front of the house.

"A simple matter for any one to come to the breakfast-room without being seen," he observed. "I note that the kitchen door is behind the staircase."

"Yes, sir—quite so, sir." Brush's agreement was almost eager.

Vance appeared not to notice his manner.

"And you say you took the doctor's coffee to him about five minutes after Mrs. Bliss and Mr. Salveter had gone up-stairs. . . . What did you do after that, Brush?"

"I went to tidy up the drawing-room, sir."

"Ah, yes—so you told us." Vance was running his finger over the inlaid work of one of the chairs. "And I believe you said Mrs. Bliss left the house shortly after nine. Did you see her go?"

"Oh, yes, sir. She stopped at the drawing-room door on her way out and said she was going shopping, and that I should so inform Doctor Bliss in case he asked for her."

"You're sure she went out?"

Brush's eyes opened wide: the question seemed to startle him.  
"Quite sure, sir," he replied with much emphasis. "I opened the front door for her. . . . She walked toward Fourth Avenue."  
"And Mr. Salveter?"  
"He came down-stairs fifteen or twenty minutes later, and went out."  
"Did he say anything to you?"  
"Only, 'I'll be back for lunch.'"  
Vance sighed deeply and looked at his watch.  
"Lunch! . . . My word! I'm positively famished." He gave Markham a doleful look. "It's nearly three o'clock . . . and I've had nothing today but tea and muffins at ten. . . . I say; must one starve to death simply because a silly crime has been committed?"  
"I can serve you gentlemen—" Brush began, but Vance cut him short.  
"An excellent idea. Tea and toast would sustain us. But let us speak to Dingle first."  
Brush bowed and went to the kitchen. A few moments later he reappeared with a corpulent, placid woman of about fifty.  
"This is Dingle, sir," he said. "I took the liberty of informing her of Mr. Kyle's death."  
Dingle regarded us stolidly and waited, unperturbed, her hands on her generous hips.  
"Good-afternoon, Dingle." Vance sat on the edge of the table. "As Brush has told you, a serious accident has happened in this house."  
"An accident, is it?" The woman nodded her head sagely. "Maybe. Anyhow, you couldn't knock me over with a feather. What surprises me is that something didn't happen long ago—what with young Mr. Salveter living in the house, and Mr. Scarlett hanging around, and the doctor fussing with his mummies day and night. But I certainly didn't expect anything to happen to Mr. Kyle,—he was a very nice and liberal gentleman."  
"To whom did you expect something to happen, Dingle?"  
The woman set her face determinedly.  
"I'm not saying—it's none of my business. But things here ain't according to nature. . . ." Again she wagged her head shrewdly.  
"Now, I've got a young good-looking niece who wants to marry a man of fifty, and I says to her—"  
"I'm sure you gave her excellent advice, Dingle," Vance interrupted; "but we'd much prefer to hear your views on the Bliss family."  
"You've heard 'em." The woman's jaws went together with a click, and it was obvious that neither threats nor wheedling could get any more out of her on the subject.  
"Oh, that's quite all right." Vance treated her refusal as of no importance. "But there's one other matter we'd like to know about. It won't compromise you in the slightest to tell us.—Did you hear any one in this room after Mrs. Bliss and Mr. Salveter had gone upstairs this morning—that is, during the time you were making the toast for the doctor's breakfast?"  
"So that's it, is it?" Dingle squinted and remained silent for several moments. "Maybe I did and maybe I didn't," she said at length. "I wasn't paying any particular attention. . . . Who could've been in here?"  
"I haven't the faintest notion." Vance smiled engagingly. "That's what we're tryin' to find out."  
"Is it, now?" The woman's eyes drifted to the percolator. "Since you ask me," she returned, with a malevolence I could not understand at the time, "I'll tell you that I thought I heard some one drawing a cup of coffee."  
"Who did you think it was?"  
"I thought it was Brush. But at that moment he came out of the rear hall and asked me how the toast was getting along. So I knew it wasn't him."  
"And what did you think then?"  
"I didn't do any thinking."  
Vance nodded abruptly and turned to Brush.  
"Maybe we could have that toast and tea now."  
"Certainly, sir." He started toward the kitchen, waving Dingle before him; but Markham halted them.  
"Bring me a small container of some kind, Brush," he ordered. "I want to take away the rest of the coffee in this percolator."  
"There ain't no coffee in it," Dingle informed him aggressively. "I cleaned that pesky contraption out and polished it at ten o'clock this morning."  
"Thank Heaven for that," sighed Vance. "Y' know, Markham, if you had any of that coffee to analyze, you'd be farther away from the truth than ever."  
With this cryptic remark he slowly lighted a cigarette and began inspecting one of the stencilled figures on the wall.

## 12. THE TIN OF OPIUM

(Friday, July 13; 3:15 P.M.)

A few minutes later Brush served us tea and toast.

"It is oolong tea, sir—Taiwan," he explained proudly to Vance. "And I did not butter the toast."

"You have rare intuition, Brush." Vance spoke appreciatively. "And what of Mrs. Bliss and Mr. Salveter? They have had no lunch."

"I took tea to them a little while ago. They did not wish anything else."

"And Doctor Bliss?"

"He has not rung for me, sir. But then, he often goes without lunch." Ten minutes later Vance called Brush in from the kitchen.

"Suppose you fetch Hani."

The butler's eyelids fluttered.

"Yes, sir." He bowed stiffly and departed.

"There are one or two matters," Vance explained to Markham, "that we should clear up at once; and Hani may be able to enlighten us. . . . The actual murder of Kyle is the least devilish thing about this plot. I'm countin' extravagantly on what we'll learn from Salveter and Mrs. Bliss—which is why, d' ye see, I want to accumulate beforehand as much ammunition as possible."

"Still and all," put in Heath, "a guy was bumped off, and if I could put my hands on the bird who did it I wouldn't lay awake night worrying about plots."

"You're so dashed pristine, Sergeant." Vance sipped his tea dolefully. "Findin' the murderer is simple. But even if you had him gyved, it wouldn't do you a tittle of good. He'd have you apologizin' to him within forty-eight hours."

"The hell he would!" snapped Heath. "Slip me the baby that croaked Kyle, and I'll show you some inside stuff that don't get into the newspapers."

"If you were to arrest the murderer now," Vance returned mildly, "both of you would get into the newspapers—and the stories would all go against you. I'm savin' you from your own impetuosity."

Heath snorted, but Markham looked at Vance seriously.

"I'm beginnin' to fall in with your views," he said. "The elements in this case are damnably confused."

At this moment soft, measured footsteps sounded in the hall, and Hani appeared at the door. He was calm and aloof as usual, and his immobile face registered not the least surprise at our being in possession of the breakfast-room.

"Come in and sit down, Hani." Vance's invitation was almost too pleasant.

The Egyptian moved slowly toward us, but he did not take a seat.

"I prefer to stand, *effendi*."

"It's of course more comfortin' to stand in moments of stress," Vance commented.

Hani inclined his head slightly, but made no answer. His poise, typically oriental, was colossal.

"Mr. Scarlett tells us," Vance began, without looking up, "that Mrs. Bliss had been well provided for in Mr. Kyle's will. This information, Mr. Scarlett said, came from you."

"Is it not natural," asked Hani, in a quiet voice, "that Mr. Kyle should provide for his god-child?"

"He told you he had done so?"

"Yes. He always confided in me, for he knew I loved Meryt-Amen like a father."

"When did he give you his confidence?"

"Years ago—in Egypt."

"Who else, Hani, knew of this bequest?"

"I think every one knew of it. He told me in the presence of Doctor Bliss. And naturally I told Meryt-Amen."

"Did Mr. Salveter know about it?"

"I told him myself." There was a curious note in Hani's voice, which I could not understand at the time.

"And you also told Mr. Scarlett." Vance raised his eyes and studied the Egyptian impersonally. "You're not what I'd call the ideal repository for a secret."

"I did not consider the matter a secret," Hani returned.

"Obviously not." Vance rose and walked languidly to the samovar.

"Do you happen to know if Mr. Salveter was also to be an object of Mr. Kyle's benefactions?"

"I could not say with assurance." Hani's eyes rested dreamily on the opposite wall. "But from certain remarks dropped by Mr. Kyle, I gathered that Mr. Salveter was also well provided for in the will."

"You like Mr. Salveter—eh, what, Hani?" Vance lifted the top of the samovar and peered into its interior.

"He is, I have reason to think, an admirable young man."

"Oh, quite." Vance smiled faintly, and replaced the samovar's lid. "And he is much nearer Mrs. Bliss's age than Doctor Bliss."

Hani's eyes flickered, and it seemed to me that he gave a slight start. It was a momentary reaction, however. Slowly he folded his arms, and stood like a sphinx, silent and detached.

"Mrs. Bliss and Mr. Salveter will both be rich, now that Mr. Kyle is dead." Vance spoke casually without glancing toward the Egyptian. After a pause he asked: "But what of Doctor Bliss's excavations?"

"They are probably at an end, *effendi*." Despite Hani's monotonous tone there was a discernible note of triumphal satisfaction in his words. "Why should the sacred resting-places of our noble Pharaohs be ravaged?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Vance said blandly. "The art unearthed is scarcely worth considerin'. The only true art of antiquity is Chinese; and all modern aesthetic beauty stems from the Greeks. . . . But this isn't an appropriate time to discuss the creative instinct. . . ."

. Speakin' of the doctor's researches, isn't it possible that Mrs. Bliss will continue to finance her husband's work?"

A black cloud fell across Hani's face.

"It's possible. Meryt-Amen is a loyal wife. . . . And no one can tell what a woman will do."

"So I've been told—by those unversed in feminine psychology." Vance's manner was light and almost flippant. "Still, even should Mrs. Bliss decline to assist in the continuance of the work, Mr. Salveter—with his fanatical enthusiasm for Egyptology—might be persuaded to act as the doctor's financial angel."

"Not if it offended Meryt-Amen—" began Hani, and then stopped abruptly.

Vance appeared not to notice the sudden break in the other's response.

"You would, I suppose," he remarked, "attempt to influence Mrs. Bliss against helping her husband complete his excavations."

"Oh, no, *effendi*." Hani shook his head. "I would not presume to advise her. She knows her own mind—and her loyalty to Doctor Bliss would dictate her decision, whatever I might say."

"Ah! . . . Tell me, Hani, who do you consider was the most benefited by the death of Mr. Kyle?"

"The *ka* of Intef." [16]

Vance raised his eyes and gave an exasperated smile.

"Ah, yes—of course. . . . Most helpful," he murmured.

"For that reason," Hani continued, a visionary look on his face, "the spirit of Sakhmet returned to the museum this morning and struck down the desecrator—"

"And," interjected Vance, "put the financial report in the desecrator's hand, placed the doctor's scarab pin beside the body, and made bloody footprints leading to the study. . . . Not very fairminded, your lady of vengeance—in fact, a rather bad sport, don't y' know, tryin' to get some one else punished for her little flutter in crime." He studied the Egyptian closely through narrowed eyes; then he leaned forward over the end of the table. When he spoke again his voice was severe and resonant. "You're trying to shield some one, Hani! . . . Who is it?"

The other took a deep breath, and the pupils of his eyes dilated.

"I have told you all I know, *effendi*." His voice was scarcely audible. "I believe that Sakhmet—"

"Rubbish!" Vance cut him short. Then he shrugged his shoulders and grinned. "*Jawāb ul ahmaq sakūt*." [17]

A shrewd gleam came into Hani's eyes, and I thought I detected a sneer on his mouth.

Vance was in no wise disconcerted, however. Somehow I felt that, despite the Egyptian's evasiveness, he had learned what he wanted. After a brief pause he tapped the samovar.

"Leaving mythology to one side," he said complaisantly, "I understand that Mrs. Bliss sent Brush to you this morning with a cup of coffee."

Hani merely nodded.

"What, by the by, was the nature of your illness?" Vance asked.

"Since coming to this country," the man returned, "I have suffered from indigestion. When I awoke this morning—"

"Most unfortunate," Vance murmured sympathetically. "And did you find that the one cup of coffee was sufficient for your needs?"

Hani obviously resented the question, but there was no indication of his feeling in his answer.

"Yes, *effendi*. I was not hungry. . . ."

Vance looked mildly surprised.

"Indeed! I was rather under the impression you came down-stairs and drew yourself a second cup from this percolator."

Once more a cautious expression came over Hani's face, and he hesitated perceptibly before answering.

"A second cup?" he repeated. "Here in the breakfast-room? . . . I was not aware of the fact."

"It doesn't matter in the least," Vance returned. "Some one was alone with the percolator this morning. And whoever it was—that is to say, whoever might have been alone with it—was involved in the plot of Mr. Kyle's death."

"How could that be, *effendi*?" Hani, for the first time, appeared vitally worried.

Vance did not answer his query. He was leaning over the table, looking critically at the inlay.

"Dingle said she thought she heard some one in here after Mrs. Bliss and Mr. Salveter had gone up-stairs after breakfast, and it occurred to me it might have been you. . . ." He glanced up sharply. "It's possible, of course, that Mrs. Bliss returned for another cup of coffee . . . or even Mr. Salveter. . . ."

"It was I who was here!" Hani spoke with slow and impressive emphasis. "I came down-stairs almost immediately after Meryt-Amen had returned to her room. I drew myself another cup of coffee, and at once went back up-stairs. It was I whom Dingle heard. . . . I lied to you a moment ago because I had already told you, in the museum, that I had remained in my room all the morning—my trip to the breakfast-room had slipped my mind. I did not regard the matter as of any importance."

"Well, well! That explains everything." Vance smiled musingly. "And now that you have recalled your little pilgrimage for coffee, will you tell us who in the house possesses powdered opium?"

I was watching Hani, and I expected to see him show some sign of fear at Vance's question. But only an expression of profound puzzlement came over his stolid features. A full half minute passed before he spoke.

"At last I comprehend why you have questioned me concerning the coffee," he said. "But you are being cleverly deceived."

"Fancy that!" Vance stifled a yawn.

"Bliss *effendi* was not put to sleep this morning," the Egyptian continued; and, despite the oracular monotone of his voice, there was an undercurrent of hatred beneath his words.

"Really, now! . . . And who said he had been put to sleep, Hani?"

"Your interest in the coffee . . . your question regarding the opium. . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Well?"

"I have no more to say."

"Opium," Vance informed him, "was found in the bottom of the doctor's coffee cup."



Hani appeared genuinely startled by this news.  
 "You are sure, *effendi*? . . . I cannot understand."  
 "Why should you understand?" Vance stepped forward and stood before the man, searching him with a fixed look. "How much do you know about this crime, Hani?"  
 The veil of detachment again fell over the Egyptian.  
 "I know nothing," he returned sullenly.  
 Vance made a gesture of impatient resignation.  
 "You at least know who owned powdered opium hereabouts."  
 "Yes, I know that. Powdered opium was part of the medical equipment on our tours of exploration in Egypt. Bliss *effendi* had charge of it."  
 Vance waited.  
 "There is a large cabinet in the hall up-stairs," Hani continued. "All the medical supplies are kept there."  
 "Is the door kept locked?"  
 "No, I do not believe so."  
 "Would you be so good as to toddle up-stairs and see if the opium is still there?"  
 Hani bowed and departed without a word.  
 "Look here, Vance;"—Markham had risen and was pacing up and down—"what earthly good can it do us to know whether the rest of the opium is in the cabinet? . . . Moreover, I don't trust Hani."  
 "Hani has been most revealin'," Vance replied. "Let me dally with him in my own way for a time,—he has ideas, and they're most interestin'. . . . As for the opium, I have a distinct feelin' that the tin of brown powder in the medicine chest will have disappeared—"  
 "But why," interrupted Markham, "should the person who extracted some of the opium remove it all from the cabinet? He wouldn't leave the container on his dressing-table for the purpose of leading us directly to him."  
 "Not exactly." Vance's tone was grave. "But he may have sought to throw suspicion on some one else. . . . That's mere theory, however. Anyway, I'll be frightfully disappointed if Hani finds the tin in the cabinet."  
 Heath was glowering.  
 "It looks to me, sir," he complained, "that one of *us* ought look for that opium. You can't trust anything that Swami says."  
 "Ah, but you can trust his reactions, Sergeant," Vance answered. "Furthermore, I had a definite object in sending Hani up-stairs alone."  
 Again came the sound of Hani's footsteps in the hall outside. Vance walked to the window. Under his drooping lids he was watching the door eagerly.  
 The Egyptian entered the room with a resigned, martyr-like air. In one hand he held a small circular tin container bearing a white-paper label. He placed it solemnly on the table and lifted heavy eyes to Vance.  
 "I found the opium, *effendi*."  
 "Where?" The word was spoken softly.  
 Hani hesitated and dropped his gaze.  
 "It was not in the cabinet," he said. "The place on the shelf where it was generally kept, was empty. . . . And then I remembered—"  
 "Most convenient!" There was a sneer in Vance's tone. "You remembered that you yourself had taken the opium some time ago—eh, what? . . . Couldn't sleep—or something of the kind."  
 "The *effendi* understands many things." Hani's voice was flat and expressionless. "Several weeks ago I was lying awake—I had not slept well for nights—and I went to the cabinet and took the opium to my room. I placed the container in the drawer of my own cabinet—"  
 "And forgot to return it," Vance concluded. "I do hope it cured your insomnia." He smiled ironically. "You are an outrageous liar, Hani. But I do not blame you altogether—"  
 "I have told you the truth."  
 "Se non è vero, è molto ben trovato." Vance sat down, frowning.  
 "I do not speak Italian. . . ."  
 "A quotation from Bruno." He inspected the Egyptian speculatively. "Clawed into the vulgate, it means that, although you have not spoken the truth, you have invented your lie very well."  
 "Thank you, *effendi*."  
 Vance sighed and shook his head with simulated weariness. Then he said:  
 "You were not gone long enough to have made any extensive search for the opium. You probably found it in the first place you looked—you had a fairly definite idea where you'd find it. . . ."  
 "As I told you—"  
 "Dash it all! Don't be so persistent. You're becoming very borin'. . . ." Menacingly Vance rose and stepped toward the Egyptian. His eyes were cold and his body was tense. "Where did you find that tin of opium?"  
 Hani shrank away and his arms fell to his sides.  
 "Where did you find the opium?" Vance repeated the question.  
 "I have explained, *effendi*." Despite the doggedness of Hani's manner, his tone was not convincing.  
 "Yes! You've explained—but you haven't told the truth. The opium was not in your room—although you have a reason for wanting us to think so. . . . A reason! What is it? . . . Perhaps I can guess that reason. You lied to me because you found the opium—"  
 "Effendi! . . . Don't continue. You are being deceived. . . ."  
 "I am not being deceived by you, Hani." (I had rarely seen Vance so earnest.) "You unutterable ass! Don't you understand that I knew where you'd find that opium? Do you think I'd have sent you to look for it if I hadn't been pretty certain where it was? And you've told me—in your circuitous Egyptian way you've informed me most lucidly." Vance relaxed and smiled. "But my real reason for

sending you to search for the sleeping-powder was to ascertain to what extent you were involved in the plot."

"And you found out, *effendi*?" There were both awe and resignation in the Egyptian's question.

"Yes . . . oh, yes." Vance casually regarded the other. "You're not at all subtle, Hani. You're only involved—you have characteristics in common with the ostrich, which is erroneously said to bury its head in the sand when in danger. You have merely buried your head in a tin of opium."

"Vance *effendi* is too erudite for my inferior comprehension. . . ."

"You're extr'ordin'rily tiresome, Hani." Vance turned his back and walked to the other end of the room. "Go away, please—go quite away."

At this moment there was a disturbance in the hall outside. We could hear angry voices at the end of the corridor. They became louder, and presently Snitkin appeared at the door of the breakfast-room holding Doctor Bliss firmly by the arm. The doctor, fully clothed and with his hat on, was protesting volubly. His face was pale, and his eyes had a hunted, frightened look.

"What's the meaning of this?" He addressed no one in particular. "I wanted to go out to get a bit of fresh air, and this bully dragged me downstairs—"

Snitkin looked toward Markham.

"I was told by Sergeant Heath not to let any one leave the house, and this guy tries to make a getaway. Full of hauchoor, too. . . . Whaddya want done with him?"

"I see no reason why the doctor shouldn't take an airin', don't y' know." Vance spoke to Markham. "We sha'n't want to confer with him till later."

"It's bully with me," Heath agreed. "There's too many people in this house anyway."

Markham nodded to Snitkin.

"You may let the doctor go for a walk, officer." He shifted his gaze to Bliss. "Please be back, sir, in half an hour or so. We'll want to question you."

"I'll be back before that—I only want to go over in the park for a while." Bliss seemed nervous and distraught. "I feel unusually heavy and suffocated. My ears are ringing frightfully."

"And, I take it," put in Vance, "you've been inordinately thirsty."

The doctor regarded him with mild surprise.

"I've consumed at least a gallon of water since going to my room. I hope I'm not in for an attack of malaria. . . ."

"I hope not, sir. I believe you'll feel perfectly normal later on."

Bliss hesitated at the door-sill.

"Anything new?" he asked.

"Oh, much." Vance spoke without enthusiasm. "But we'll talk of that later."

Bliss frowned and was about to ask another question; but he changed his mind, and bowing, went away, Snitkin trailing after him sourly.

### 13. AN ATTEMPTED ESCAPE

(Friday, July 13; 3:45 P.M.)

It was Hani who broke the silence after Bliss's departure.

"You wish me to go away, *effendi*?" he asked Vance, with a respect that struck me as overdone.

"Yes, yes." Vance had become *distract* and introspective. I knew something was preying on his mind. He stood near the table, his hands in his pockets, regarding the samovar intently. "Go up-stairs, Hani. Take some sodium bicarbonate—and meditate. Divinely bend yourself, so to speak; indulge in a bit of 'holy exercise,' as Shakespeare calls it in—is it *Richard III*?"

"Yes, *effendi*—in Act III. Catesby uses the phrase to the Duke of Buckingham."

"Astonishin'!" Vance studied the Egyptian critically. "I had no idea the fallahin were so well versed in the classics."

"For hours at a time I read to Meryt-Amen when she was young—"

"Ah, yes." Vance dropped the matter. "We'll send for you when we need you. In the meantime wait in your room."

Hani bowed and moved toward the hall.

"Do not be deceived by appearances, *effendi*," he said solemnly, turning at the door. "I do not fully understand the things that have happened in this house to-day; but do not forget—"

"Thanks awfully." Vance waved his hand in dismissal. "I at least shall not forget that your name is Anûpu."

With a black look the man went out.

Markham was growing more and more impatient.

"Everything in this case seems to peter out," he complained. "Any one in the household could have put the opium in the coffee—which leaves us just where we were before we came here to the breakfast-room. . . . By the way, where do you think Hani found the can of opium?"

"Oh, that? Why, in Salveter's room, of course. . . . Rather obvious, don't y' know."

"I'm damned if I see anything obvious about it. Why should Salveter have left it there?"

"But he didn't leave it there, old dear. . . . My word! Don't you see that some one in the house had ideas? There's a *deus ex machina* in our midst, and he's troublin' himself horribly about the situation. The plot has been far too clever; and there's a tutelary genius who's attempting to simplify matters for us."

Heath made a throaty noise of violent disgust.

"Well, I'm here to tell you he's making a hell of a job of it."

Vance smiled sympathetically.

"A hellish job, let us say, Sergeant."

Markham regarded him with a quizzical frown.

"Do you believe, Vance, that Hani was in this room after Mrs. Bliss and Salveter had gone up-stairs?"

"It's possible. In fact, it seems more likely that it was Hani than either Mrs. Bliss or Salveter."

"If the front door had been unlatched," Markham offered, "it might conceivably have been some one from the outside."

"Your hypothetical thug?" asked Vance dryly. "Dropped in here, perhaps, for a bit of caffèin stimulant before tackling his victim in the museum." He did not give Markham time to reply, but went to the door. "Come. Let's chivy the occupants of the drawing-room. We need more data—oh, many more data."

He led the way up-stairs. As we walked along the heavily carpeted upper hall toward the drawing-room door, the sound of an angry high-pitched voice came to us. Mrs. Bliss was speaking; and I caught the final words of a sentence.

". . . should have waited."

Then Salveter answered in a hoarse, tense tone:

"Meryt! You're insane. . . ."

Vance cleared his throat, and there was silence.

Before we entered the room, however, Hennessey beckoned mysteriously to Heath from the front of the hall. The Sergeant stepped forward past the drawing-room door, and the rest of us, sensing some revelation, followed him.

"You know that bird Scarlett who you told me to let go," Hennessey reported in a stage whisper; "well, just as he was going out he turned suddenly and ran up-stairs. I was going to chase him, but since you O.K.'d him, I thought it was all right. A coupla minutes later he came down and went away without a word. Then I got to thinking that maybe I shoulda followed him up-stairs. . . ."

"You acted correctly, Hennessey." Vance spoke before the Sergeant could reply. "No reason why he shouldn't have gone up-stairs—probably went there to speak to Doctor Bliss."

Hennessey appeared relieved and looked hopefully toward Heath, who merely grunted disdainfully.

"And, by the by, Hennessey," Vance continued; "when the Egyptian came up-stairs the first time, did he go directly to the floor above, or did he tarry in the drawing-room *en route*?"

"He went in and spoke to the missus. . . ."

"Did you hear anything he said?"

"Naw. It sounded to me like they was parleying in one of those foreign languages."

Vance turned to Markham and said in a low voice: "That's why I sent Hani up-stairs alone. I had an idea he'd grasp the opportunity to commune with Mrs. Bliss." He spoke again to Hennessey. "How long was Hani in the drawing-room?"

"A minute or two maybe—not long." The detective was growing apprehensive. "Shouldn't I have let him go in?"

"Oh, certainly. . . . And then what happened?"

"The guy comes outa the room, looking worried, and goes up-stairs. Pretty soon he comes down again carrying a tin can in his hand."

"What you got there, Abdullah?" I asks. "Something Mr. Vance sent me to get. Any objection?" he says. "Not if you're on the level; but I don't like your looks," I answers. And then he gives me the high hat and goes down-stairs."

"Perfect, Hennessey." Vance nodded encouragingly and, taking Markham by the arm, walked back toward the drawing-room. "I think we'd better question Mrs. Bliss."

As we entered the woman rose to greet us. She had been sitting by the front window, and Salveter was leaning against the folding doors leading to the dining-room. They had obviously taken these positions when they heard us in the hall, for as we came up-stairs they had been speaking at very close quarters.

"We are sorry to have to annoy you, Mrs. Bliss," Vance began, courteously. "But it's necessary that we question you at this time."

She waited without the slightest movement or change of expression, and I distinctly received the impression that she was resentful of our intrusion.

"And you, Mr. Salveter," Vance went on, shifting his gaze to the man, "will you please go to your room. We'll confer with you later."

Salveter seemed disconcerted and worried.

"May I not be present—?" he began.

"You may not," Vance cut in with unwonted severity; and I noticed that even Markham was somewhat surprised at his manner. "Hennessey!" Vance called toward the door, and the detective appeared almost simultaneously. "Escort this gentleman to his room, and see that he communicates with no one until we send for him."

Salveter, with an appealing look toward Mrs. Bliss, walked out of the room, the detective at his side.

"Pray be seated, madam." Vance approached the woman and, after she had sat down, took a chair facing her. "We are going to ask you several intimate questions, and if you really want the murderer of Mr. Kyle brought to justice you will not resent those questions but will answer them frankly."

"The murderer of Mr. Kyle is a despicable and unworthy creature," she answered in a hard, strained voice; "and I will gladly do anything I can to help you." She did not look at Vance, but concentrated her gaze on an enormous honey-colored camelian ring of intaglio design which she wore on the forefinger of her right hand.

Vance's eyebrows went up slightly.

"You think, then, we did right in releasing your husband?"

I could not understand the purport of Vance's question; and the woman's answer confused me still further. She raised her head slowly and regarded each one of us in turn. Finally she said:

"Doctor Bliss is a very patient man. Many people have wronged him. I am not even sure that Hani is altogether loyal to him. But my husband is not a fool—he is even too clever at times. I do not put murder beyond him—or beyond any one, for that matter. Murder may sometimes be the highest form of courage. However, if my husband had killed Mr. Kyle he would not have been stupid about it—certainly he would have not left evidence pointing to himself. . . ." She glanced again at her folded hands. "But if he had been contemplating murder, Mr. Kyle would not have been the object of his crime. There are others whom he had more reason for wanting out of the way."

"Hani, for instance?"

"Perhaps."

"Or Mr. Salveter?"

"Almost any one but Mr. Kyle," the woman answered, without a perceptible modulation of voice.

"Anger could have dictated the murder." Vance spoke like a man discussing a purely academic topic. "If Mr. Kyle had refused to continue financing the excavations—"

"You do not know my husband. He has the most equable temper I have ever seen. Passion is alien to his nature. He makes no move without long deliberation."

"The scholar's mind," Vance murmured. "Yes, I have always had that impression of him." He took out his cigarette-case. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Do you mind if I do?"

Vance leapt to his feet and extended his case.

"Ah—*Régies!*" She selected a cigarette. "You are very fortunate, Mr. Vance. There were none left in Turkey when I applied for a shipment."

"I am doubly fortunate that I am able to offer you one." Vance lighted her cigarette and resumed his seat. "Who, do you think, Mrs. Bliss, was most benefited by Mr. Kyle's death?" he put the question carelessly, but I could see he was watching her closely.

"I couldn't say." The woman was clearly on her guard.

"But surely," pursued Vance, "some one benefited by his death. Otherwise he would not have been murdered."

"That point is one the police should ascertain. I can give you no assistance along that line."

"It may be that the police have satisfied themselves, and that I merely asked you for corroboration." Vance, while courteous, spoke with somewhat pointed significance. "Lookin' at the matter coldly, the police might argue that the sudden demise of Mr. Kyle would remove a thorn from Hani's side and end the so-called desecration of his ancestors' tombs. Then again, the police might hold that Mr. Kyle's death would enrich both you and Mr. Salveter."

I expected the woman to resent this remark of Vance's, but she only glanced up with a frigid smile and said in a dispassionate tone:

"Yes, I do believe there was a will naming Mr. Salveter and myself as the principal beneficiaries."

"Mr. Scarlett informed us to that effect," Vance returned. "Quite understandable, don't y' know. . . . And by the by, would you be willing to use your inheritance to perpetuate Doctor Bliss's work in Egypt?"

"Certainly," she replied with unmistakable emphasis. "If he asked me to help him, the money would be his to do with as he desired. . . . Especially now," she added.

Vance's face had grown cold and stern, and after a quick upward glance he dropped his eyes and contemplated his cigarette.

Markham rose at this moment.

"Who, Mrs. Bliss," he asked, with what I regarded as unnecessary aggression, "would have had an object in attempting to saddle your husband with this crime?"

The woman's gaze faltered, but only momentarily.

"I'm sure I don't know," she returned. "Did some one really try to do that?"

"You suggested as much yourself, madam, when the scarab pin was called to your attention. You said quite positively that some one had placed it beside Mr. Kyle's body."

"What if I did?" She became suddenly defiant. "My initial instinct was naturally to defend my husband."

"Against whom?"

"Against you and the police."

"Do you regret that 'initial instinct'?" Markham put the question brusquely.

"Certainly not!" the woman stiffened in her chair and glanced surreptitiously toward the door.

Vance noted her action and drawled:

"It is only one of the detectives in the hall. Mr. Salveter is sojourning in his boudoir—quite out of hearing."

Quickly she covered her face with her hands, and a shudder ran over her body.

"You are torturing me," she moaned.

"And you are watching me through your fingers," said Vance with a mild grin.

She rose swiftly and glared ferociously at him.

"Please don't say 'How dare you?'" Vance spoke banteringly. "The phrase is so trite. And do sit down again. . . . Hani informed you, I believe—in your native language—that Doctor Bliss was supposed to have been given opium in his coffee this morning. What else did he tell you?"

"That was all he said." The woman resumed her seat: she appeared exhausted.

"Did you know that opium was kept in the cabinet up-stairs?"

"I wasn't aware of it," she replied listlessly; "though I'm not surprised."

"Did Mr. Salveter know of it?"

"Oh, undoubtedly—if it was actually there. He and Mr. Scarlett had charge of the medical supplies."

Vance shot her a quick look.

"Although Hani would not admit it," he said, "I am pretty sure that the tin of opium was found in Mr. Salveter's room."

"Yes?" (I could not help feeling that she rather expected this news. Certainly, it was no surprise to her.)

"On the other hand," pursued Vance, "it might have been found by Hani in *your* room."

"Impossible! It couldn't have been in my room!" She flared up, but on meeting Vance's steady gaze, subsided. "That is, I don't see how it could be possible," she ended weakly.

"I'm probably wrong," Vance murmured. "But tell me, Mrs. Bliss: did you return to the breakfast-room this morning for another cup of coffee, after you and Mr. Salveter had gone up-stairs?"

"I—I. . . ." She took a deep breath. "Yes! . . . Was there any crime in that?"

"Did you meet Hani there?"

After a brief hesitation she answered:

"No. He was in his room—ill. . . . I sent him his coffee."

Heath grunted disgustedly.

"A lot we're finding out," he growled.

"Quite right, Sergeant," Vance agreed pleasantly. "An amazin' amount. Mrs. Bliss is helpin' us no end." He turned to the woman again. "You know, of course, who killed Mr. Kyle?" he asked blandly.

"Yes. . . . I know!" The words were spoken with impulsive venom.

"And you also know why he was killed?"

"I know that, too." A sudden change had come over her. A strange combination of fear and animus possessed her; and the tragic bitterness of her attitude stunned me.

Heath let forth a queer, inarticulate ejaculation.

"You tell us who it was," he blurted vindictively, shaking his cigar in her face, "or I'll arrest you as an accessory, or as a material witness. . . ."

"Tut, tut, Sergeant!" Vance rose and placed his hand pacifyingly on the other's shoulder. "Why be so precipitate? It wouldn't do you the slightest good to incarcerate Mrs. Bliss at this time. . . . And, d'ye see, she may be wholly wrong in her diagnosis of the case."

Markham projected himself into the scene.

"Have you any definite reasons for your opinion, Mrs. Bliss?" he asked. "Have you any specific evidence against the murderer?"

"Not legal evidence," she answered quietly. "But—but. . . ." Her voice faltered, and her head fell forward.

"You left the house about nine o'clock this morning, I believe." Vance's calm voice seemed to steady her.

"Yes—shortly after breakfast."

"Shopping?"

"I took a taxi at Fourth Avenue to Altman's. I didn't see what I wanted there, and walked to the subway. I went to Wanamaker's, and later returned to Lord and Taylor's. Then I went to Saks's, and finally dropped in at a little shop on Madison Avenue. . . ."

"The usual routine," sighed Vance. "You of course bought nothing?"

"I ordered a hat on Madison Avenue. . . ."

"Remarkable!" Vance caught Markham's eye and nodded significantly. "I think that will be all for the present, Mrs. Bliss," he said. "You will kindly go to your room and wait there."

The woman pressed a small handkerchief to her eyes, and left us without a word.

Vance walked to the window and gazed out into the street. He was, I could see, deeply troubled as a result of the interview. He

opened the window, and the droning summer noises of the street drifted in to us. He stood for several minutes in silence, and neither Markham nor Heath interrupted his meditations. At length he turned and, without looking at us, said in a quiet, introspective tone:

"There are too many cross-currents in this house—too many motives, too many objects to be gained, too many emotional complications. A plausible case could be made out of almost any one. . . ."

"But who could have benefited by Bliss's entanglement in the crime?" Markham asked.

"Oh, my word!" Vance leaned against the centre-table and gazed at a large oil portrait of the doctor which hung on the east wall. "Every one apparently. Hani doesn't like his employer and writhes in psychic agony at each basketful of sand that is excavated from Intef's tomb. Salveter is infatuated with Mrs. Bliss, and naturally her husband is an obstacle to his suit. As for the lady herself: I do not wish to wrong her, but I'm inclined to believe she returns the young gentleman's affection. If so, the elimination of Bliss would not drive her to suicidal grief."

Markham's face clouded.

"I got the impression, too, that Scarlett was not entirely impervious to her charms and that there was a chilliness between him and Salveter."

"Quite. *Ça crève les yeux*." Vance nodded abstractedly. "Mrs. Bliss is undeniably fascinating. . . . I say; if only I could find the clew I'm looking for! Y' know, Markham, I've an idea that something new is going to happen anon. The plot thus far has gone awry. We've been led into a Moorish maze by the murderer, but the key hasn't yet been placed in our hands. When it is, I'll know which door it'll unlock—and it won't be the door the murderer intends us to use it on. Our difficulty now is that we have too many clews; and not one of 'em is the real clew. That's why we can't make an arrest. We must wait for the plot to unfold."

"It's unfolding, as you call it, too swift for me," Heath retorted impatiently. "And I don't mind admitting that I think we're getting sidetracked. After all's said and done, weren't Bliss's finger-prints found on the statue, and no one else's? Wasn't his stick-pin found beside the body? And didn't he have every opportunity to bump Kyle off? . . ."

"Sergeant,"—Vance spoke patiently—"would a man of intelligence and profound scientific training commit a murder and not only overlook his finger-prints on the weapon, but also be so careless as to drop his scarf-pin at the scene of the murder, and then calmly wait in the next room for the police to arrest him, after having made bloody footprints to guide them?"

"And there's the opium, too, Sergeant," added Markham. "It seems pretty clear to me that the doctor was drugged."

"Have it your own way, sir." Heath's tone bordered on impoliteness. "But I don't see that we're getting anywheres."

As he spoke Emery came to the door.

"Telephone call for you, Sergeant," he announced. "Down-stairs."

Heath hurried eagerly from the room and disappeared down the hall. Three or four minutes later he returned. His face was wreathed in smiles, and he swaggered as he walked toward Vance.

"Huh!" He inserted his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. "Your good friend Bliss has just tried to make a getaway. My man, Guilfoyle,<sup>[18]</sup> who I'd phoned to tail the doctor, picked him up as he came out of this house for his walk in the park. But he didn't go to the park, Mr. Vance. He beat it over to Fourth Avenue and went to the Corn Exchange Bank at Twenty-ninth Street. It was after hours, but he knew the manager and didn't have no trouble getting his money. . . ."

"Money?"

"Sure! He drew out everything he had in the bank—got it in twenties, fifties and hundreds—and then took a taxi. Guilfoyle hopped another taxi and followed him up-town. He got off at Grand Central Station and hurried to the ticket office. 'When's the next train for Montreal?' he asked. 'Four forty-five,' the guy told him. 'Gimme a through ticket,' he said. . . . It was then four o'clock; and the doc walked to the gate and stood there, waiting. Guilfoyle came up to him and said: 'Going for a jaunt to Canada?' The doc got haughty and refused to answer. 'Anyway,' said Guilfoyle, 'I don't think you'll leave the country to-day.' And taking the doc by the arm, he led him to a telephone booth. . . . Guilfoyle's on his way here with your innocent friend." The Sergeant rocked back and forth on his feet. "What do you think of that, sir?"

Vance regarded him lugubriously.

"And that is taken as another sign of the doctor's guilt?" He shook his head hopelessly. "Is it possible that you regard such a childish attempt of escape as incriminating? . . . I say, Sergeant; mightn't that come under the head of panic on the part of an impractical scientist?"

"Sure it might." Heath laughed unpleasantly. "All crooks and killers get scared and try to make a getaway. But it don't prove their lily-white innocence."

"Still, Sergeant,"—Vance's voice was discouraged—"a murderer who accidentally left clews on every hand pointing directly to himself and then indulged in this final stupid folly of trying to escape would not be exactly bright. And, I assure you, Doctor Bliss is neither an imbecile nor a lunatic."

"Them's mere words, Mr. Vance," declared the Sergeant doggedly. "This bird made a coupla mistakes and, seeing he was caught, tried to get outa the country. And, I'm here to tell you, that's running true to form."

"Oh, my aunt—my precious, dodderin' aunt!" Vance sank into a large chair and let his head fall back wearily against the lace antimacassar.

## 14. A HIEROGLYPHIC LETTER

(Friday, July 13, 4:15 P.M.)

Markham got up irritably and walked the length of the room and back. As always in moments of perplexity his hands were clasped behind him, and his head was projected forward.

"Damn your various aunts!" he growled, as he came abreast of Vance. "You're always calling on an aunt. Haven't you any uncles?"

Vance opened his eyes and smiled blandly.

"I know how you feel." Despite the lightness of his tone there was unmistakable sympathy in his words. "No one is acting as he should in this case. It's as if every one were in a conspiracy to confuse and complicate matters for us."

"That's just it!" Markham fumed. "On the other hand, there's something in what the Sergeant says. Why should Bliss—?"

"Too much theory, Markham old dear," Vance interrupted. "Oh, much too much theory . . . too much speculation . . . too many futile questions. There's a key coming, and it'll explain everything. Our immediate task, it seems to me, is to find that key."

"Sure!" Heath spoke with heavy sarcasm. "Suppose I begin punching the furniture with hat-pins and ripping up the carpets. . . ."

Markham snapped his fingers impatiently, and Heath subsided.

"Let's get down to earth." He regarded Vance with vindictive shrewdness. "You've got some pretty definite idea; and all your maunderings couldn't convince me to the contrary.—What do you suggest we do next?—interview Salveter?"

"Precisely." Vance nodded with unwonted seriousness. "That bigoted lad fits conspicuously into the picture; and his presence on the tapis now is, as the medicos say, indicated."

Markham made a sign to Heath, who immediately rose and went to the drawing-room door and bellowed up the staircase.

"Hennessey! . . . Bring that guy down here. We got business with him."

A few moments later Salveter was piloted into the room. His eyes were flashing, and he planted himself aggressively before Vance, cramming his hands violently into his trousers' pockets.

"Well, here I am," he announced with belligerence. "Got the handcuffs ready?"

Vance yawned elaborately and inspected the newcomer with a bored expression.

"Don't be so virile, Mr. Salveter," he drawled. "We're all worn out with this depressin' case, and simply can't endure any more vim and vigor. Sit down and let the joints go free. . . . As for the manacles, Sergeant Heath has 'em beautifully polished. Would you like to try 'em on?"

"Maybe," Salveter returned, watching Vance calculatingly. "What did you say to Meryt—to Mrs. Bliss?"

"I gave her one of my *Régies*," Vance told him carelessly. "Most appreciative young woman. . . . Would you care for one yourself? I've two left."

"Thanks—I smoke Deities."

"Ever dip 'em in opium?" Vance asked dulcetly.

"Opium?"

"The concrete juice of the poppy, so to speak—obtained from slits in the cortex of the capsule of *Papaver somniferum*. Greek word: *opion*—to wit: omicron, pi, iota, omicron, nu."

"No!" Salveter sat down suddenly and shifted his gaze. "What's the idea?"

"There seems to be an abundance of opium in the house, don't y' know."

"Oh, is there?" The man looked up warily.

"Didn't you know?" Vance selected one of his two remaining cigarettes. "We thought you and Mr. Scarlett had charge of the medical supplies."

Salveter started and remained silent for several moments.

"Did Meryt-Amen tell you that?" he asked finally.

"Is it true?" There was a new note in Vance's voice.

"In a way," the other admitted. "Doctor Bliss—"

"What about the opium?" Vance leaned forward.

"Oh, there has always been opium in the cabinet up-stairs—nearly a canful."

"Have you had it in your room lately?"

"No . . . yes . . . I—"

"Thanks awfully. We take our choice of answers, what?"

"Who said there was opium in my room?" Salveter squared his shoulders.

Vance leaned back in his chair.

"It really doesn't matter. Anyway, there's no opium there now. . . . I say, Mr. Salveter; did you return to the breakfast-room this morning after you and Mrs. Bliss had gone up-stairs?"

"I did not! . . . That is," he amended, "I don't remember. . . ."

Vance rose abruptly and stood menacingly before him.

"Don't try to guess what Mrs. Bliss told us. If you don't care to answer my questions, I'll turn you over to the Homicide Bureau—and God help you! . . . We're here to learn the truth, and we want straight answers.—Did you return to the breakfast-room?"

"No—I did not."

"That's much better—oh, much!" Vance sighed and resumed his seat. "And now, Mr. Salveter, we must ask you a very intimate question.—Are you in love with Mrs. Bliss?"

"I refuse to answer!"

"Good! But you would not be entirely brokenhearted if Doctor Bliss should be gathered to his fathers?"

Salveter clamped his jaws and said nothing.

Vance contemplated him ruminatingly.

"I understand," he said amicably, "that Mr. Kyle has left you a considerable fortune in his will. . . . If Doctor Bliss should ask you to finance the continuation of his excavations in Egypt, would you do it?"

"I'd insist upon it, even if he did not ask me." A fanatical light shone in Salveter's eyes. "That is," he added, as a reasoned afterthought, "if Meryt-Amen approved. I would not care to go against her wishes."

"Ah!" Vance had lit his cigarette and was smoking dreamily. "And do you think she would disapprove?"

Salveter shook his head.

"No, I think she would do whatever the doctor wanted."

"A dutiful wife—*quo?*"

Salveter bristled and sat up.

"She's the straightest, most loyal—"

"Yes, yes," Vance exhaled a spiral of cigarette smoke. "Spare me your adjectives. . . . I take it, however, she's not entirely ecstatic with her choice of a life mate."

"If she wasn't," Salveter returned angrily, "she wouldn't show it."

Vance nodded uninterestedly.

"What do you think of Hani?" he asked.

"He's a dumb beast—a good soul, though. Adores Mrs. Bliss. . . ." Salveter stiffened and his eyes opened wide. "Good God, Mr. Vance! You don't think—" He broke off in horror; then he shook himself. "I see what you're getting at. But . . . but. . . . Those degenerate modern Egyptians! They're all alike—oriental dogs, every one of 'em. No sense of right and wrong—superstitious devils—but loyal as they make 'em. I wonder. . . ."

"Quite. We're all wonderin'." Vance was apparently unimpressed by Salveter's outbreak. "But, as you say, he's pretty close to Mrs. Bliss. He'd do a great deal for her—eh, what? Might even risk his neck, don't y' know, if he thought her happiness was at stake. Of course, he might need a bit of coaching. . . ."

A hard light shone in Salveter's eyes.

"You're on the wrong tack. Nobody coached Hani. He's capable of acting for himself—"

"And throwing the suspicion on some one else?" Vance looked at the other. "I'd say the planting of that scarab pin was a bit too subtle for a mere fellah."

"You think so?" Salveter was almost contemptuous. "You don't know those people the way I do. The Egyptians were working out intricate plots when the Nordic race were arboreans."

"Bad anthropology," murmured Vance. "And you're doubtless thinkin' of Herodotus's silly story of the treasure house of King Rhampsinitus. Personally, I think the priests were spoofing the papa of history. . . . By the by, Mr. Salveter; do you know any one round here, besides Doctor Bliss, who uses Koh-i-noor pencils?"

"Didn't even know the doctor used 'em." The man flicked his cigarette ashes on the carpet and brushed his foot over them.

"You didn't by any chance see Doctor Bliss this morning?"

"No. When I came down to breakfast Brush told me he was working in the study."

"Did you go into the museum this morning before you went on your errand to the Metropolitan?"

Salveter's eyes blinked rapidly.

"Yes!" he blurted finally. "I generally go into the museum every morning after breakfast—a kind of habit. I like to see that everything is all right—that nothing has happened during the night. I'm the assistant curator; and, aside from my responsibility, I'm tremendously interested in the place. It's my duty to keep an eye on things."

Vance nodded understandingly.

"What time did you enter the museum this morning?"

Salveter hesitated. Then throwing his head back he looked challengingly at Vance.

"I left the house a little after nine. When I got to Fifth Avenue it suddenly occurred to me I hadn't made an inspection of the museum; and for some reason I was worried. I couldn't tell you why I felt that way—but I did. Maybe because of the new shipment that arrived yesterday. Anyway, I turned back, let myself in with my key, and went into the museum—"

"About half past nine?"

"That would be about right."

"And no one saw you re-enter the house?"

"I hardly think so. In any event, I didn't see any one."

Vance gazed at him languidly.

"Suppose you finish the recital. . . . If you don't care to, I'll finish it for you."

"You won't have to." Salveter tossed his cigarette into a cloisonné dish on the table and drew himself resolutely to the edge of his chair. "I'll tell you all there is to tell. Then if you're not satisfied, you can order my arrest—and the hell with you!"

Vance sighed and let his head fall back.

"Such energy!" he breathed. "But why be vulgar? . . . I take it you saw your uncle before you finally quitted the museum for the Great American Mausoleum on the Avenue."

"Yes—I saw him!" Salveter's eyes flashed and his chin shot forward. "Now, make something out of that."

"Really, I can't be bothered. Much too fatiguing." Vance did not even look at the man: his eyes, half closed, were resting on an old-fashioned crystal chandelier which hung low over the centre-table. "Since you saw your uncle," he said, "you must have remained in the museum for at least half an hour."

"Just about." Salveter obviously could not understand Vance's indifferent attitude. "The fact is I got interested in a papyrus we



picked up last winter, and tried to work out a few of the words that stumped me. There were the words *ankhet*, *wash*, and *tema* that I couldn't translate."

Vance frowned slightly; then his eyebrows lifted.

"Ankhet . . . *wash* . . . *tema* . . ." He iterated the words slowly. "Was the *ankhet* written with or without a determinative?"

Salveter did not answer at once.

"With the animal-skin determinative," he said presently.

"And was the next word really *wash* and not *was*?"

Again he hesitated, and looked uneasily at Vance.

"It was *wash*, I think. . . . And *tema* was written with a double flail."

"Not the sledge ideogram, eh? . . . Now, that's most interestin'.—And during your linguistic throes your uncle walked in."

"Yes. I was sitting at the little desk-table by the obelisk when Uncle Ben opened the door. I heard him say something to Brush, and I got up to greet him. It was rather dark, and he didn't see me till he'd reached the floor of the museum."

"And then?"

"I knew he wanted to inspect the new treasures; so I ran along. Went to the Metropolitan—"

"Your uncle seemed in normal good spirits when he came into the museum?"

"About as usual—a bit grouchy perhaps. He was never over-pleasant in the forenoons. But that didn't mean anything."

"You left the museum immediately after greeting him?"

"At once. I hadn't realized I'd been so long fussing over the papyrus; and I hurried away. Another thing, I knew he'd come to see Doctor Bliss on a pretty important matter, and I didn't want to be in the way."

Vance nodded but gave no indication whether or not he unreservedly accepted the other's statements. He sat smoking lazily, his eyes impassive and mild.

"And during the next twenty minutes," he mused,—that is between ten o'clock and ten-twenty, at which time Mr. Scarlett entered the museum—your uncle was killed."

Salveter winced.

"So it seems," he mumbled. "But"—he shot his jaw out—"I didn't have anything to do with it! That's straight,—take it or leave it."

"There, now; don't be indelicate," Vance admonished him quietly. "I don't have to take it and I don't have to leave it, d' ye see? I may choose merely to dally with it."

"Dally and be damned!"

Vance got to his feet leisurely, and there was a chilly smile on his face—a smile more deadly than any contortion of anger could have been.

"I don't like your language, Mr. Salveter," he said slowly.

"Oh, don't you!" The man sprang up, his fists clenched, and swung viciously. Vance, however, stepped back with the quickness of a cat, and caught the other by the wrist. Then he made a swift, pivotal movement to the right, and Salveter's pinioned arm was twisted upward behind his shoulder-blades. With an involuntary cry of pain, the man fell to his knees. (I recalled the way in which Vance had saved Markham from an attack in the District Attorney's office at the close of the Benson murder case.) Heath and Hennessey stepped forward, but Vance motioned them away with his free hand.

"I can manage this impetuous gentleman," he said. Then he lifted Salveter to his feet and shoved him back into his chair. "A little lesson in manners," he remarked pleasantly. "And now you will please be civil and answer my questions, or I'll be compelled to have you—and Mrs. Bliss—arrested for conspiring to murder Mr. Kyle."

Salveter was completely subdued. He looked at his antagonist in ludicrous amazement. Then suddenly Vance's words seemed to seep into his astonished brain.

"Mrs. Bliss? . . . She had nothing to do with it, I tell you!" His tone, though highly animated, was respectful. "If it'll save her from any suspicion, I'll confess to the crime. . . ."

"No need for any such heroism." Vance had resumed his seat and was again smoking calmly. "But you might tell us why, when you came into the museum this afternoon and learned of your uncle's death, you didn't mention the fact that you'd seen him at ten o'clock."

"I—I was too upset—too shocked," the man stammered. "And I was afraid. Self-protective instinct, maybe. I can't explain—really I can't. I should have told you, I suppose . . . but—but—"

Vance helped him out.

"But you didn't care to involve yourself in a crime of which you were innocent. Yes . . . yes. Quite natural. Thought you'd wait and find out if any one had seen you. . . . I say, Mr. Salveter; don't you know that if you had admitted being with your uncle at ten o'clock, it would have been a point in your favor?"

Salveter had become sullen, and before he could answer Vance went on.

"Leavin' these speculations to one side, could we prevail upon you to tell us exactly what you did in the museum between half past nine and ten o'clock?"

"I've already told you," Salveter was troubled and *distract*. "I was comparing an Eighteenth-Dynasty papyrus recently found by Doctor Bliss at Thebes with Luckenbill's translation of the hexagonal prism of the Annals of Sennacherib[19] in order to determine certain values for—"

"You're romancing frightfully, Mr. Salveter," Vance broke in quietly. "And you're indulgin' in an anachronism. The Sennacherib prism is in Babylonian cuneiform, and dates almost a thousand years later." He lifted his eyes sternly. "What were you doing in the museum this morning?"

Salveter started forward in his chair, but at once sank back.

"I was writing a letter," he answered weakly.

"To whom?"

"I'd rather not say."

"Naturally." Vance smiled faintly. "In what language?"

An immediate change came over the man. His face went pale, and his hands, which were lying along his knees, convulsed.

"What language?" he repeated huskily. "Why do you ask that? . . . What language would I be likely to write a letter in—Bantu, Sanskrit, Walloon, Ido. . . ?"

"No-o." Vance's gaze came slowly to rest on Salveter. "Nor did I have in mind Aramaic, or Agao, or Swahili, or Sumerian. . . . The fact is, it smote my brain a moment ago that you were composin' an epistle in Egyptian hieroglyphics."

The man's eyes dilated.

"Why, in Heaven's name," he asked lamely, "should I do a thing like that?"

"Why? Ah, yes—why, indeed?" Vance sighed deeply. "But, really, y' know, you were composin' in Egyptian—weren't you?"

"Was I? What makes you think so?"

"Must I explain? It's so deuced simple." Vance put out his cigarette and made a slight deprecatory gesture. "I could even guess for whom the epistle was intended. Unless I'm hopelessly mistaken, Mrs. Bliss was to have been the recipient." Again Vance smiled musingly. "Y' see, you mentioned three words in the imagin'ry papyrus, which you have not yet satisfactorily translated—*ankhet*, *wash*, and *tema*. But since there are scores of Egyptian words that have thus far resisted accurate translation, I wondered why you should have mentioned these particular three. And I further wondered why you should have mentioned three words whose meaning you did not recall, which so closely approximate three very familiar words in Egyptian. . . . And then I bethought me as to the meaning of these three familiar words. *Ankh*—without a determinative—can mean the 'living one.' *Was*—which is close to *wash*—means 'happiness' or 'good fortune'; though I realize there is some doubt about it,—Erman translates it, with a question-mark, as *Glück*. The *tema* you mentioned with a double flail is unknown to me. But I of course am familiar with *tem* spelt with a sledge ideograph. It means 'to be ended' or 'finished.' . . . Do you follow me?"

Salveter stared like a man hypnotized.

"Good God!" he muttered.

"And so," Vance continued, "I concluded that you had been dealin' in the well-known forms of these three words, and had mentioned them because, in their other approximate forms, their transliterative meanings are unknown. . . . And the words fitted perfectly with the situation. Indeed, Mr. Salveter, it wouldn't take a great deal of imagination to reconstruct your letter, being given the three verbal salients—to wit, *the living one*, *happiness* or *good fortune*, and *to be ended* or *finished*"

Vance paused briefly, as if to arrange his words.

"You probably composed a communication in which you said that the 'living one' (*ankh*) was standing in the way of your 'happiness' or 'good fortune' (*was*), and expressed a desire for the situation 'to be ended' or 'finished' (*tem*). . . . I'm right, am I not?"

Salveter continued staring at Vance in a kind of admiring astonishment.

"I'm going to be truthful with you," he said at length. "That's exactly what I wrote. You see, Meryt-Amen, who knows the Middle Egyptian hieroglyphic language better than I'll ever know it, suggested long ago that I write to her at least once a week in the language of her ancestors, as a kind of exercise. I've been doing it for years; and she always corrects me and advises me—she's almost as well versed as any of the scribes who decorated the ancient tombs. . . . This morning, when I returned to the museum, I realized that the Metropolitan did not open until ten o'clock, and on some sudden impulse I sat down and began working on this letter."

"Most unfortunate," Vance sighed; "for your phraseology in that letter made it appear that you were contemplating taking drastic measures."

"I know it!" Salveter caught his breath. "That's why I lied to you. But the fact is, Mr. Vance, the letter was innocent enough. . . . I know it was foolish, but I didn't take it very seriously. Honest, sir, it was really a lesson in Egyptian composition—not an actual communication."

Vance nodded non-committally.

"And where is this letter now?" he asked.

"In the drawer of the table in the museum. I hadn't finished it when Uncle Ben came in; and I put it away."

"And you had already made use of the three words, *ankh* and *was* and *tem*?"

Salveter braced himself and took a deep breath.

"Yes! Those three familiar words were in it. And then, when you first asked me about what I'd been doing in the museum I made up the tale about the papyrus—"

"And mentioned three words which were suggested to you by the three words you had actually used—eh, what?"

"Yes, sir! That's the truth."

"We're most grateful for your sudden burst of honesty." Vance's tone was frigid. "Will you be so good as to bring me the uncompleted epistle? I'd dearly love to see it; and perhaps I can decipher it."

Salveter leapt to his feet and fairly ran out of the room. A few minutes later he returned, to all appearances dazed and crestfallen.

"It isn't there!" he announced. "It's gone!"

"Oh, is it now? . . . Most unfortunate."

Vance lay back pensively for several moments. Then suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"It's not there! . . . It's gone!" he murmured. "I don't like this situation, Markham—I don't at all like it. . . . Why should the letter have disappeared? Why . . . why?"

He swung about to Salveter.

"What kind of paper did you write that indiscreet letter on?" he asked, with suppressed excitement.

"On a yellow scratch-pad—the kind that's generally kept on the table. . . ."

"And the ink—did you draw your characters with pen or pencil?"

"With a pen. Green ink. It's always in the museum. . . ."

Vance raised his hand in an impatient gesture.

"That's enough. . . . Go up-stairs—go to your room . . . and stay there."

"But, Mr. Vance, I—I'm worried about that letter. Where do you think it is?"

"Why should I know where it is?—provided, of course, you ever wrote it. I'm no divining-rod." Vance was deeply troubled, though he sought to hide the fact. "Didn't you know better than to leave such a missive lying loosely about?"

"It never occurred to me—"

"Oh, didn't it? . . . I wonder." Vance looked at Salveter sharply. "This is no time to speculate. . . . Please go to your room. I'll speak to you again. . . . Don't ask any questions—do as I tell you!"

Salveter, without a word, turned and disappeared through the door. We could hear his heavy footsteps ascending the stairs.

## 15. VANCE MAKES A DISCOVERY

(Friday, July 13; 4:45 P.M.)

Vance stood for a long time in uneasy silence. At length he lifted his eyes to Hennessey.

"I wish you'd run up-stairs," he said, "and take a post where you can watch all the rooms. I don't want any communication between Mrs. Bliss and Salveter and Hani."

Hennessey glanced at Heath.

"Those are orders," the Sergeant informed him; and the detective went out with alacrity.

Vance turned to Markham.

"Maybe that priceless young ass actually wrote the silly letter," he commented; and a worried look came over his face. "I say; let's take a peep in the museum."

"See here, Vance,"—Markham rose—"why should the possibility of Salveter's having written a foolish letter upset you?"

"I don't know—I'm not sure." Vance went to the door; then pivoted suddenly. "But I'm afraid—I'm deuced afraid! Such a letter would give the murderer a loophole—that is, if what I think is true. If the letter *was* written, we've got to find it. If we don't find it, there are several plausible explanations for its disappearance—and one of 'em is fiendish. . . . But come. We'll have to search the museum—on the chance that it was written, as Salveter says, and left in the table-drawer."

He went swiftly across the hall and threw open the great steel door.

"If Doctor Bliss and Guilfoyle return while we're in the museum," he said to Snitkin, who stood leaning against the front door, "take them in the drawing-room and keep them there."

We passed down the steps into the museum, and Vance went at once to the little desk-table beside the obelisk. He looked at the yellow pad and tested the color of the ink. Then he pulled open the drawer and turned out its contents. After a few minutes' inspection of the odds and ends, he restored the drawer to order and closed it. There was a small mahogany waste-basket beneath the table, and Vance emptied it on the floor. Going down on his knees he looked at each piece of crumpled paper. At length he rose and shook his head.

"I don't like this, Markham," he said. "I'd feel infinitely better if I could find that letter."

He strolled about the museum looking for places where a letter might have been thrown. But when he reached the iron spiral stairs at the rear he leaned his back against them and regarded Markham hopelessly.

"I'm becoming more and more frightened," he remarked in a low voice. "If this devilish plot should work! . . ." He turned suddenly and ran up the stairs, beckoning to us as he did so. "There's a chance—just a chance," he called over his shoulder. "I should have thought of it before."

We followed him uncomprehendingly into Doctor Bliss's study.

"The letter should be in the study," he said, striving to control his eagerness. "That would be logical . . . and this case is unbelievably logical, Markham—so logical, so mathematical, that we may eventually be able to read it aright. It's too logical, in fact—that's its weakness. . . ."

He was already on all fours delving into the spilled contents of Doctor Bliss's waste-basket. After a moment's search he picked up two torn pieces of yellow paper. He glanced at them carefully, and we could see tiny markings on them in green ink. He placed them to one side, and continued his search. After several minutes he had amassed a small pile of yellow paper fragments.

"I think that's about all," he said, rising.

He sat down in the swivel chair and laid the torn bits of yellow paper on the blotter.

"This may take a little time, but since I know Egyptian hieroglyphs fairly well I ought to accomplish the task without too much difficulty, don't y' know."

He began arranging and fitting the scraps together, while Markham, Heath and I stood behind him looking on with fascination. At the end of ten minutes he had reassembled the letter. Then he took a large sheet of white paper from one of the drawers of the desk and covered it with mucilage. Carefully he transferred the reconstructed letter, piece by piece, to the gummed paper.

"There, Markham old dear," he sighed, "is the unfinished letter which Salveter told us he was working on this morning between nine-thirty and ten."

The document was unquestionably a sheet of the yellow scratch-pad we had seen in the museum; and on it were four lines of old Egyptian characters painstakingly limned in green ink.

Vance placed his finger on one of the groups of characters.

"That," he told us, "is the *ankh* hieroglyph." He shifted his finger. "And that is the *was* sign. . . . And here, toward the end, is the *tem* sign."

"And then what?" Heath was frankly nonplussed, and his tone was far from civil. "We can't arrest a guy because he drew a lot of cock-eyed pictures on a piece of yellow paper."

"My word, Sergeant! Must you always be thinkin' of clappin' persons into oubliettes? I fear you haven't a humane nature. Very sad. . . . Why not try to cerebrate occasionally?" He looked up and I was startled by his seriousness. "The young and impetuous Mr. Salveter confesses that he has foolishly penned a letter to his Dulcibella in the language of the Pharaohs. He tells us he has placed the unfinished *billet-doux* in the drawer of a table in the museum. We discover that it is not in the table-drawer, but has been ruthlessly dismembered and thrown into the waste-basket in Doctor Bliss's study. . . . On what possible grounds could you regard the Paul of this epistle as a murderer?"

"I ain't regarding nobody as anything," retorted Heath violently. "But there's too much shenanigan going on around here to suit me. I want action."

Vance contemplated him gravely.

"For once I, too, want action, Sergeant. If we don't get some sort of action before long, we may expect something even worse than has already happened. But it must be intelligent action—not the action that the murderer wants us to take. We're caught in the meshes of a cunningly fabricated plot; and, unless we watch our step, the culprit will go free and we'll still be battling with the cobwebs."

Heath grunted and began poring over the reconstructed letter.

"That's a hell of a way for a guy to write to a dame," he commented, with surly disdain. "Give me a nice dirty shooting by a gangster. These flossy crimes make me sick."

Markham was scowling.

"See here, Vance," he said; "do you believe the murderer tore up that letter and threw it in Doctor Bliss's waste-basket?"

"Can there be any doubt of it?" Vance asked in return.

"But what, in Heaven's name, could have been his object?"

"I don't know—yet. That's why I'm frightened." Vance gazed out of the rear window. "But the destruction of that letter is part of the plot; and until we can get some definite and workable evidence, we're helpless."

"Still," persisted Markham, "if the letter was incriminating, it strikes me it would have been valuable to the murderer. Tearing it up doesn't help any one."

Heath looked first at Vance and then at Markham.

"Maybe," he offered, "Salveter tore it up himself."

"When?" Vance asked quietly.

"How do I know?" The Sergeant was nettled. "Maybe when he croaked the old man."

"If that were the case, he wouldn't have admitted having written it."

"Well," Heath persevered, "maybe he tore it up when you sent him to find it a few minutes ago."

"And then, after tearing it up he came here and put it in the basket where it might be found. . . . No, Sergeant. That's not entirely reasonable. If Salveter had been frightened and had decided to get rid of the letter, he'd have destroyed it completely—burned it, most likely, and left no traces of it about."

Markham, too, had become fascinated by the hieroglyphs Vance had pieced together. He stood regarding the conjoined bits of paper perplexedly.

"You think, then, we were intended to find it?" he asked.

"I don't know." Vance's far-away gaze did not shift. "It may be . . . and yet. . . . No! There was only one chance in a thousand that we would come across it. The person who put it in the wastebasket here couldn't have known, or even guessed, that Salveter would tell us of having written it and left it lying about."

"On the other hand,"—Markham was loath to relinquish his train of thought—"the letter might have been put here in the hope of involving Bliss still further—that is, it might have been regarded by the murderer as another planted clew, along with the scarab pin, the financial report, and the footprints."

Vance shook his head.

"No. That couldn't be. Bliss, d' ye see, couldn't have written the letter,—it's too obviously a communication from Salveter to Mrs. Bliss."

Vance picked up the assembled letter and studied it for a time.

"It's not particularly difficult to read for any one who knows something of Egyptian. It says exactly what Salveter said it did." He tossed the paper back on the desk. "There's something unspeakably devilish behind this. And the more I think of it the more I'm convinced we were not intended to find the letter. My feeling is, it was carelessly thrown away by some one—*after it had served its purpose.*"

"But what possible purpose—?" Markham began.

"If we knew the purpose, Markham," said Vance with much gravity, "we might avert another tragedy."

Markham compressed his lips grimly. I knew what was going through his mind: he was thinking of Vance's terrifying predictions in the Greene and the Bishop cases—predictions which came true with all the horror of final and ineluctable catastrophe.

"You believe this affair isn't over yet?" he asked slowly.

"I know it isn't over. The plan isn't complete. We forestalled the murderer by releasing Doctor Bliss. And now he must carry on. We've seen only the dark preliminaries of his damnable scheme—and when the plot is finally revealed, it will be monstrous. . . ."

Vance went quietly to the door leading into the hall and, opening it a few inches, looked out.

"And, Markham," he said, reclosing the door, "we must be careful—that's what I've been insisting on right along. We must not fall into any of the murderer's traps. The arrest of Doctor Bliss was one of those traps. A single false step on our part, and the plot will succeed."

He turned to Heath.

"Sergeant, will you be so good as to bring me the yellow pad and the pen and ink from the table in the museum? . . . We, too, must cover up our tracks, for we are being stalked as closely as we are stalking the murderer."

Heath, without a word, went into the museum, and a few moments later returned with the requested articles. Vance took them and sat down at the doctor's desk. Then placing Salveter's letter before him he began copying roughly the phonograms and ideograms on a sheet of the yellow pad.

"It's best, I think," he explained as he worked, "that we hide the fact that we've found the letter. The person who tore it up and threw it in the basket may suspect that we've discovered it and look for the fragments. If they're not here, he will be on his guard. It's merely a remote precaution, but we can't afford to make a slip. We're confronted by a mind of diabolical cleverness. . . ."

When he had finished transcribing a dozen or so of the symbols, he tore the paper into pieces of the same size as those of the original letter, and mixed them with the contents of the waste-basket. Then he folded up Salveter's original letter and placed it in his pocket.

"Do you mind, Sergeant, returning the paper and ink to the museum?"

"You oughta been a crook, Mr. Vance," Heath remarked good-naturedly, picking up the pad and ink-stand and disappearing through the steel door.

"I don't see any light," Markham commented gloomily. "The farther we go, the more involved the case becomes."

Vance nodded sombrely.

"There's nothing we can do now but await developments. Thus far we've checked the murderer's king; but he still has several moves. It's like one of Alekhine's chess combinations—we can't tell just what was in his mind when he began the assault. And he may produce a combination that will clean the board and leave us defenseless. . . ."

Heath reappeared at this moment, looking uneasy.

"I don't like that damn room," he grumbled. "Too many corpses. Why do these scientific bugs have to go digging up mummies and things? It's what you might call morbid."

"A perfect criticism of Egyptologists, Sergeant," Vance replied with a sympathetic grin. "Egyptology isn't an archaeological science—it's a pathological condition, a cerebral visitation—*dementia scholastica*. Once the *spirillum terrigenum* enters your system, you're lost—cursed with an incurable disease. If you dig up corpses that are thousands of years old, you're an Egyptologist; if you dig up recent corpses you're a Burke or a Hare, and the law swoops down on you. It all comes under the head of body-snatching. . . ."[20]

"Be that as it may,"—Heath was still troubled and was chewing his cigar viciously—"I don't like the things in that morgue. And I specially don't like that black coffin under the front windows. What's in it, Mr. Vance?"

"The granite sarcophagus? Really, I don't know, Sergeant. It's empty in all probability, unless Doctor Bliss uses it as a storage chest—which isn't likely, considerin' the weight of the lid."

There came a knock on the hall door, and Snitkin informed us that Guilfoyle had arrived with Doctor Bliss.

"There are one or two questions," Vance said, "that I want to ask him. Then, I think, Markham, we can toddle along: I'm fainting for muffins and marmalade. . . ."

"Quit now?" demanded Heath in astonished disgust. "What's the idea? We've just begun this investigation!"

"We've done more than that," Vance told him softly. "We've avoided every snare laid for us by the murderer. We've upset all his calculations and forced him to reconstruct his trenches. As the case stands now, it's a stalemate. The board will have to be set up again—and, fortunately for us, the murderer gets the white pieces. It's his first move. He simply *has* to win the game, d' ye see. We can afford to play for a draw."

"I'm beginning to understand what you mean, Vance," Markham nodded slowly. "We've refused to follow his false moves, and now he must rebait his trap."

"Spoken with a precision and clarity wholly unbecoming a lawyer," returned Vance, with a forced smile. Then he sobered again. "Yes, I think he will rebait the trap before he takes any final steps. And I'm hopin' that the new bait will give us a solution to the entire plot and permit the Sergeant to make his arrest."

"Well, all I've gotta say," Heath complained, "is that this is the queerest case I was ever mixed up in. We go and eat muffins, and wait for the guilty guy to spill the beans! If I was to outline that technic to O'Brien[21] he'd call an ambulance and send me to Bellevue."

"I'll see you don't go to a psychopathic ward, Sergeant," Markham said irritably, walking toward the door.

## 16. A CALL AFTER MIDNIGHT

(Friday, July 13; 5:15 P.M.)

We found Doctor Bliss in the drawing-room, slumped in a deep sprawling chair, his tweed hat pulled down over his eyes. Beside him stood Guilfoyle smirking triumphantly.

Vance was annoyed, and took no pains to hide the fact.

"Tell your efficient bloodhound to wait outside, will you, Sergeant?"

"O.K." Heath looked commiseratingly at Guilfoyle. "Out on the cement, Guil," he ordered. "And don't ask any questions. This ain't a murder case—it's a Hallowe'en party in a bug-house."

The detective grinned and left us.

Bliss lifted his eyes. He was a dejected-looking figure. His face was flushed, and apprehension and humiliation were written on his sunken features.

"Now, I suppose," he said in a quavering voice, "you'll arrest me for this heinous murder. But—oh, my God, gentlemen!—I assure you—"

Vance had stepped toward him.

"Just a moment, doctor," he broke in. "Don't upset yourself. We're not going to arrest you; but we would like an explanation of your amazin' action. Why should you, if you are innocent, attempt to leave the country?"

"Why . . . why?" The man was nervous and excited. "I was afraid—that's why. Everything is against me. All the evidence points toward me. . . . There's some one here who hates me and wants me out of the way. It's only too obvious. The planting of my scarab pin beside poor Kyle's body, and that financial report found in the murdered man's hand, and those terrible footprints leading to my study—don't you think I know what it all means? It means that I must pay the price—I, I." He struck his chest weakly. "And other things will be found; the person who killed Kyle won't rest content until I'm behind the bars—or dead. I know it—I know it! . . . That's why I tried to get away. And now you've brought me back to a living death—to a fate more awful than the one that befell my old benefactor. . . ."

His head dropped forward and a shudder ran through his body.

"Still, it was foolish to attempt to escape, doctor," Markham said gently. "You might have trusted us. I assure you no injustice will be done you. We have learned many things in the course of our investigation; and we have reason to believe that you were drugged with powdered opium during the period of the crime—"

"Powdered opium!" Bliss almost leapt out of his chair. "That's what I tasted! There was something the matter with the coffee this morning—it had a curious flavor. At first I thought Brush hadn't made it the way I'd instructed him. Then I got drowsy, and forgot all about it. . . . Opium! I know the taste. I once had dysentery in Egypt, and took opium and capsicum—my Sun Cholera Mixture[22] had run out." His mouth sagged open, and he gave Markham a look of terrified appeal. "Poisoned in my own house!" Suddenly a grim vindictiveness shone in his eyes. "You're right, sir," he said, with metallic hardness. "I shouldn't have attempted to run away. My place is here, and my duty is to help you—"

"Yes, yes, doctor." Vance was palpably bored. "Regrets are very comfortin', but we're tryin' to deal with facts. And thus far you haven't been very helpful. . . . I say, who had charge of the medical supplies?" He put the question abruptly.

"Why . . . why . . . let me see. . . ." Bliss averted his eyes and began fidgeting with the crease in his trousers.

"We'll drop the matter." Vance made a resigned gesture. "Maybe you're willing to tell us how well Mrs. Bliss knows Egyptian hieroglyphs."

Bliss looked surprised, and it took him several moments to regain his equanimity.

"She knows them practically as well as I do," he answered at length. "Her father, Abercrombie, taught her the old Egyptian language when she was a child, and she has worked with me for years in the deciphering of inscriptions. . . ."

"And Hani?"

"Oh, he has a smattering of hieroglyphic writing—nothing unusual. He lacks the trained mind—"

"And how well does Mr. Salveter know Egyptian?"

"Fairly well. He's weak on grammatical points, but his knowledge of the signs and the vocabulary is rather extensive. He has studied Greek and Arabic; and I believe he had a year or two of Assyrian. Coptic, too. The usual linguistic foundation for an archaeologist.—Scarlett, on the other hand, is something of a wizard, though he's a loyal adherent of Budge's system—like many amateurs.[23] And Budge, of course, is antiquated. Don't misunderstand me. Budge is a great man—his contributions to Egyptology are invaluable; and his publication of the Book of the Dead—"

"I know." Vance nodded with impatience. "His Index makes it possible to find almost any passage in the Papyrus of Ani. . . ."

"Just so." Bliss had begun to reveal a curious animation: his scientific enthusiasm was manifesting itself. "But Alan Gardiner is the true modern scholar. His 'Egyptian Grammar' is a profound and accurate work. The most important *opus* on Egyptology, however, is the Erman-Grapow 'Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache.' . . ."

Vance had become suddenly interested.

"Does Mr. Salveter use the Erman-Grapow 'Wörterbuch'?" he asked.

"Certainly. I insisted upon it. I ordered three sets from Leipzig—one for myself, and one each for Salveter and Scarlett."

"The signs differ considerably, I believe, from the Theinhardt type used by Budge."

"Oh, yes." Bliss removed his hat and threw it on the floor. "The consonant transliterated *u* by Budge—the quail chick—appears as *w* in the 'Wörterbuch' and every other modern work. And, of course, there's the cursive spiral sign which is also the hieroglyphic adaptation of the hieratic abbreviated form of the quail. . . ."

"Thank you, doctor." Vance took out his cigarette-case, saw he had only one *Régie* left, and returned it to his pocket. "I understand that Mr. Scarlett, before leaving the house this afternoon, went up-stairs. I rather thought, don't y' know, that he dropped in to see you."

"Yes." Bliss sank back in his chair. "A very sympathetic fellow, Scarlett."

"What did he say to you?"

"Nothing of any importance. He wished me good luck—said he'd stand by, in case I wanted him. That sort of thing."

"How long was he with you?"

"A minute or so. He went away immediately. Said he was going home."

"One more question, doctor," Vance said, after several moments' pause. "Who in this house would have any reason for wanting to saddle you with the crime of killing Mr. Kyle?"

A sudden change came over Bliss. His eyes glared straight ahead, and the lines of his face hardened into almost terrifying contours. He clutched the arms of his chair and drew in his feet. Both fear and hatred possessed him; he was a man about to leap at a mortal enemy. Then he stood up, every muscle in his body tense.

"I can't answer that question; I refuse to answer it! . . . I don't know—I don't know! But there is some one—isn't there?" He reached out and grasped Vance's arm. "You should have let me escape." A wild look came into his eyes, and he glanced hurriedly toward the door as if he feared some imminent danger lurking in the hall. "Have me arrested, Mr. Vance! Do anything but ask me to stay here. . . ." His voice had become pitifully appealing.

Vance drew away from him.

"Pull yourself together, doctor," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "Nothing is going to happen to you. . . . Go to your room and remain there till to-morrow. We'll take care of the criminal end of the case."

"But you have no idea who did this frightful thing," Bliss protested.

"Oh, but we have, don't y' know." Vance's calm assurance seemed to have a quieting effect on him. "It's only necess'ry for us to wait a bit. At present we haven't enough evidence to make an arrest. But since the murderer's main object has failed, it's almost inevitable that he will make another move. And when he does, we may get the necess'ry evidence against him."

"But suppose he takes direct action—against me?" Bliss remonstrated. "The fact that he has failed to involve me may drive him to more desperate measures."

"I hardly think so," returned Vance. "But if anything happens, you can reach me at this telephone number." He wrote his private number on a card and handed it to Bliss.

The doctor took the card eagerly, glanced at it, and slipped it into his pocket.

"I'm going up-stairs now," he said, and walked distractedly out of the room.

"Are you sure, Vance," Markham asked in a troubled voice, "that we're not subjecting Doctor Bliss to unnecessary risk?"

"Pretty sure." Vance had become thoughtful. "Anyway, it's a delicate game, and there's no other way to play it." He went to the window. "I don't know. . . ," he murmured. Then after several moments: "Sergeant, I'd like to speak to Salveter.—And there's no need for Hennessey to remain up-stairs. Let him go."

Heath, nonplussed and helpless, went into the hall and called to Hennessey.

When Salveter came into the drawing-room, Vance did not even glance in his direction.

"Mr. Salveter," he said, looking out at the dusty trees in Gramercy Park, "if I were you I'd lock my door to-night. . . . And don't write any more letters," he added. "Also, keep out of the museum."

Salveter appeared frightened by these admonitions. He studied Vance's back for some time, and then set his jaw.

"If any one starts anything round here—" he began with an almost ferocious aggressiveness.

"Oh, quite." Vance sighed. "But don't project your personality so intensively. I'm fatigued."

Salveter, after a moment's hesitation, swung about and strode from the room.

Vance came to the centre-table and rested heavily against it.

"And now, a word with Hani, and we can depart."

Heath shrugged his shoulders resignedly, and went to the door.

"Hey, Snitkin, round up that Ali Baba in the kimono."

Snitkin leapt to the staircase, and a few minutes later the Egyptian stood before us, serene and detached.

"Hani," said Vance, with an impressiveness wholly uncharacteristic, "you will do well to watch over this household to-night."

"Yes, *effendi*. I comprehend perfectly. The spirit of Sakhmet may return and complete the task she has begun—"

"Exactly." Vance gave a tired smile. "Your feline lady fozzled things this morning, and she'll probably be back to tie up a few loose ends. . . . Watch for her—do you understand?"

Hani inclined his head.

"Yes, *effendi*. We understand each other."

"That's positively rippin'. And incidentally, Hani, what is the number of Mr. Scarlett's domicile in Irving Place?"

"Ninety-six." The Egyptian revealed considerable interest in Vance's question.

"That will be all. . . . And give my regards to your lion-headed goddess."

"It may be Anûbis who will return, *effendi*," said Hani sepulchrally, as he left us.

Vance looked whimsically at Markham.

"The stage is set, and the curtain will go up anon. . . . Let's move on. There's nothing more we can do here. And I'm totterin' with hunger."

As we passed out into Twentieth Street Vance led the way toward Irving Place.

"I rather think we owe it to Scarlett to let him know how things stand," he explained negligently. "He brought us the sad tidings and is probably all agog and aflutter. He lives just round the corner."

Markham glanced at Vance inquisitively, but made no comment. Heath, however, grunted impatiently.

"It looks to me like we're doing 'most everything but clean up this homicide," he grouched.



"Scarlett's a shrewd lad; he may have conjured up an idea or two," Vance returned.

"I got ideas, too," the Sergeant declared maliciously. "But what good are they? If I was handling this case, I'd arrest the whole outfit, put 'em in separate cells, and let 'em sweat. By the time they got *habeas-corpus* proceedings started I'd know a damn sight more than I do now."

"I doubt it, Sergeant," Vance spoke mildly. "I think you'd know even less. . . . Ah, here's number ninety-six."

He turned into the Colonial entrance of an old brick house a few doors from Twentieth Street, and rang the bell.

Scarlett's quarters—two small rooms with a wide, arched doorway between—were on the second floor at the front. They were furnished severely but comfortably in Jacobean style, and typified the serious-minded bachelor. Scarlett had opened the door at our knock and invited us in with the stiff cordiality of the English host. He seemed relieved to see us.

"I've been in a frightful stew for hours," he said. "Been trying to analyze this affair. I was on the point of running round to the museum and finding out what progress you gentlemen had made."

"We've made a bit of progress," Vance told him; "but it's not of a tangible nature. We've decided to let matters float for a while in the anticipation that the guilty person will proceed with his plot and thus supply us with definite evidence."

"Ah!" Scarlett took his pipe slowly from his mouth and looked sharply at Vance. "That remark makes me think that maybe you and I have reached the same conclusion. There was no earthly reason for Kyle's having been killed unless his demise was to lead to something else—"

"To what, for example?"

"By Jove, I wish I knew!" Scarlett packed his pipe with his finger and held a match to it. "There are several possible explanations."

"My word! Are there? . . . Several? Well, well! Could you bear to outline one of them? We're dashed interested, don't y' know."

"Oh, I say, Vance! Really, now, I'd hate like the Old Harry to wrong any one," Scarlett spluttered. "Hani, however, didn't care a great deal for Doctor Bliss—"

"Thanks awfully. Astonishin' as it may seem, I noted that fact myself this morning. Have you any other little beam of sunshine you'd care to launch in our direction?"

"I think Salveter is hopelessly smitten with Meryt-Amen."

"Fancy that!"

Vance took out his cigarette-case and tapped his one remaining *Régie* on the lid. Deliberately he lighted it and, after a deep inhalation, looked up seriously.

"Yes, Scarlett," he drawled, "it's quite possible that you and I have arrived at the same conclusion. But naturally we can't make a move until we have something definite with which to back up our hypotheses. . . . By the by, Doctor Bliss attempted to leave the country this afternoon. If it hadn't been for one of Sergeant Heath's minions he presumably would be on his way to Montreal at this moment."

I expected to see Scarlett express astonishment at this news, but instead he merely nodded his head.

"I'm not surprised. He's certainly in a funk. Can't say that I blame him. Things appear rather black for him." Scarlett puffed on his pipe, and shot a surreptitious look at Vance. "The more I think about this affair, the more I'm impressed with the possibility that, after all—"

"Oh, quite," Vance cut him short. "But we're not pantin' for possibilities. What we crave is specific data."

"That's going to be difficult, I'm afraid," Scarlett grew thoughtful. "There's been too much cleverness—"

"Ah! That's the point—*too much cleverness*. Exactly! Therein lies the weakness of the crime. And I'm hopefully countin' on that *abundantia cautelae*," Vance smiled. "Really, y' know, Scarlett, I'm not as dense as I've appeared thus far. My object in stultifyin' my perceptions has been to wangle the murderer into new efforts. Sooner or later he'll overplay his hand."

Scarlett did not answer for some time. Finally he spoke.

"I appreciate your confidence, Vance. You're very sporting. But my opinion is, you'll never be able to convict the murderer."

"You may be right," Vance admitted. "Nevertheless, I'm appealing to you to keep an eye on the situation. . . . But I warn you to be careful. The murderer of Kyle is a ruthless johnnie."

"You don't have to tell me that," Scarlett got up and, walking to the fireplace, leaned against the marble mantel. "I could tell you volumes about him."

"I'm sure you could." To my astonishment Vance accepted the other's startling statement without the slightest manifestation of surprise. "But there's no need to go into that now." He, too, rose, and going to the door gave a casual wave of farewell to Scarlett. "We're toddlin' along. Just thought we'd let you know how things stood and admonish you to be careful."

"Very kind of you, Vance. Fact is, I'm frightfully upset—nervous as a Persian kitten. . . . Wish I could work; but all my materials are at the museum. I know I sha'n't sleep a wink to-night."

"Well, cheerio!" Vance turned the door-knob.

"I say, Vance!" Scarlett stepped forward urgently. "Are you, by any chance, going back to the Bliss house to-day?"

"No. We're through there for the time being." Vance's voice was quiet and droning, as with ennui. "Why do you ask?"

Scarlett fiddled at his pipe with a sort of sudden agitation.

"No reason." He looked at Vance with a constricted brow. "No reason at all. I'm anxious about the situation. There's no telling what may happen."

"Whatever happens, Scarlett," Vance said, with a certain abruptness, "Mrs. Bliss will be perfectly safe. I think we can trust Hani to see to that."

"Yes—of course," the man murmured. "Faithful dog, Hani. . . . And who'd want to harm Meryt?"

"Who, indeed?" Vance was now standing in the hallway, holding the door open for Markham and Heath and me to pass through.

Scarlett, animated by some instinct of hospitality, came forward.

"Sorry you're going," he said perfunctorily. "If I can be of any help. . . . So you've ended your investigation at the house?"

"For the moment, at least," Vance paused. The rest of us had passed him and were waiting at the head of the stairs. "We're not

contemplatin' returning to the Bliss establishment until something new comes to light."

"Right-o." Scarlett nodded with a curious significance. "If I learn anything I'll telephone to you."

We went out into Irving Place, and Vance hailed a taxicab.

"Food—sustenance," he moaned. "Let us see. . . . The Brevoort isn't far away. . . ."

We had an elaborate tea at the old Brevoort on lower Fifth Avenue, and shortly afterward Heath departed for the Homicide Bureau to make out his report and to pacify the newspaper reporters who would be swarming in on him the moment the case went on record.

"You had better stand by," Vance suggested to the Sergeant, as he left us; "for I'm full of anticipation, and we couldn't push forward without you."

"I'll be at the office till ten to-night," Heath told him sulkily. "And after that Mr. Markham knows where to reach me at home. But, I'm here to tell you, I'm disgusted."

"So are we all," said Vance cheerfully.

Markham telephoned to Swacker[24] to close the office and go home. Then the three of us drove to Longue Vue for dinner. Vance refused to discuss the case and insisted upon talking about Arturo Toscanini, the new conductor of the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra.

"A vastly overrated *Kapellmeister*," he complained, as he tasted his *canard Molière*. "It strikes me he is temperamentally incapable of sensing the classic ideals in the great symphonic works of Brahms and Beethoven. . . . I say, the tomato purée in this sauce is excellent, but the Madeira wine is too vineg'ry. Prohibiton, Markham, worked devastatin' havoc on the food of this country: it practically eliminated gastronomic aesthetics. . . . But to return to Toscanini. I'm positively amazed at the panegyrics with which the critics have showered him. His secret ideals, I'm inclined to think, are Puccini and Giordano and Respighi. And no man with such ideals should attempt to interpret the classics. I've heard him do Brahms and Beethoven and Mozart, and they all exuded a strong Italian aroma under his baton. But the Americans worship him. They have no sense of pure intellectual beauty, of sweeping classic lines and magistral form. They crave strongly contrasted *pianissimos* and *fortissimos*, sudden changes in tempi, leaping *accelerandos* and crawling *ritardandos*. And Toscanini gives it all to 'em. . . . Furtwangler, Walter, Klemperer, Mengelberg, Van Hoogstraaten—any one of these conductors is, in my opinion, superior to Toscanini when it comes to the great German classics. . . ."

"Would you mind, Vance," Markham asked irritably, "dropping these irrelevancies and outlining to me your theory of the Kyle case?"

"I'd mind terribly," was Vance's amiable reply. "After the *Bar-le-duc* and *Gervaise*, however. . . ."

As a matter of fact it was nearly midnight before the subject of the tragedy was again broached. We had returned to Vance's apartment after a long drive through Van Cortlandt Park; and Markham and he and I had gone up to the little roof garden to seek whatever air was stirring along East Thirty-eighth Street. Currie had made a delicious champagne cup—what the Viennese call a *Bowle*—with fresh fruit in it; and we sat under the summer stars smoking and waiting. I say, "waiting," for there is no doubt that each of us expected something untoward to happen.

Vance, for all his detachment, was inwardly tense—I could tell this by his slow, restrained movements. And Markham was loath to go home: he was far from satisfied with the way the investigation had progressed, and was hoping—as a result of Vance's prognostication—that something would develop to take the case out of the hazy realm of conjecture and place it upon a sound basis where definite action could be taken.

Shortly before twelve o'clock Markham held a long conversation with Heath on the telephone. When he hung up the receiver he heaved a hopeless sigh.

"I don't like to think of what the opposition papers are going to say to-morrow," he remarked gloomily, as he cut the tip off of a fresh cigar. "We've got absolutely nowhere in this investigation. . . ."

"Oh, yes, we have." Vance was staring up into the sultry night. "We've made amazin' progress. The case, d' ye see, is closed as far as the solution is concerned. We're merely waitin' for the murderer to get panic-stricken. The moment he does, we'll be able to take action."

"Why must you be so confounded mysterious?" Markham was in a vile humor. "You're always indulging in cabalistic rituals. The Delphic Pythia herself was no vaguer or more obscure than you. If you think you know who killed Kyle, why not come out with it?"

"I can't do it." Vance, too, was distressed. "Really, y' know, Markham, I'm not trying to be illusory. I'm strivin' to find some tangible evidence to corroborate my theory. And if we bide our time we'll secure that evidence." He looked at Markham seriously. "There's danger, of course. Something unforeseen may happen. But there's no human way to stop it. Whatever step we might take now would lead to tragedy. We have given the murderer an abundance of rope; let us hope he will hang himself. . . ."

It was exactly twenty minutes past twelve that night when the thing that Vance had been waiting for happened. We had been sitting in silence for perhaps ten minutes when Currie stepped out into the garden carrying a portable telephone.

"I beg your pardon, sir—" he began; but before he could continue Vance had risen and walked toward him.

"Plug it in, Currie," he ordered. "I'll answer the call."

Vance took the instrument and leaned against the French door.

"Yes . . . yes. What has happened?" His voice was low and resonant. He listened for perhaps thirty seconds, his eyes half closed. Then he said merely: "We'll be there at once," and handed the telephone to Currie.

He was unquestionably puzzled, and stood for several moments, his head down, deep in thought.

"It's not what I expected," he said, as if to himself. "It doesn't fit."

Presently he lifted his head, like one struck sharply.

"But it *does* fit! Of course it fits! It's what I should have expected." Despite the careless pose of his body his eyes were animated. "Logic! How damnably logical! . . . Come, Markham. Phone Heath—have him meet us at the museum as soon as he can get there. . . ."

Markham had risen and was glaring at Vance in ferocious alarm.

"Who was that on the phone?" he demanded. "And what has happened?"

"Please be tranquil, Markham." Vance spoke quietly. "It was Doctor Bliss who spoke to me. And, accordin' to his hysterical tale,

there has been an attempted murder in his house. I promised him we'd look in. . . ."

Markham had already snatched the telephone from Currie's hands and was frantically asking for Heath's number.

## 17. THE GOLDEN DAGGER

(Saturday, July 14; 12:45 A.M.)

We had to walk to Fifth Avenue to find a taxicab at that hour, and even then there was five minutes' wait until an unoccupied one came by. The result was that it was fully twenty minutes before we turned into Gramercy Park and drew up in front of the Bliss residence.

As we alighted another taxicab swung round the corner of Irving Place and nearly skidded into us as its brakes were suddenly thrown on. The door was flung open before the cab had come to a standstill, and the bulky figure of Sergeant Heath projected itself to the sidewalk. Heath lived in East Eleventh Street and had managed to dress and reach the museum almost simultaneously with our arrival.

"My word, Sergeant!" Vance hailed him. "We synchronize, don't y' know. We arrive at the same destination at the same time, but from opposite directions. Jolly idea."

Heath acknowledged the somewhat enigmatical pleasantry with a grunt.

"What's all the excitement anyway?" he asked Markham. "You didn't give me much of an earful over the phone."

"An attempt has been made on Doctor Bliss's life," Markham told him.

Heath whistled softly.

"I certainly didn't expect that, sir."

"Neither did Mr. Vance." The rejoinder was intended as a taunt.

We went up the stone steps to the vestibule, but before we could ring the bell Brush opened the door. He placed his forefinger to his lips and, leaning forward mysteriously, said in a stage whisper:

"Doctor Bliss requests that you gentlemen be very quiet so as not to disturb the other members of the household. . . . He's in his bedchamber waiting for you."

Brush was clad in a flannel robe and carpet slippers, but despite the hot sultriness of the night he was visibly shivering. His face, always pale, now appeared positively ghastly in the dim light.

We stepped into the hall, and Brush closed the door cautiously with trembling hands. Suddenly, Vance wheeled about and caught him by the arm, spinning him round.

"What do you know about the occurrence here to-night?" he demanded in a low tone.

The butler's eyes bulged and his jaw sagged.

"Nothing—nothing," he managed to stammer.

"Really, now! Then why are you so frightened?" Vance did not relax his hold.

"I'm afraid of this place," came the plaintive answer. "I want to leave here. Strange things are going on—"

"So they are. But don't fret; you'll be able to look for another berth before long."

"I'm glad of that, sir." The man seemed greatly relieved. "But what *has* happened to-night, sir?"

"If you're ignorant of what has taken place," returned Vance, "how do you happen to be here at this hour awaiting our arrival and acting like a villain in a melodrama?"

"I was told to wait for you, sir. Doctor Bliss came down-stairs to my room—"

"Where is your room, Brush?"

"In the basement, at the rear, just off the kitchen."

"Very good. Go on."

"Well, sir, Doctor Bliss came to my room about half an hour ago. He seemed very much upset, and frightened—if you know what I mean. He told me to wait at the front door for you gentlemen—that you'd arrive any minute. And he instructed me to make no noise and also to warn you—"

"Then he went up-stairs?"

"At once, sir."

"Where is Doctor Bliss's room?"

"It's the rear door on the second floor, just at the head of the stairs. The forward door is the mistress's bedchamber."

Vance released the man's arm.

"Did you hear any disturbance to-night?"

"None, sir. Everything has been quiet. Every one retired early, and I myself went to bed before eleven."

"You may go back to bed now," Vance told him.

"Yes, sir." And Brush went quickly away and disappeared through the door at the rear of the hall.

Vance made a gesture for us to follow him and led the way up-stairs. A small electric bulb was burning in the upper hall, but we did not need it to find Doctor Bliss's room, for his door was a few inches ajar and a shaft of light fell diagonally across the floor outside.

Vance, without knocking, pushed the door inward and stepped into the room. Bliss was sitting rigidly in a straight chair in the far corner, leaning slightly forward, his eyes riveted on the door. In his hand was a brutal-looking army revolver. At our entrance he leapt to his feet, and brought the gun up simultaneously.

"Tut, tut, doctor!" Vance smiled whimsically. "Put the firearms away and chant us the distressin' rune."

Bliss drew an audible sigh of relief, and placed the weapon on a small table at his side.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Vance," he said in a strained tone. "And you, Mr. Markham." He acknowledged Heath's and my presence with a slight, jerky bow. "The thing you predicted has happened. . . . There's a murderer in this house!"

"Well, well! That would hardly come under the head of news." (I could not understand Vance's attitude.) "We've known that fact

since eleven this morning."

Bliss, too, was perplexed and, I imagine, somewhat piqued by Vance's negligent manner, for he stepped stiffly to the bed and, pointing at the headboard, remarked irritably:

"And there's the proof!"

The bed was an old Colonial piece, of polished mahogany, with a great curving headboard rising at least four feet above the mattress. It stood against the left-hand wall at a right angle to the door.

The object at which Bliss pointed with a quivering finger was an antique Egyptian dagger, about eleven inches long, whose blade was driven into the headboard just above the pillow. The direction of penetration was on a line with the door.

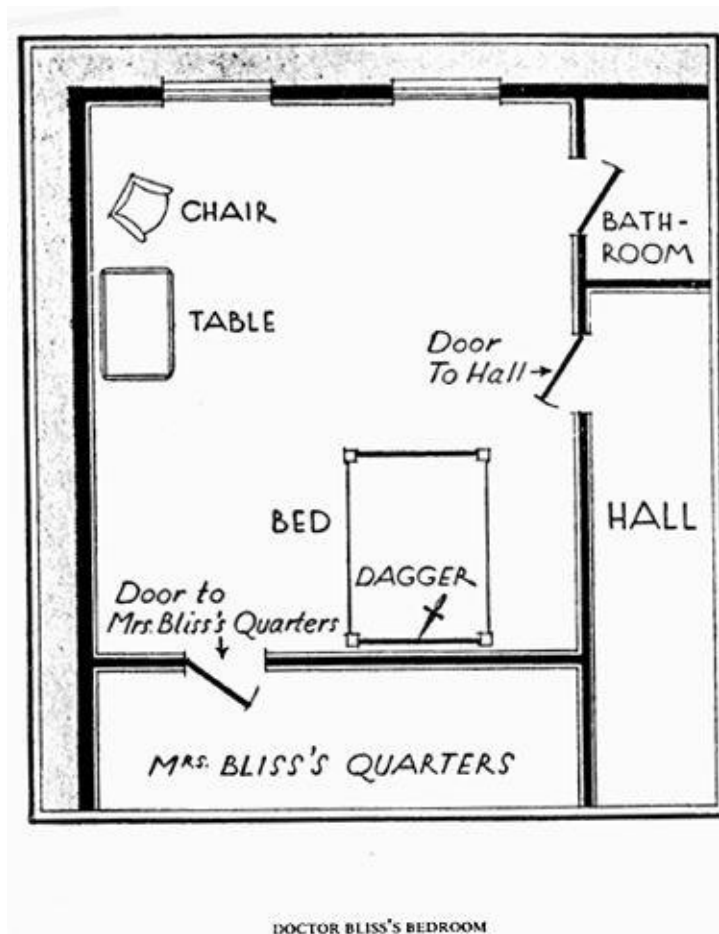
We all moved forward and stood for several seconds staring at the sinister sight. The dagger had undoubtedly been thrown with great force to have entered the hard mahogany wood so firmly; and it was obvious that if any one had been lying on the pillow at the time it was hurled, he would have received the full brunt of it somewhere in the throat.

Vance studied the position of the dagger, gauging its alignment and angulation with the door, and then he reached out his hand to grasp it. But Heath intercepted the movement.

"Use your handkerchief, Mr. Vance," he admonished. "There'll be fingerprints—"

"Oh, no, there won't, Sergeant." Vance spoke with an impressive air of knowledge. "Whoever threw that dagger was careful to avoid any such incriminatin' tokens. . . ." Whereupon he drew the blade, with considerable difficulty, from the headboard, and took it to the table-lamp.

It was a beautiful and interesting piece of workmanship. Its handle was ornamented with decorations of granulated gold and with strips of cloisonné and semi-precious stones—amethysts, turquoises, garnets, carnelians, and tiny cuttings of obsidian, chalcedony and felspar. The haft was surmounted with a lotiform knob of rock crystal, and at the hilt was a chair-scroll design in gold wire. The blade was of hardened gold adorned with shallow central grooves ending with an engraved palmette decoration.<sup>[25]</sup>



"Late Eighteenth Dynasty," murmured Vance, fingering the dagger and studying its designs. "Pretty, but decadent. The rugged simplicity of early Egyptian art went frightfully to pot during the opulent renaissance following the Hyksos invasion. . . . I say, Doctor Bliss; how did you come by this flamboyant gewgaw?"

Bliss was ill at ease, and when he answered his tone was apologetic and embarrassed.

"The fact is, Mr. Vance, I smuggled that dagger out of Egypt. It was an unusual and unexpected find, and purely accidental. It's a most valuable relic, and I was afraid the Egyptian Government would claim it."

"I can well imagine they'd want to keep it in their own country." Vance tossed the dagger to the table. "And where did you ordinarily keep it?"

"Under some papers in one of my desk drawers in the study," he replied presently. "It was a rather personal item, and I thought it best not to list it in the museum."

"Most discreet. . . . Who besides yourself knew of its existence?"

"My wife, of course, and—" He broke off suddenly, and a peculiar light came in his eyes.

"Come, come, doctor." Vance spoke with annoyance. "This won't do. Finish your sentence."

"It is finished. My wife was the only person I confided in."

Vance accepted the statement without further argument.

"Still," he said, "any one might have discovered it, what?"

Bliss nodded slowly.

"Provided he had been snooping through my desk."

"Exactly. When did you last see the dagger in your desk drawer?"

"This morning. I was searching for some foolscap paper on which to check my report for poor Kyle. . . ."

"And who, to your knowledge, has been in your study since we left the house this afternoon?"

Bliss pondered, and shortly a startled expression came over his face.

"I'd rather not say."

"We can't do anything to help you, doctor, if you take that attitude," Vance said severely. "Was it Mr. Salveter who was in the study?"

Bliss paused for several seconds. Then he set his jaw.

"Yes!" The word fairly burst from his lips. "I sent him to the study after dinner to-night to get me a memorandum book. . . ."

"And where did you keep the book?"

"In the desk." This information was given reluctantly. "But any attempt to connect Salveter—"

"We're not attemptin' just now to connect any one with this episode." Vance interrupted. "We're merely tryin' to accumulate all the information possible. . . . However, you must admit, doctor," Vance added, "that young Mr. Salveter is—how shall I put it?—rather interested in Mrs. Bliss—"

"What's that?" Bliss stiffened and glared at Vance ferociously. "How dare you intimate such a thing? My wife, sir—"

"No one has criticised Mrs. Bliss," Vance said mildly. "And one A.M. is hardly the time for indignant pyrotechnics."

Bliss sank into his chair and covered his face with his hands.

"It may be true," he conceded in a despairing voice. "I'm too old for her—too much absorbed in my work. . . . But that doesn't mean that the boy would attempt to kill me."

"Perhaps not." Vance spoke indifferently. "But who, then, do you suspect of endeavorin' to sever your carotid?"

"I don't know—I don't know." The man's voice rose pitifully.

At this moment the door leading into the front apartment opened, and Mrs. Bliss stood on the threshold, a long flowing robe of oriental pattern draped about her. She was perfectly calm, and her eyes were steady, if a bit brilliant, as they took in the scene before her.

"Why have you gentlemen returned at this hour?" she inquired imperiously.

"An attempt has been made on your husband's life, madam," Markham answered sombrely; "and he telephoned to us—"

"An attempt on his life? Impossible!" She spoke with over-emphasis, and her face turned perceptibly pale. Then she went to Bliss and put her arms about him in an attitude of affectionate protection. Her eyes were blazing as she lifted them to Vance. "What absurdity is this? Who would want to take my husband's life?"

"Who, indeed?" Vance met her gaze calmly. "If we knew, we could at least arrest the person for assault with a deadly weapon—I believe that's the phrase."

"A deadly weapon?" She frowned with obvious distress. "Oh, tell me what happened!"

Vance indicated the dagger on the table.

"All we know thus far is that yon golden dagger was projectin' from the head of the bed when we arrived. We were on the point of asking your husband for a full account of the affair when you appeared—a charming Nefretiti—at the door. . . . Perhaps," he went on, turning to Bliss, "the doctor will recount the entire episode for us now."

"There's really little to tell." Bliss sat up and began nervously to make creases in the folds of his dressing-gown. "I came here to my room shortly after dinner, and went to bed. But I couldn't sleep, and got up. Just then Salveter passed my door on his way up-stairs and I asked him to fetch the memorandum book from the study,—I thought I might take my mind off the dreadful events of the day—"

"One moment, doctor," Vance interposed. "Was your door open?"

"Yes. I had opened it when I arose, in order to get a little more air in the room,—the atmosphere was stifling. . . . Then I went over a few old notes and entries relating to last winter's excavations. But I couldn't keep my mind on them, and finally I closed the door, switched off the lights, and lay down again on the bed."

"That would have been about what time?"

"Between half past ten and eleven, I should say. . . . I dozed intermittently till midnight—I could see the time by that clock with the luminous dial—and then became unaccountably restless. I got to thinking about poor Kyle, and all inclination to sleep left me. However, I was dog-tired physically, and lay quite still. . . . About a quarter past twelve—the house was very quiet, you understand—I thought I could hear footsteps on the stairs—"

"Which stairs, doctor?"

"I couldn't determine. The footsteps might have been coming down from the third floor, or they might have been ascending from the first floor. They were very quiet, and if I had not been wide awake and keyed up I wouldn't have noticed them. As it was, I couldn't be sure, though at one time I imagined I heard a slight creak as if a board were a little loose under the carpet."

"And then?"

"I lay speculating on who it might be, for I knew the other members of the house had retired early. I did not exactly worry about the sounds until I heard them approach my own door and suddenly halt. Then your warning, Mr. Vance, swept over me with full force, and I felt that some terrible unknown danger was lurking on the threshold. I was, I admit, temporarily paralyzed with fright: I could feel the roots of my hair tingle, and my body broke out in cold perspiration."

He took a deep breath, as if to rid himself of a haunting memory.

"Just then the door began to open slowly and softly. The light in the hall had been turned out and the room here was in almost pitch darkness, so I was unable to see anything. But I could hear the gentle swish of the door as it swung open, and I could feel the mild current of air that came in from the hall. . . ."

A tremor ran over his body, and his eyes glowed unnaturally.

"I would have called out, but my throat seemed constricted, and I did not want to imperil Mrs. Bliss, who might have answered my call and run unwittingly into something dangerous and deadly. . . . And then the blinding ray of a flash-light was thrown directly into my eyes, and I instinctively lurched to the far side of the bed. At that moment I heard a swift, brushing sound followed by a dull wooden detonation near my head. And immediately I became conscious of footsteps retreating—"

"In which direction?" Vance again interrupted.

"I'm not sure—they were very faint. I was aware only of their stealthy retreat. . . ."

"What did you do after that, doctor?"

"I waited several minutes. Then I cautiously closed the door and switched on the lights. It was at that moment I realized what had made the noise at the head of the bed, for the first thing I saw was the dagger. And I knew that I had been the object of a murderous attack."

Vance nodded and, picking up the dagger, weighed it on the palm of his hand.

"Yes," he mused; "it's blade-heavy and could easily have been thrown accurately even by an amateur. . . . A peculiar form of assassination, though," he went on, almost to himself. "Much simpler and surer for the wielder to have sneaked to the bed and thrust it into his intended victim's ribs. . . . Most peculiar! Unless, of course—" He stopped and glanced thoughtfully at the bed. Presently he shrugged his shoulders, and looked at Bliss. "After discovering the dagger, I opine, you telephoned to me."

"Within five minutes. I listened at the door a while and then went down to the study and called your number. After that I roused Brush and told him to watch for you at the front door. I came back up-stairs,—I'd armed myself with my revolver while in the study,—and awaited your arrival."

Mrs. Bliss had been watching her husband with a look of deep anxiety during his recital.

"I heard the sound of the dagger striking the headboard," she said in a low, fearful voice. "My bed is against the other side of the wall. It startled me and woke me up, but I didn't give it a second thought, and went to sleep again. She threw her head back and glared at Vance. "This is shameful and outrageous! You insist upon my husband staying in this house that harbors a murderer—a murderer who is plotting against him—and you do nothing to protect him."

"But nothing has happened to him, Mrs. Bliss," Vance replied with gentle sternness. "He has lost an hour's sleep, but really, y' know, that's not a serious catastrophe. And I can assure you that no further danger will beset him." He looked straight into the woman's eyes, and I was conscious that some understanding passed between them in that moment of mutual scrutiny.

"I do hope you find the guilty person," she said with slow, tragic emphasis. "I can bear the truth—now."

"You are very courageous, madam," Vance murmured. "And in the meantime you can best help us by retiring to your room and waiting there until you hear from us. You can trust me."

"Oh, I know I can!" There was a catch in her voice. Then she bent impulsively, touched her lips to Bliss's forehead, and returned to her room.

Vance's eyes followed her with a curious expression: I could not determine if it was one of regret or sorrow or admiration. When the door had closed after her he strolled to the table and replaced the dagger on it.

"I was just wonderin', doctor," he said. "Don't you lock or bolt your door at night?"

"Always," was the immediate reply. "It makes me nervous to sleep with an unlocked door."

"But what about to-night?"

"That is what puzzles me." Bliss's forehead was knit in perplexity. "I'm sure I locked it when I first came to my room. But, as I told you, I got up later and opened the door to get some air. The only explanation I can think of is that when I went back to bed I forgot to relock the door. It's possible of course, for I was very much upset. . . ."

"It couldn't have been unlocked from the outside?"

"No, I'm sure it couldn't. The key was in the lock, just as you see it now."

"What about finger-prints on the outside knob?" Heath queried. "That cut glass would take 'em easy."

"My word, Sergeant!" Vance shook his head despairingly. "The concocter of this plot knows better than to leave his visitin' card wherever he goes. . . ."

Bliss sprang to his feet.

"An idea has just struck me," he exclaimed. "There was a gold-and-cloisonné sheath to that dagger; and if the sheath should not be in my desk drawer now, perhaps—perhaps—"

"Yes, yes. Quite." Vance nodded. "I see your point. The sheath might still be in the frustrated assassin's possession. An excellent clew. . . . Sergeant, would you mind going with Doctor Bliss to the study to ascertain if the sheath was taken with the dagger? No use worryin' ourselves about it if it's still in the drawer."

Heath went promptly to the hall, followed by Bliss. We could hear them descending to the first floor.

"What do you make of this, Vance?" Markham asked, when we were alone. "It looks pretty serious to me."

"I make a great deal of it," Vance returned sombrely. "And it *is* pretty serious. But, thank Heaven, the *coup* was not very brilliant. The whole thing was frightfully botched."

"Yes, I can see that," Markham agreed. "Imagine any one hurling a knife six feet or more when he could have dealt a single thrust in a vital spot."

"Oh, that?" Vance lifted his eyebrows. "I wasn't thinking of the technic of the knife-thrower. There were other points about the affair still less intelligent. I can't understand it altogether. Perhaps too much panic. Anyway we may get a definite key to the plot through the doctor's suggestion about the sheath."

Bliss and Heath were heard returning up the stairs.

"Well, it's gone," the Sergeant informed us, as the two stepped into the room.

"No doubt taken with the dagger," Bliss supplemented.

"Suppose I send for a couple of the boys and give the house the once-over," Heath suggested.

"That's not necess'ry, Sergeant," Vance told him. "I've a feelin' it won't be hard to find."

Markham was becoming annoyed at Vance's vagueness.

"I suppose," he said, with a tinge of sarcasm, "you can tell us exactly where we can find the sheath."

"Yes, I rather think so," Vance spoke with thoughtful seriousness. "However, I'll verify my theory later. . . . In the meantime"—he addressed himself to Bliss—"I'd be greatly obliged if you'd remain in your room until we finish our investigation."

Bliss bowed in acquiescence.

"We're going to the drawing-room for a while," Vance continued. "There's a little work to be done there."

He moved toward the hall, then stopped as if on sudden impulse and, going to the table, slipped the dagger into his pocket. Bliss closed the door after us, and we could hear the key turn in the lock. Markham and Heath and I started down the stairs, Vance bringing up the rear.

We had descended but a few steps when a calm, flat voice from the upper hall arrested us.

"Can I be of any assistance, *effendi*?"

The unexpected sound in that dim quiet house startled us, and we instinctively turned. At the head of the stairs leading to the third floor stood the shadowy figure of Hani, his flowing kaftan a dark mass against the palely lighted wall beyond.

"Oh, rather!" Vance answered cheerfully. "We were just repairin' to the drawing-room to hold a little conversational *séance*. Do join us, Hani."



## 18. A LIGHT IN THE MUSEUM

(Saturday, July 14; 1:15 A.M.)

Hani joined us in the drawing room. He was very calm and dignified, and his inscrutable eyes rested impassively on Vance like those of an ancient Egyptian priest meditating before the shrine of Osiris.

"How do you happen to be up and about at this hour?" Vance asked casually. "Another attack of gastritis?"

"No, *effendi*," Hani spoke in slow, measured tones. "I rose when I heard you talking to Brush. I sleep with my door open always."

"Perhaps, then, you heard Sakhmet when she returned to the house tonight."

"Did Sakhmet return?" The Egyptian lifted his head slightly in mild interest.

"In a manner of speaking. . . . But she's a most inefficient deity. She bungled everything again."

"Are you sure she did not intentionally bungle things?" Despite the droning quality of Hani's voice, there was a significant note in it. Vance regarded him for a moment. Then:

"Did you hear footsteps on the stairs or along the second-floor corridor shortly after midnight?"

The man shook his head slowly.

"I heard nothing. But I was asleep for at least an hour before you arrived; and the soft tread of footsteps on the deep carpet would scarcely have been sufficient to rouse me."

"Doctor Bliss himself," Vance explained, "came down-stairs and telephoned to me. You did not hear him either?"

"The first sound I perceived was when you gentlemen came into the front hall and talked to Brush. Your voices, or perhaps the door opening, awakened me. Later I could hear your muffled tones in Doctor Bliss's bedroom, which is just below mine; but I could not distinguish anything that was said."

"And of course you were not aware that any one turned off the light in the second-story hall round midnight."

"Had I not been asleep I would certainly have noticed it, as the light shines dimly up the stairs into my room. But when I awoke the light was on as usual." Hani frowned slightly. "Who would have turned the hall light off at that hour?"

"I wonder. . . ." Vance did not take his eyes from the Egyptian. "Doctor Bliss has just told us that it was some one who had designs on his life."

"Ah!" The exclamation was like a sigh of relief. "But the attempt, I gather, was not successful."

"No. It was quite a fiasco. The technic, I might say, was both stupid and hazardous."

"It was not Sakhmet," Hani's pronouncement was almost sepulchral.

"Really, now!" Vance smiled slightly. "She is still reclining, then, by the side of the great west wind of heaven.<sup>[26]</sup> . . . I'm jolly glad to be able to rule her out. And since no occult force was at work, perhaps you can suggest who would have had a motive to cut the doctor's throat."

"There are many who would not weep if he were to quit this life; but I know of none who would take it upon himself to precipitate that departure."

Vance lighted a *Régie* and sat down.

"Why, Hani, did you imagine you might be of service to us?"

"Like you, *effendi*," came the soft reply, "I expected that something distressing, and perhaps violent, would happen in this house to-night. And when I heard you enter and go to Doctor Bliss's room, it occurred to me that the looked-for event had come to pass. So I waited on the upper landing until you came out."

"Most considerate and thoughtful of you," Vance murmured, and took several puffs on his cigarette. After a moment he asked: "If Mr. Salveter had emerged from his room to-night after you had gone to bed, would you have known of the fact?"

The Egyptian hesitated, and his eyes contracted.

"I think I would. His room is directly opposite mine—"

"I'm familiar with the arrangement."

"It does not seem probable that Mr. Salveter could have unlocked his door and come out without my being cognizant of it."

"It's possible though, is it not?" Vance was insistent. "If you were asleep, and Mr. Salveter had good reason for not disturbing you, he might have emerged so cautiously that you would have slept on in complete ignorance of his act."

"It is barely possible," Hani admitted unwillingly. "But I am quite sure that he did not leave his room after retiring."

"Your wish, I fear, is father to your assurance," Vance sighed. "However, we sha'n't belabor the point."

Hani was watching Vance with lowering concern.

"Did Doctor Bliss suggest that Mr. Salveter left his room tonight?"

"Oh, to the contr'y," Vance assured him. "The doctor said quite emphatically that any attempt to connect Mr. Salveter with the stealthy steps outside of his door at midnight would be a grave error."

"Doctor Bliss is wholly correct," the Egyptian declared.

"And yet, Hani, the doctor insisted that a would-be assassin was prowling about the house. Who else could it have been?"

"I cannot imagine," Hani appeared almost indifferent.

"You do not think that it could have been Mrs. Bliss?"

"Never!" The man's tone had become quickly animated. "Meryt-Amen would have had no reason to go into the hall. She has access to her husband's room through a communicating door—"

"So I observed a while ago,—she joined our *pour-parler* in the doctor's room. And I must say, Hani, that she was most anxious for us to find the person who had made the attempt on her husband's life."

"Anxious—and sad, *effendi*," A new note crept into Hani's voice. "She does not yet understand the things that have happened to-day."

But when she does—"

"We won't speculate along those lines now," Vance cut in brusquely. He reached in his pocket and drew out the golden dagger. "Did you ever see that?" he asked, holding the weapon toward the Egyptian.

The man's eyes opened wide as he stared at the glittering, jewelled object. At first he appeared fascinated, but the next moment his face clouded, and the muscles of his jowls worked spasmodically. A smouldering anger had invaded him.

"Where did that Pharaonic dagger come from?" he asked, striving to control his emotion.

"It was brought from Egypt by Doctor Bliss," Vance told him.

Hani took the dagger and held it reverently under the table-lamp.

"It could only have come from the tomb of Ai. Here on the crystal knob is faintly engraved the king's cartouche. Behold: Kheper-kheperu-Rê Iry-Maät—"

"Yes, yes. The last Pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The doctor found the dagger during his excavations in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings." Vance was watching the other intently. "You are quite positive you have never seen it before?"

Hani drew himself up proudly.

"Had I seen it, I would have reported it to my Government. It would no longer be in the possession of an alien desecrator, but in the country where it belongs, cared for by loving hands at Cairo. . . . Doctor Bliss did well to keep it hidden."

There was a bitter hatred in his words, but suddenly his manner changed.

"May I be permitted to ask when you first saw this royal dagger?"

"A few minutes ago," Vance answered. "It was projectin' from the headboard of the doctor's bed—just behind the place where his head had lain a second earlier."

Hani's gaze travelled past Vance to some distant point, and his eyes became shrewdly thoughtful.

"Was there no sheath to this dagger?" he asked.

"Oh, yes." There was a flicker in the corners of Vance's eyes. "Gold and cloisonné—though I haven't seen it. The fact is, Hani, we're deuced interested in the sheath. It's disappeared—lying *perdu* somewhere hereabouts. We're going to make a bit of a search for it ere long."

Hani nodded his head understandingly.

"And if you find it, are you sure you'll know more than you do now?"

"It may at least verify my suspicions."

"The sheath would be an easy object to hide securely," Hani reminded him.

"I really don't anticipate any difficulty in putting my hands on it." Vance rose and confronted the man. "Could you perhaps suggest where we might best start our search?"

"No, *effendi*," Hani returned, after a perceptible hesitation. "Not at this moment. I would need time to think about it."

"Very well. Suppose you go to your room and indulge in some lamaic concentration. You're anything but helpful."

Hani handed the dagger back, and turned toward the hall.

"And be so good," Vance requested, "as to knock on Mr. Salveter's door and tell him we would like to see him here at once."

Hani bowed, and disappeared.

"I don't like that bird," Heath grumbled, when the Egyptian was out of hearing. "He's too slippery. And he knows something he's not telling. I'd like to turn my boys loose on him with a piece of rubber hose—they'd make him come across. . . . I wouldn't be surprised, Mr. Vance, if he threw the dagger himself. Did you notice the way he held it, laying out flat in the palm of his hand with the point toward the fingers?—just like those knife-throwers in vaudeville."

"Oh, he might have been thinkin' caressingly of Doctor Bliss's trachea," Vance conceded. "However, the dagger episode doesn't worry me half as much as something that *didn't* happen to-night."

"Well, it looks to me like plenty happened," retorted Heath.

Markham regarded Vance inquisitively.

"What's in your mind?" he asked.

"The picture presented to us to-night, d' ye see, wasn't finished. I could still detect some of the underpainting. And there was no *vermissage*. The canvas needed another form—the generating line wasn't complete. . . ."

Just then we could hear footsteps on the stairs. Salveter, with a wrinkled Shantung dressing-gown wrapped about his pyjamas, blinked as he faced the lights in the drawing-room. He appeared only half awake, but when his pupils had become adjusted to the glare, he ran his eyes sharply over the four of us and then shot a glance at the bronze clock on the mantel.

"What now?" he asked. "What has happened?" He seemed both bewildered and anxious.

"Doctor Bliss phoned me that some one had tried to kill him," Vance explained. "So we hobbled over. . . . Know anything about it?"

"Good God, no!" Salveter sat down heavily in a chair by the door. "Some one tried to kill the doctor? When? . . . How?" He fumbled in his dressing-gown pockets, and Vance, reading his movements correctly, held out his cigarette-case. Salveter lighted a *Régie* nervously, and drew several deep inhalations on it.

"Shortly after midnight," Vance answered. "But the attempt failed dismally." He tossed the dagger in Salveter's lap. "Familiar with that knickknack?"

The other studied the weapon a few seconds without touching it. A growing astonishment crept into his expression, and he carefully picked up the dagger and inspected it.

"I never saw it in my life," he said in an awed tone. "It's a very valuable archaeological specimen—a rare museum piece. Where, in Heaven's name, did you unearth it? It certainly doesn't belong to the Bliss collection."

"Ah, but it does," Vance assured him. "A private item, so to speak. Always kept secluded from prying vulgar eyes."

"I'm amazed. I'll bet the Egyptian Government doesn't know about it." Salveter looked up abruptly. "Has this dagger anything to do with the attempt on the doctor's life?"

"Everything apparently," Vance replied negligently. "We found it lodged in the headboard of the doctor's bed, evidently thrown with

great force at the spot where his throat should have been."

Salveter contracted his brow and set his lips.

"See here, Mr. Vance," he declared at length; "we haven't any Malayan jugglers in this house. . . . Unless," he added, as a startled afterthought, "Hani knows the art. Those orientals are full of unexpected lore and practices."

"The performance to-night was not, according to all accounts, what one would unqualifiedly call artistic. It was, in fact, somewhat amateurish. I'm sure a Malay could have done much better with his kris. In the first place, the intruder's footsteps and the opening of the door were plainly heard by Doctor Bliss; and, in the second place, there was sufficient delay between the projection of the flash-light and the actual hurling of the dagger to give the doctor time to remove his head from the line of propulsion. . . ."

At this moment Hani appeared at the door holding a small object in his hand. Walking forward he laid it on the centre-table.

"Here, *effendi*," he said in a low voice, "is the sheath of the royal dagger. I found it lying against the baseboard of the second-story hall, near the head of the stairs."

Vance scarcely glanced at it.

"Thanks awfully," he drawled. "I rather thought you'd find it. But of course it wasn't in the hall."

"I assure you—"

"Oh, quite." Vance looked straight into Hani's eyes, and presently a faint, gentle smile crept into his gaze. "Isn't it true, Hani," he asked pointedly, "that you found the sheath exactly where you and I believed it to be hidden?"

The Egyptian did not answer at once. Presently he said:

"I have told my story, *effendi*. You may draw your own conclusion."

Vance appeared satisfied and waved his hand toward the door.

"And now, Hani, go to bed. We sha'n't need you any more to-night. *Leiltak sa'ida*."

"*Leiltak sa'ida wemubâraka*." The man bowed and departed.

Vance picked up the sheath and, taking the dagger from Salveter, fitted the blade into its holder, looking at the gold embossing critically.

"Aegean influence," he murmured. "Pretty, but too fussy. These ornate floral devices of the Eighteenth Dynasty bear the same relation to early Egyptian art that the Byzantine ginger-bread does to the simple Greek orders." He held the sheath closer to his monocle. "And, by the by, here's a decoration that may interest you, Mr. Salveter. The formal scrolls terminate in a jackal's head."

"Anûpu, eh? Hani's given name. That's curious." Salveter rose and looked at the design. "And another point might be considered, Mr. Vance," he went on, after a pause. "These lower-class Copts are, for all their superficial Christian veneer, highly superstitious. Their minds run along one traditional groove: they like to fit everything to a preconceived symbolism. There have been nine more or less coincidental deaths of late among those connected with the excavations in Egypt,[27] and the natives ridiculously imagine that the afrits of their ancestors lay in ambush in the various tombs to mow down the western intruders, as a kind of punitive measure. They actually believe in such malefic forces. . . . And here is Hani, at bottom a superstitious Egyptian, who resents the work of Doctor Bliss:—is it not possible he might consider the death of the doctor by a dagger once worn by a Pharaoh as a sort of mystical retribution in line with all these other irrational ghost stories? And Hani might even regard the jackal's head on that sheath as a sign that he—named after the jackal-headed god, Anûbis—had been divinely appointed the agent in this act of vengeance."

"A charmin' theory," was Vance's somewhat uninterested comment. "But a bit too specious, I fear. I'm comin' to the opinion that Hani is not nearly so stupid and superstitious as he would have us think. He's a kind of modern Theogonius, who has found it the part of wisdom to simulate mental inferiority." [28]

Salveter slowly nodded agreement.

"I've felt that same quality in him at times. . . . But who else—?"

"Ah! Who else?" Vance sighed. "I say, Mr. Salveter; what time did you go to bed to-night?"

"At ten-thirty," the man returned aggressively. "And I didn't wake up until Hani called me just now."

"You retired, then, immediately after you had fetched the memorandum-book from the study for Doctor Bliss."

"Oh, he told you about that, did he? . . . Yes, I handed him the book and went on up to my room."

"The book, I understand, was in his desk."

"That's right—But why this cross-examination about a memorandum-book?"

"That dagger," Vance explained, "was also kept in one of the drawers of the doctor's desk."

Salveter leapt to his feet.

"I see!" His face was livid.

"Oh, but you don't," Vance mildly assured him. "And I'd appreciate it immensely if you'd try to be calm. Your vitality positively exhausts me.—Tell me, did you lock your bedroom door to-night?"

"I always lock it at night."

"And during the day?"

"I leave it open—to air the room."

"And you heard nothing to-night after retiring?"

"Nothing at all. I went to sleep quickly—the reaction, I suppose."

Vance rose.

"One other thing: where did the family have dinner to-night?"

"In the breakfast-room. It could hardly be called dinner, though. No one was hungry. It was more like a light supper. So we ate down-stairs. Less bother."

"And what did the various members of the household do after dinner?"

"Hani went up-stairs at once, I believe. The doctor and Mrs. Bliss and I sat here in the drawing-room for an hour or so, when the doctor excused himself and went to his room. A little later Meryt-Amen went up-stairs, and I sat here until about half past ten trying to read."

"Thank you, Mr. Salveter. That will be all." Vance moved toward the hall. "Only, I wish you'd tell Mrs. Bliss and the doctor that we sha'n't disturb them any more to-night. We'll probably communicate with them to-morrow. . . . Let's go, Markham. There's really nothing more we can do here."

"I could do a whole lot more," Heath objected with surly antagonism. "But this case is being handled like a pink tea. Somebody in this house threw that dagger, and if I had my way I'd steam the truth out of him."

Markham endeavored diplomatically to soothe the Sergeant's ruffled feelings, but without any marked success.

We were now standing just inside the front door preparatory to departing, and Vance paused to light a cigarette. He was facing the great steel door leading into the museum, and I saw his frame suddenly go taut.

"Oh, just a moment, Mr. Salveter," he called; and the man, who was now nearly at the head of the first flight of stairs, turned and retraced his steps. "What are the lights doing on in the museum?"

I glanced toward the bottom of the steel door where Vance's gaze was resting, and for the first time saw a tiny illuminated line. Salveter, too, glanced at the floor, and frowned.

"I'm sure I don't know," he said in a puzzled voice. "The last person in the museum is supposed to turn off the switch. But no one to my knowledge has been in there to-night. . . . I'll see." He stepped toward the door, but Vance moved in front of him.

"Don't trouble yourself," he said peremptorily. "I'll attend to it. . . . Good-night."

Salveter took the dismissal uneasily but without another word he went upstairs.

When he had disappeared round the banisters on the second floor, Vance gently turned the knob, and pushed the museum door open. Below us, on the opposite side of the room, seated at the desk-table near the obelisk, and surrounded by filing-boxes, photographs, and cardboard folders, was Scarlett. His coat and waistcoat were hanging over the back of his chair; a green celluloid shade covered his eyes; and a pen was in his hand, poised above a large note-book.

He looked up as the door opened.

"Oh, hallo!" he called cheerily. "Thought you were through with the Bliss ménage for to-day."

"It's to-morrow now," returned Vance, going down the stairs and crossing the museum.

"What!" Scarlett reached behind him and took out his watch. "Great Scott! So it is. Had no idea of the hour. Been working here since eight o'clock—"

"Amazin'." Vance glanced over a few of the upturned photographs. "Very interestin'. . . . Who let you in, by the by?"

"Brush, of course." Scarlett seemed rather astonished at the question. "Said the family were having dinner in the breakfast-room. I told him not to disturb 'em—that I had a bit of work to finish. . . ."

"He didn't mention your arrival to us." Vance was apparently engrossed in a photograph of four amuletic bracelets.

"But why should he, Vance?" Scarlett had risen and was getting into his coat. "It's a commonplace thing for me to come here and work in the evenings. I'm drifting in and out of the house constantly. When I work at night I always shut off the light on going and see that the front door is fastened. Nothing unusual about my coming here after dinner."

"That probably accounts for Brush's not telling us, don't y' know." Vance tossed the photographs back on the table. "But something out of the ordin'ry did happen here to-night." He laid the sheathed dagger before Scarlett. "What do you know about that bizarre parazonium?"

"Oh, much." The other grinned, and shot Vance an interrogatory look. "How did you happen on it? It's one of the doctor's dark secrets."

"Really?" Vance lifted his eyebrows in simulated surprise. "Then you're familiar with it?"

"Rather. I saw the old scalawag slip in into his khaki shirt when he found it. I kept mum—none of my business. Later, when we were here in New York, he told me he'd smuggled it out of Egypt, and confided to me that he was keeping it sequestered in his study. He was in constant fear that Hani would unearth it, and swore me to secrecy. I agreed. What's one dagger, more or less? The Cairo Museum has the cream of all the excavated items anyway."

"He kept it ensconced under some papers in one of his desk drawers."

"Yes, I know. Safe hiding-place. Hani rarely goes in the study. . . . But I'm curious—"

"We're all curious. Distressin' state, what?" Vance gave him no time to speculate. "Who else knew of the dagger's existence?"

"No one, as far as I know. The doctor certainly didn't disclose the fact to Hani; and I doubt seriously if he informed Mrs. Bliss. She has peculiar loyalties in regard to her native country, and the doctor respects them. No telling how she'd react to the theft of such a valuable treasure."

"What about Salveter?"

"I'd say no." Scarlett made an unpleasant grimace. "He'd be sure to confide in Meryt-Amen. Impulsive young cub."

"Well, some one knew of its whereabouts," Vance remarked. "Doctor Bliss phoned me shortly after midnight that he had escaped assassination by the proverbial hair's-breadth; so we sped hither and found the point of that poniard infixed in the head of his bed."

"By Jove! You don't say!" Scarlett seemed shocked and perplexed. "Some one must have discovered the dagger . . . and yet—" He stopped suddenly and shot Vance a quick look. "How do you account for it?"

"I'm not accountin' for it. Most mysterious. . . . Hani, by the by, found the sheath in the hall near the doctor's door."

"That's odd. . . ." Scarlett paused as if considering. Then he began arranging his papers and photographs in neat piles and stacking his filing-boxes under the table. "Couldn't you get any suggestions out of the rest of the household?" he asked.

"Any number of suggestions. All of 'em conflictin', and most of 'em silly. So we're toddlin' along home. Happened to see the light under the door and was overcome with curiosity. . . . Quitting now?"

"Yes." Scarlett took up his hat. "I'd have knocked off long ago but didn't realize how late it was."

We all left the house together. A heavy silence had fallen over us, and it was not until Scarlett paused in front of his quarters that any one of us spoke. Then Vance said:

"Good-night. Don't let the dagger disturb your slumbers."

Scarlett waved an abstracted adieu.

"Thanks, old man," he rejoined. "I'll try to follow your advice."

Vance had taken several steps when he turned suddenly.

"And I say, Scarlett; if I were you I'd keep away from the Bliss house for the time being."

## 19. A BROKEN APPOINTMENT

(Saturday, July 14; 2 A.M.-10 P.M.)

Heath left us at Nineteenth Street and Fourth Avenue; and Vance, Markham and I took a taxicab back to Vance's apartment. It was nearly two o'clock, but Markham showed no indication of going home. He followed Vance up-stairs to the library, and throwing open the French windows gazed out into the heavy, mist-laden night. The events of the day had not gone to his liking; and yet I realized that his quandary was so deep that he felt disinclined to make any decisive move until the conflicting factors of the situation became more clarified.

The case at the outset had appeared simple, and the number of possible suspects was certainly limited. But, despite these two facts, there was a subtle and mysterious intangibility about the affair that rendered a drastic step impossible. The elements were too fluid, the cross-currents of motives too contradictory. Vance had been the first to sense the elusory complications, the first to indicate the invisible paradoxes; and so surely had he put his finger upon the vital points of the plot—so accurately had he foretold certain phases of the plot's development—that Markham had, both figuratively and literally, stepped into the background and permitted him to deal with the case in his own way.

Withal, Markham was dissatisfied and impatient. Nothing definitely leading to the actual culprit had, so far as could be seen, been brought to light by Vance's unprofessional and almost casual process of investigation.

"We're not making headway, Vance," Markham complained with gloomy concern, turning from the window. "I've stood aside all day and permitted you to deal with these people as you saw fit, because I felt your knowledge of them and your familiarity with things Egyptological gave you an advantage over impersonal official cross-questioning. And I also felt that you had a plausible theory about the whole matter, which you were striving to verify. But Kyle's murder is as far from a solution as it was when we first entered the museum."

"You're an incorrigible pessimist, Markham," Vance returned, getting into a printed foulard dressing-gown. "It has been just fifteen hours since we found Sakhmet athwart Kyle's skull; and you must admit, painful as it may be to a District Attorney, that the average murder investigation has scarcely begun in so brief a time. . . ."

"In the average murder case, however," Markham retorted acidly, "we'd at least have found a lead or two and outlined a workable routine. If Heath had been handling the matter he'd have made an arrest by now—the field of possibilities is not an extensive one."

"I dare say he would. He'd no doubt have had every one in jail, including Brush and Dingle and the Curators of the Metropolitan Museum. Typical tactics: butcher innocent persons to make a journalistic holiday. I'm not entranced with that technic, though. I'm far too humane—I've retained too many of my early illusions. Sentimentality, alas! will probably be my downfall."

Markham snorted, and seated himself at the end of the table. For several moments he beat the devil's tattoo on a large, vellum-bound copy of "*Malleus Maleficarum*."

"You told me quite emphatically," he said, "that when this second episode happened—the attempt on Bliss's life—you'd understand all the phases of the plot and perhaps be able to adduce some tangible evidence against Kyle's murderer. It appears to me, however, that to-night's affair has simply plunged us more deeply into uncertainty."

Vance shook his head seriously in disagreement.

"The throwing of that dagger and the hiding and finding of the sheath have illuminated the one moot point in the plot."

Markham looked up sharply.

"You think you know now what the plot is?"

Vance carefully fitted a *Régie* into a long jet holder and gazed at a small Picasso still-life beside the mantel.

"Yes, Markham," he returned slowly; "I think I know what the plot is. And if the thing that I expect to happen to-night occurs, I can, I believe, convince you that I am right in my diagnosis. Unfortunately the throwing of the dagger was only part of the pre-arranged episode. As I said to you a while ago, the tableau was not completed. Something intervened. And the final touch—the rounding-out of the episode—is yet to come."

He spoke with impressive solemnity, and Markham, I could see, was strongly influenced by his manner.

"Have you any definite notion," he inquired, "what that final touch will prove to be?"

"Oh, quite. But just what shape it will take I can't say. The plotter himself probably doesn't know, for he must wait for a propitious opportunity. But it will centre about one specific object, or, rather, clew—a planted clew, Markham. That clew has been carefully prepared, and the placing of it is the only indefinite factor left. . . . Yes, I am waiting for a specific item to appear; and when it does, I can convince you of the whole devilish truth."

"When do you figure this final clew will turn up?" Markham asked uneasily.

"At almost any moment." Vance spoke in low, level and quiet tones. "Something prevented its taking shape to-night, for it is an intimate corollary of the dagger-throwing. And by refusing to take that episode too seriously, and by letting Hani find the sheath, I made the immediate planting of the final clew necess'ry. Once again we refused to fall into the murderer's trap—though, as I say, the trap was not fully baited."

"I'm glad to have some kind of explanation for your casual attitude tonight." Despite the note of sarcasm in Markham's voice, it was obvious that at bottom he was not indulging in strictures upon Vance's conduct. He was at sea and inclined, therefore, to be irritable. "You apparently had no interest in determining who hurled the dagger at Bliss's pillow."

"But, Markham old dear, I knew who hurled the bejewelled bodkin." Vance made a slight gesture of impatience. "My only concern was with what the reporters call the events leading up to the crime."

Markham realized it was of no use to ask, at this time, who had thrown the dagger; so he pursued his comments on Vance's recent activities at the Bliss house.

"You might have got some helpful suggestions from Scarlett—he evidently was in the museum during the entire time. . . ."

"Even so, Markham," Vance countered, "don't forget there is a thick double wall between the museum and the Bliss domicile, and that those steel doors are practically sound-proof. Bombs might have been exploded in the doctor's room without any one in the museum hearing them."

"Perhaps you're right." Markham rose and stood contemplating Vance appraisingly. "I'm putting a lot of trust in you—you confounded aesthete. And I'm going against all my principles and stultifying the whole official procedure of my office because I believe in you. But God help you if you fail me. . . . What's the programme for to-morrow?"

Vance shot him a grateful, affectionate look. Then, at once, a cynical smile overspread his face.

"I'm the unofficial straw, so to speak, at which the drowning District Attorney clutches—eh, what? Not an overwhelmin' compliment."

It was always the case with these two old friends that when one uttered a generous remark the other immediately scotched it, lest there be some outward show of sentiment.

"The programme for to-morrow?" Vance took up Markham's question. "Really, y' know, I hadn't given it any Cartesian consideration. . . . There's an exhibition of Gauguins at Wildenstein's. I might stagger in and bask in the color harmonics of the great Pont-Avenois. Then there's a performance of the Beethoven *Septet* at Carnegie Hall; and a preview of Egyptian wall paintings from the tombs of Nakhte and Menena and Rekh-mi-Rê—"

"And there's an orchid show at the Grand Central Palace," Markham suggested with vicious irony. "But see here, Vance: if we let this thing run on another day without taking some kind of action, there may be danger ahead for someone else, just as there was danger for Bliss to-night. If the murderer of Kyle is as ruthless as you say and his job hasn't been completed—"

"No, I don't think so." Vance's face clouded again. "The plot doesn't include another act of violence. I believe it has now entered upon a quiescent and subtle—and more deadly—stage." He smoked a moment speculatively. "And yet . . . there may be a remote chance. Things haven't gone according to the murderer's calculations. We've blocked his two most ambitious moves. But he has one more combination left, and I'm countin' on his trying it. . . ."

His voice faltered, and rising he walked slowly to the French window and back.

"Anyway, I'll take care of the situation in the morning," he said. "I'll guard against any dangerous possibility. And at the same time I'll hasten the planting of that last clew."

"How long is this rigmarole going to take?" Markham was troubled and nervous. "I can't go on indefinitely waiting for apocalyptic events to happen."

"Give me twenty-four hours. Then, if we haven't received further guidance from the gentleman who is pullin' the strings you may turn Heath loose on the family."

It was less than twenty-four hours when the culminating event occurred. The fourteenth of July will always remain in my memory as one of the most terrible and exciting days of my life; and as I set down this record of the case, years later, I can hardly refrain from a shudder. I do not dare think of what might have happened—of what soul-stirring injustice might have been perpetrated in good faith—had not Vance seen the inner machinations of the diabolical plot underlying Kyle's murder, and persisted in his refusal to permit Markham and Heath taking the obvious course of arresting Bliss.

Vance told me months later that never in his career had he been confronted by so delicate a task as that of placating Markham and convincing him that an impassive delay was the only possible means of reaching the truth. Almost from the moment Vance entered the museum in answer to Scarlett's summons, he realized the tremendous difficulties ahead; for everything had been planned in order to force Markham and the police into making the very move against which he had so consistently fought.

Though Markham did not take his departure from Vance's apartment on the night of the dagger episode until half past two, Vance rose the next morning before eight o'clock. Another sweltering day was promised, and he had his coffee in the roof-garden. He sent Currie to fetch all the morning newspapers, and spent a half hour or so reading the accounts of Kyle's murder.

Heath had been highly discreet about giving out the facts, and only the barest skeleton of the story was available to the press. But the prominence of Kyle and the distinguished reputation of Doctor Bliss resulted in the murder creating a tremendous furore. It was emblazoned across the front page of every metropolitan journal, and there were long reviews of Bliss's Egyptological work and the financial interest taken in it by the dead philanthropist. The general theory seemed to be—and I recognized the Sergeant's shrewd hand in it—that some one from the street had entered the museum, and, as an act of vengeance or enmity, had killed Kyle with the first available weapon.

Heath had told the reporters of the finding of the scarab beside the body, but had given no further information about it. Because of this small object, which was the one evidential detail that had been vouchsafed, the papers, always on the lookout for identifying titles, named the tragedy the Scarab murder case; and that appellation has clung to it to the present day. Even those persons who have forgotten the name of Benjamin H. Kyle still remember the sensation caused by his murder, as a result of that ancient piece of lapis-lazuli carved with the name of an Egyptian Pharaoh of the year 1650 B.C.

Vance read the accounts with a cynical smile.

"Poor Markham!" he murmured. "Unless something definite happens very soon, the anti-administration critics will descend on him like a host of trolls. I see that Heath has announced to the world that the District Attorney's office has taken full charge of the case. . . ."

He smoked meditatively for a time. Then he telephoned to Salveter and asked him to come at once to his apartment.

"I'm hopin' to remove every possibility of disaster," he explained to me as he hung up the receiver; "though I'm quite certain another attempt to hoodwink us will be made before any desperate measures are taken."

For the next fifteen minutes he stretched out lazily and closed his eyes. I thought he had fallen asleep, but when Currie softly opened the door to announce Salveter, Vance bade him show the visitor up before the old man could speak.

Salveter entered a minute later looking anxious and puzzled.

"Sit down, Mr. Salveter." Vance waved him indolently to a chair. "I've been thinkin' about Queen Hetep-hir-es and the Boston Museum. Have you any business that might reasonably take you to Boston to-night?"

Salveter appeared even more puzzled.

"I always have work that I can do there," he replied, frowning. "Especially in view of the excavations of the Harvard-Boston Expedition at the Gizeh pyramids. It was in connection with these excavations that I had to go to the Metropolitan yesterday morning for Doctor Bliss. . . . Does that answer your question satisfactorily?"

"Quite. . . . And these reproductions of the tomb furniture of Hetep-hir-es: couldn't you arrange for them more easily if you saw Doctor Reisner personally?"

"Certainly. The fact is, I'll have to go north anyway in order to close up the business. I was merely on the trail of preliminary information yesterday."

"Would the fact that to-morrow is Sunday handicap you in any way?"

"To the contrary. I could probably see Doctor Reisner away from his office, and go into the matter at leisure with him."

"That being the case, suppose you hop a train to-night after dinner. Come back, let us say, to-morrow night. Any objection?"

Salveter's puzzlement gave way to astonishment.

"Why—no," he stammered. "No particular objection. But—"

"Would Doctor Bliss think it strange if you jumped out on such sudden notice?"

"I couldn't say. Probably not. The museum isn't a particularly pleasant place just now. . . ."

"Well, I want you to go, Mr. Salveter." Vance abandoned his lounging demeanor and sat up. "And I want you to go without question or argument. . . . There's no possibility of Doctor Bliss's forbidding you to go, is there?"

"Oh, nothing like that," Salveter assured him. "He may think it's queer, my running off at just this time; but he never meddles in the way I choose to do my work."

Vance rose.

"That's all. There's a train to Boston from the Grand Central at half past nine to-night. See that you take it. . . . And," he added, "you might phone me from the station, by way of verification. I'll be here between nine and nine-thirty. . . . You may return to New York any time you desire after to-morrow noon."

Salveter gave Vance an abashed grin.

"I suppose those are orders."

"Serious and important orders, Mr. Salveter," Vance returned with quiet impressiveness. "And you needn't worry about Mrs. Bliss. Hani, I'm sure, will take good care of her."

Salveter started to make a reply, changed his mind, and, turning abruptly, strode rapidly away.

Vance yawned and rose languorously.

"And now I think I'll take two more hours' sleep."

After lunch at Marguéry's, Vance went to the Gauguin exhibition, and later walked to Carnegie Hall to hear the Beethoven *Septet*. It was too late when the concert was over to see the Egyptian wall paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Instead, he called for Markham in his car, and the three of us drove to the Claremont for dinner.

Vance explained briefly what steps he had taken in regard to Salveter. Markham made scant comment. He looked tired and discouraged, but there was a distracted tenseness about his manner that made me realize how greatly he was counting on Vance's prediction that something tangible would soon happen in connection with the Kyle case.

After dinner we returned to Vance's roof-garden. The enervating mid-summer heat still held, and there was scarcely a breath of air stirring.

"I told Heath I'd phone him—" Markham began, sinking into a large peacock wicker chair.

"I was about to suggest getting in touch with the Sergeant," Vance chimed in. "I'd rather like to have him on hand, don't y' know. He's so comfortin'."

He rang for Currie and ordered the telephone. Then he called Heath and asked him to join us.

"I have a psychic feelin'," he said to Markham, with an air of forced levity, "that we are going to be summoned anon to witness the irrefutable proof of some one's guilt. And if that proof is what I think it is. . . ."

Markham suddenly leaned forward in his chair.

"It has just come to me what you've been hinting about so mysteriously!" he exclaimed. "It has to do with that hieroglyphic letter you found in the study."

Vance hesitated but momentarily.

"Yes, Markham," he nodded. "That torn letter hasn't been explained yet. And I have a theory about it that I can't shake off—it fits too perfectly with the whole fiendish scheme."

"But you have the letter," Markham argued, in an effort to draw Vance out.

"Oh, yes. And I'm prizin' it."

"You believe it's the letter Salveter said he wrote?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And you believe he is ignorant of its having been torn up and put in the doctor's waste-basket?"

"Oh, quite. He's still wonderin' what became of it—and worryin', too."

Markham studied Vance with baffled curiosity.

"You spoke of some purpose to which the letter might have been put before it was thrown away."

"That's what I'm waiting to verify. The fact is, Markham, I expected that the letter would enter into the mystery of the dagger throwing last night. And I'll admit I was frightfully downcast when we'd got the whole family snugly back to bed without having run upon a single hieroglyph." He reached for a cigarette. "There was a reason for it, and I think I know the explanation. That's why I'm pinnin' my childlike faith on what may happen at any moment now. . . ."

The telephone rang, and Vance himself answered it at once. It was Salveter calling from the Grand Central Station; and after a brief verbal interchange, Vance replaced the instrument on the table with an air of satisfaction.



"The doctor," he said, "was evidently quite willin' to endure to-night and to-morrow without his assistant curator. So that bit of strategy was achieved without difficulty. . . ."

Half an hour later Heath was ushered into the roof-garden. He was glum and depressed, and his greeting was little more than a guttural rumble.

"Lift up your heart, Sergeant," Vance exhorted him cheerfully. "This is Bastille Day.<sup>[29]</sup> It may have a symbolic meaning. It's not beyond the realm of possibility that you will be able to incarcerate the murderer of Kyle before midnight."

"Yeah?" Heath was utterly sceptical. "Is he coming here to give himself up, bringing all the necessary proof with him? A nice, accommodating fella."

"Not exactly, Sergeant. But I'm expecting him to send for us; and I think he may be so generous as to point out the principal clew himself."

"Cuckoo, is he? Well, Mr. Vance, if he does that, no jury'll convict him. He'll get a bill of insanity with free lodging and medical care for the rest of his life." He looked at his watch. "It's ten o'clock. What time does the tip-off come?"

"Ten?" Vance verified the hour. "My word! It's later than I thought. . . ." A look of anxiety passed over his set features. "I wonder if I could have miscalculated this whole affair."

He put out his cigarette and began pacing back and forth. Presently he stopped before Markham, who was watching him uneasily.

"When I sent Salveter away," he began slowly, "I was confident that the expected event would happen forthwith. But I'm afraid something has gone wrong. Therefore I think I had better outline the case to you now."

He paused and frowned.

"However," he added, "it would be advisable to have Scarlett present. I'm sure he could fill in a few of the gaps."

Markham looked surprised.

"What does Scarlett know about it?"

"Oh, much," was Vance's brief reply. Then he turned to the telephone and hesitated. "He hasn't a private phone, and I don't know the number of the house exchange. . . ."

"That's easy." Heath picked up the receiver and asked for a certain night official of the company. After a few words of explanation, he clicked the hook and called a number. There was considerable delay, but at length some one answered at the other end. From the Sergeant's questions it was evident Scarlett was not at home.

"That was his landlady," Heath explained disgustedly, when he had replaced the receiver. Scarlett went out at eight o'clock—said he was going to the museum for a while and would be back at nine. Had an appointment at nine with a guy at his apartment, and the guy's still waiting for him. . . ."

"We can reach him at the museum, then." Vance rang up the Bliss number and asked Brush to call Scarlett to the phone. After several minutes he pushed the instrument from him.

"Scarlett isn't at the museum either," he said. "He came, so Brush says, at about eight, and must have departed unobserved. He's probably on his way back to his quarters. We'll wait a while and phone him there again."

"Is it necessary to have Scarlett here?" Markham asked impatiently.

"Not precisely necessary," Vance returned evasively; "but most desirable. You remember he admitted quite frankly he could tell me a great deal about the murderer—"

He broke off abruptly, and with tense deliberation selected and lighted another cigarette. His lids drooped, and he stared fixedly at the floor.

"Sergeant," he said in a repressed tone, "I believe you said Mr. Scarlett had an appointment with some one at nine and had informed his landlady he would return at that hour."

"That's what the dame told me over the phone."

"Please see if he has reached home yet."

Without a word Heath again lifted the receiver and called Scarlett's number. A minute later he turned to Vance.

"He hasn't shown up."

"Deuced queer," Vance muttered. "I don't at all like this, Markham. . . ."

His mind drifted off in speculation, and it seemed to me that his face paled slightly.

"I'm becoming frightened," he went on in a hushed voice. "We should have heard about that letter by now. . . . I'm afraid there's trouble ahead."

He gave Markham a look of grave and urgent concern.

"We can't afford to delay any longer. It may even be too late as it is. We've got to act at once." He moved toward the door. "Come on, Markham. And you, Sergeant. We're overdue at the museum. If we hurry we may be in time."

Both Markham and Heath had risen as Vance spoke. There was a strange insistence in his tone, and a foreboding of terrible things in his eyes. He disappeared swiftly into the house; and the rest of us, urged by the suppressed excitement of his manner, followed in silence. His car was outside, and a few moments later we were swinging dangerously round the corner of Thirty-eighth Street and Park Avenue, headed for the Bliss Museum.

## 20. THE GRANITE SARCOPHAGUS

(Saturday, July 14, 10:10 P.M.)

We arrived at the museum in less than ten minutes. Vance ran up the stone steps, Markham and Heath and I at his heels. Not only was there a light burning in the vestibule, but through the frosted glass panels of the front door we could see a bright light in the hall. Vance pressed the bell vigorously, but it was some time before Brush answered our summons.

"Napping?" Vance asked. He was in a tense, sensitive mood.

"No, sir." Brush shrank from him. "I was in the kitchen—"

"Tell Doctor Bliss we're here, and want to see him at once."

"Yes, sir." The butler went down the hall and knocked on the study door. There was no answer, and he knocked again. After a moment he turned the knob and looked in the room. Then he came back to us.

"The doctor is not in his study. Perhaps he has gone to his bedroom. . . . I'll see."

He moved toward the stairs and was about to ascend when a calm, even voice halted him.

"Bliss *effendi* is not up-stairs." Hani came slowly down to the front hall. "It is possible he is in the museum."

"Well, well!" Vance regarded the man reflectively. "Amazin' how you always turn up. . . . So you think he may be potterin' among his treasures—eh, what?" He pushed open the great steel door of the museum. "If the doctor is in here, he's whiling away his time in the dark." Stepping to the stair-landing inside the museum door, he switched on the lights and looked about the great room. "You're apparently in error, Hani, regarding the doctor's whereabouts. To all appearances the museum is empty."

The Egyptian was unruffled.

"Perhaps Doctor Bliss has gone out for a breath of air."

There was a troubled frown on Vance's face.

"That's possible," he murmured. "However, I wish you'd make sure he is not up-stairs."

"I would have seen him had he come up-stairs after dinner," the Egyptian replied softly. "But I will follow your instructions nevertheless." And he went to search for Bliss.

Vance stepped up to Brush and asked in a low voice:

"At what time did Mr. Scarlett leave here to-night?"

"I don't know, sir." The man was mystified by Vance's manner. "I really don't know. He came at about eight—I let him in. He may have gone out with Doctor Bliss. They often take a walk together at night."

"Did Mr. Scarlett go into the museum when he arrived at eight?"

"No, sir. He asked for Doctor Bliss. . . ."

"Ah! And did he see the doctor?"

"Yes, sir. . . . That is,"—Brush corrected himself—"I suppose he did. I told him Doctor Bliss was in the study, and he at once went down the hall. I returned to the kitchen."

"Did you notice anything unusual in Mr. Scarlett's manner?"

The butler thought a moment.

"Well, sir, since you mention it, I might say that Mr. Scarlett was rather stiff and distant, like there was something on his mind—if you know what I mean."

"And the last you saw of him was when he was approaching the study door?"

"Yes, sir."

Vance nodded a dismissal.

"Remain in the drawing-room for the time being," he said.

As Brush disappeared through the folding door Hani came slowly down the stairs.

"It is as I said," he responded indifferently. "Doctor Bliss is not up-stairs."

Vance scrutinized him sternly.

"Do you know that Mr. Scarlett called here tonight?"

"Yes, I know." A curious light came into the man's eyes. "I was in the drawing-room when Brush admitted him."

"He came to see Doctor Bliss," said Vance.

"Yes. I heard him ask Brush—"

"Did Mr. Scarlett see the doctor?"

The Egyptian did not answer at once. He met Vance's gaze steadily as if trying to read the other's thoughts. At length, reaching a decision, he said:

"They were together—to my knowledge—for at least half an hour. When Mr. Scarlett entered the study he left the door open by the merest crack, and I was able to hear them talking together. But I could not distinguish anything that was said. Their voices were subdued."

"How long did you listen?"

"For half an hour. Then I went up-stairs."

"You have not seen either Doctor Bliss or Mr. Scarlett since?"

"No, *effendi*."

"Where was Mr. Salveter during the conference in the study?" Vance was striving hard to control his anxiety.

"Was he here in the house?" Hani asked evasively. "He told me at dinner that he was going to Boston."

"Yes, yes—on the nine-thirty train. He needn't have left the house until nine.—Where was he between eight and nine?"

Hani shrugged his shoulders.

"I did not see him. He went out before Mr. Scarlett arrived. He was certainly not here after eight—"

"You're lying." Vance's tone was icy.

"Wahyât en-nabi—"

"Don't try to impress me—I'm not in the humor." Vance's eyes were like steel. "What do you think happened here to-night?"

"I think perhaps Sakhmet returned."

A pallor seemed to overspread Vance's face: it may, however, have been only the reflection of the hall light.

"Go to your room and wait there," he said curtly.

Hani bowed.

"You do not need my help now, *effendi*. You understand many things." And the Egyptian walked away with much dignity.

Vance stood tensely until he had disappeared. Then, with a motion to us, he hurried down the hall to the study. Throwing open the door he switched on the lights.

There was anxiety and haste in all his movements, and the electric atmosphere of his demeanor was transmitted to the rest of us. We realized that something tragic and terrible was leading him on.

He went to the two windows and leaned out. By the pale reflected light he could see the asphalt tiles on the ground below. He looked under the desk, and measured with his eyes the four-inch clearance beneath the divan. Then he went to the door leading into the museum.

"I hardly thought we'd find anything in the study; but there was a chance. . . ."

He was now swinging down the spiral stairs.

"It will be here in the museum," he called to us. "Come along, Sergeant. There's work to do. A fiend has been loose to-night. . . ."

He walked past the state chair and the shelves of *shawabtis*, and stood beside the long glass table case, his hands deep in his coat pockets, his eyes moving rapidly about the room. Markham and Heath and I waited at the foot of the stairs.

"What's this all about?" Markham asked huskily. "What has taken place? And what, incidentally, are you looking for?"

"I don't know what has taken place." Something in Vance's tone sent a chill through me. "And I'm looking for something damnable. If it isn't here. . . ."

He did not finish the sentence. Going swiftly to the great replica of Kha-ef-Rê he walked round it. Then he went to the statue of Ramses II and inspected its base. After that he moved to Teti-shiret and tapped the pedestal with his knuckles.

"They're all solid," he muttered. "We must try the mummy cases." He recrossed the museum. "Start at that end, Sergeant. The covers should come off easily. If you have any difficulty, tear them off." He himself went to the anthropoid case beside Kha-ef-Rê and, inserting his hand beneath the upstanding lid, lifted it off and laid it on the floor.

Heath, apparently animated by an urgent desire for physical action, had already begun his search at the other end of the line. He was by no means gentle about it. He tore the lids off viciously, throwing them to the floor with unnecessary clatter.

Vance, absorbed in his own task, paid scant attention except to glance up as each lid was separated from the case. Markham, however, had begun to grow uneasy. He watched the Sergeant disapprovingly for several minutes, his face clouding over. Then he stepped forward.

"I can't let this go on, Vance," he remarked. "These are valuable treasures, and we have no right—"

Vance stood up and looked straight at Markham.

"And if there is a dead man in one of them?" he asked with a cold precision that caused Markham to stiffen.

"A dead man?"

"Placed here tonight—between eight and nine."

Vance's words had an ominous and impressive quality, and Markham said no more. He stood by, his features strained and set, watching the feverish inspection of the remaining mummy cases.

But no grisly discovery was made. Heath removed the lid of the last case in obvious disappointment.

"I guess something's gone wrong with your ideas, Mr. Vance," he commented without animus: indeed, there was a kindly note in his voice.

Vance, distraught and with a far-away look in his eyes, now stood by the glass case. His distress was so apparent that Markham went to him and touched him on the arm.

"Perhaps if we could re-calculate this affair along other lines—" he began; but Vance interrupted.

"No; it can't be re-calculated. It's too logical. There's been a tragedy here to-night—and we were too late to intercept it."

"We should have taken precautions." Markham's tone was bitter.

"Precautions! Every possible precaution was taken. A new element was introduced into the situation to-night—an element that couldn't possibly have been foreseen. To-night's tragedy was not part of the plot. . . ." Vance turned and walked away. "I must think this thing out. I must trace the murderer's reasoning. . . ." He made an entire circuit of the museum without taking his eyes from the floor.

Heath was puffing moodily on his cigar. He had not moved from in front of the mummy cases, and was pretending to be interested in the crudely colored hieroglyphs. Ever since the "Canary" murder case, when Tony Skeel had failed to keep his appointment in the District Attorney's office, he had, for all his protests, believed in Vance's prognostications; and now he was deeply troubled at the other's failure. I was watching him, a bit dazed myself, when I saw a frown of puzzled curiosity wrinkle his forehead. Taking his cigar from his mouth he bent over one of the fallen mummy cases and lifted out a slender metal object.

"That's a hell of a place to keep an automobile jack," he observed. (His interest in the jack was obviously the result of an unconscious attempt to distract his thoughts from the tense situation.)

He threw the jack back into the case and sat down on the base of Kha-ef-Rê's statue. Neither Vance nor Markham had apparently paid the slightest attention to his irrelevant discovery.

Vance continued pacing round the museum. For the first time since our arrival at the house he took out a cigarette and lighted it.

"Every line of reasoning leads here, Markham." He spoke in a low, hopeless tone. "There was no necessity for the evidence to have

been taken away. In the first place, it would have been too hazardous; and, in the second place, we were not supposed to have suspected anything for a day or two. . . ."

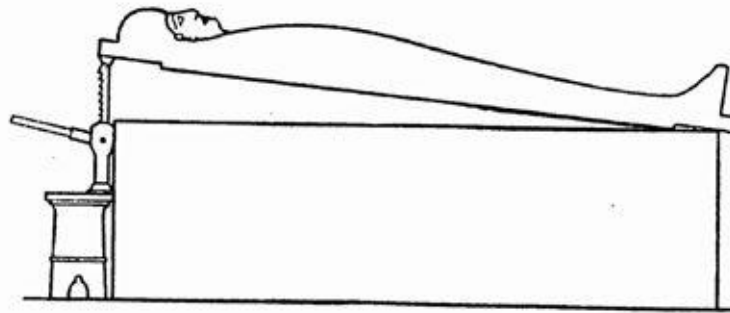
His voice faltered and his body went suddenly taut. He wheeled toward Heath.

"An automobile jack!" A dynamic change had come over him. "Oh, my aunt! I wonder . . . I wonder. . . ."

He hurried toward the black sarcophagus beneath the front windows, and scrutinized it anxiously.

"Too high," he murmured. "Three feet from the floor! It couldn't have been done. . . . But it had to be done—somehow. . . ." He looked about him. "That taboret!" He pointed to a small solid oak stand, about twenty inches high, against the wall near the Asiatic wooden statue. "It was not there last night; it was beside the desk-table by the obelisk—Scarlett was using it." As he spoke he went to the taboret and picked it up. "And the top is scratched—there's an indentation. . . ." He placed the stand against the head of the sarcophagus. "Quick, Sergeant! Bring me that jack."

Heath obeyed with swiftness; and Vance placed the jack on the taboret, fitting its base over the scars in the wood. The lifting-head came within an inch of the under-side of the sarcophagus's lid where it extended a few inches over the end elevation between the two projecting lion-legged supports at the corners.



We had gathered about Vance in tense silence, not knowing what to expect but feeling that we were on the threshold of some appalling revelation.

Vance inserted the elevating lever, which Heath handed him, into the socket, and moved it carefully up and down. The jack worked perfectly. At each downward thrust of the lever there was a metallic click as the detent slipped into the groove of the rack. Inch by inch the end of the ponderous granite lid—which must have weighed over half a ton[30]—rose.

Heath suddenly stepped back in alarm.

"Ain't you afraid, Mr. Vance, that the lid'll slide off the other end of the coffin?"

"No, Sergeant," Vance assured him. "The friction alone of so heavy a mass would hold it at a much greater angle than this jack could tilt it."

The head of the cover was now eight inches in the clear, and Vance was using both hands on the lever. He had to work with great care lest the jack slip from the smooth under-surface of the granite. Nine inches . . . ten inches . . . eleven . . . twelve. . . . The rack had almost reached its limit of elevation. With one final thrust downward, Vance released the lever and tested the solidity of the extended jack.

"It's safe, I think. . . ."

Heath had already taken out his pocket-light and flashed it into the dark recesses of the sarcophagus.

"Mother o' God!" he gasped.

I was standing just behind him, leaning over his broad shoulders; and simultaneously with the flare of his light I saw the horrifying thing that had made him call out. In the end of the sarcophagus was a dark, huddled human body, the back hunched upward and the legs hideously cramped, as if some one had hastily shoved it through the aperture, head first.

Markham stood bending forward like a person paralyzed in the midst of an action.

Vance's quiet but insistent voice broke the tension of our horror.

"Hold your light steady, Sergeant. And you, Markham, lend me a hand. But be careful. Don't touch the jack. . . ."

With great caution they reached into the sarcophagus and turned the body until the head was toward the widest point of the opening. A chill ran up my spine as I watched them for I knew that the slightest jar, or the merest touch on the jack, would bring the massive granite lid down upon them. Heath, too, realized this—I could see the glistening beads of sweat on his forehead as he watched the dangerous operation with fearful eyes.

Slowly the body emerged through the small opening, and when the feet had passed over the edge of the sarcophagus and clattered to the floor, the flashlight went out, and Heath sprawled back on his haunches with a convulsive gasp.

"Hell! I musta stumbled, Mr. Vance," he muttered. (I liked the Sergeant even more after that episode.)

Markham stood looking down at the inert body in stupefaction.

"Scarlett!" he exclaimed in a voice of complete incredulity.

Vance merely nodded, and bent over the prostrate figure. Scarlett's face was cyanosed, due to insufficient oxygenation of the blood; his eyes were set in a fixed bulging stare; and there was a crust formation of blood at his nostrils. Vance put his ear on the man's chest and took his wrist in one hand to feel the pulse. Then he drew out his gold cigarette-case and held it before Scarlett's lips. After a glance at the case he turned excitedly to heath.

"The ambulance, Sergeant! Hurry! Scarlett's still alive. . . ."

Heath dashed up the stairs and disappeared into the front hall.

Markham regarded Vance intently.

"I don't understand this," he said huskily.

"Nor do I—entirely." Vance's eyes were on Scarlett. "I advised him to keep away from here. He, too, knew the danger, and yet. . . . You remember Rider Haggard's dedication of 'Allan Quatermain' to his son, wherein he spoke of the highest rank to which one can attain—the state and dignity of an English gentleman?<sup>[31]</sup> . . . Scarlett was an English gentleman. Knowing the peril, he came here to-night. He thought he might end the tragedy."

Markham was stunned and puzzled.

"We've got to take some sort of action—now."

"Yes. . . ." Vance was deeply concerned. "But the difficulties! There's no evidence. We're helpless. . . . Unless—" He stopped short. "That hieroglyphic letter! Maybe it's here somewhere. To-night was the time; but Scarlett came unexpectedly. I wonder if he knew about that, too. . . ." Vance's eyes drifted thoughtfully into space, and for several moments he stood rigid. Then he suddenly went to the sarcophagus and, striking a match, looked inside.

"Nothing." There was dire disappointment in his tone. "And yet, it should be here. . . ." He straightened up. "Perhaps . . . yes! That, too, would be logical."

He knelt down beside the unconscious man and began going through his pockets. Scarlett's coat was buttoned, and it was not until Vance had reached into the inner breast pocket that his search was rewarded. He drew out a crumpled sheet of yellow scratch paper of the kind on which Salveter's Egyptian exercise had been written, and after one glance at it thrust it into his own pocket.

Heath appeared at the door.

"O.K.," he called down, "I told 'em to rush it."

"How long will it take?" Vance asked.

"Not more'n ten minutes. I called Headquarters; and they'll relay it to the local station. They generally pick up the cop on the beat—but that don't delay things. I'll wait here at the door for 'em."

"Just a moment." Vance wrote something on the back of an envelope and handed it up to Heath. "Call Western Union and get this telegram off."

Heath took the message, read it, whistled softly, and went out into the hall.

"I'm wiring Salveter at New Haven to leave the train at New London and return to New York," Vance explained to Markham. "He'll be able to catch the Night Express at New London, and will get here early to-morrow morning."

Markham looked at him shrewdly.

"You think he'll come?"

"Oh, yes."

When the ambulance arrived, Heath escorted the interne, the blue-uniformed driver and the police officer into the museum. The interne, a pink-faced youth with a serious brow, bowed to Markham and knelt beside Scarlett. After a superficial examination, he beckoned to the driver.

"Go easy with his head."

The man, assisted by the officer, lifted Scarlett to the stretcher.

"How bad is he, doctor?" Markham asked anxiously.

"Pretty bad, sir." The interne shook his head pompously. "A messy fracture at the base of the skull. Cheyne-Stokes breathing. If he lives, he's luckier than I'll ever be." And with a shrug he followed the stretcher out of the house.

"I'll phone the hospital later," Markham said to Vance. "If Scarlett recovers, he can supply us with evidence."

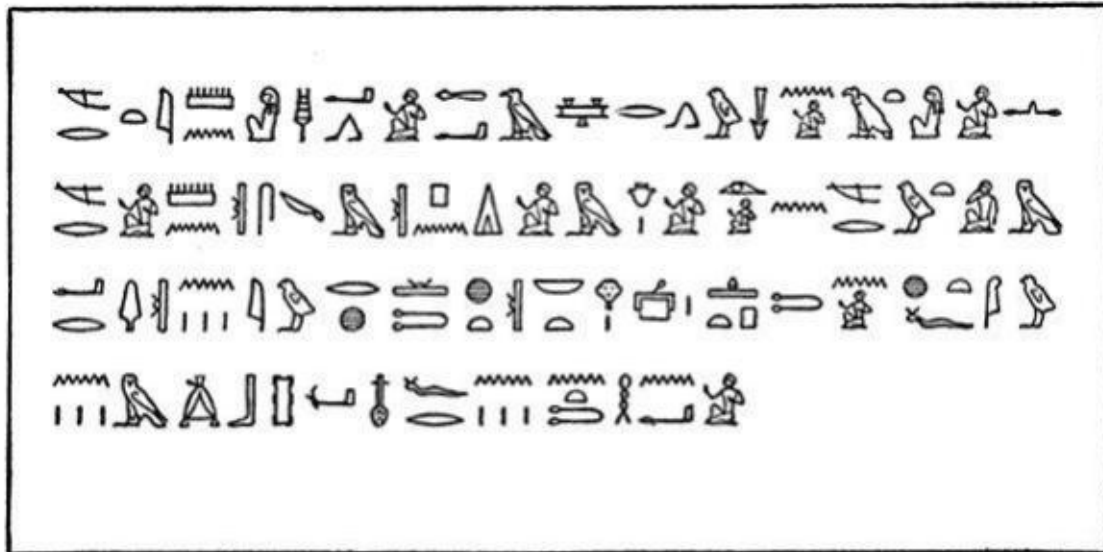
"Don't count on it," Vance discouraged him. "To-night's episode was isolated." He went to the sarcophagus and reversed the jack. Slowly the lid descended to its original position. "A bit dangerous, don't y' know, to leave it up."

Markham stood by frowning.

"Vance, what paper was that you found in Scarlett's pocket?"

"I imagine it was an incriminating document written in Egyptian hieroglyphs. We'll see."

He spread the paper out smoothly on the top of the sarcophagus. It was almost exactly like the letter Vance had pieced together in Bliss's study. The color of the paper was the same, and it contained four rows of hieroglyphs in green ink.



THE HIEROGLYPHIC LETTER

Vance studied it while Markham and Heath, who had returned to the museum, and I looked on.

"Let me see how well I remember my Egyptian," he murmured. "It's been years since I did any transliterating. . . ."

He placed his monocle in his eye and bent forward.

"Meryt-Amûn, aha-y o er yu son maut-y en merya-y men seshem pen dya-y em yeb-y era-y en marwet mar-en yu rekha-t khet nibet hir-sa hetpa-t na-y kheft shewa-n em debat nefra-n entot hena-y. . . . This is done very accurately, Markham. The nouns and adjectives agree as to gender, and the verb endings—"

"Never mind those matters," Markham interrupted impatiently. "What does that paper say?"

"I beg of you, Markham old dear!" Vance protested. "Middle-Kingdom Egyptian is a most difficult language. Coptic and Assyrian and Greek and Sanskrit are abecedarian beside it. However, I can give you a literal translation." He began reading slowly: "'Beloved of Amûn, I stop here until comes the brother of my mother. Not do I wish that should-endure this situation. I have-placed in my heart that I should-act for the sake of our well-being. Thou shalt-know every-thing later. Thou shalt-be-satisfied toward me when we are-free from what-blocks-the-way, happy-are we, thou together-with me. . . .' Not what you'd call Harvardian. But such were the verbal idiosyncrasies of the ancient Egyptians."

"Well, it don't make sense to me," Heath commented sourly.

"But properly paraphrased it makes fiendish sense, Sergeant. Put into everyday English, it says: 'Meryt-Amen: I am waiting here for my uncle. I cannot endure this situation any longer; and I have decided to take drastic action for the sake of our happiness. You will understand everything later, and you will forgive me when we are free from all obstacles and can be happy together.' . . . I say, Sergeant; does that make sense?"

"I'll tell the world!" Heath looked at Vance with an air of contemptuous criticism. "And you sent that bird Salveter to Boston!"

"He'll be back to-morrow," Vance assured him.

"But see here";—Markham's eyes were fixed on the incriminating paper—"what about that other letter you pieced together? And how did this letter get in Scarlett's pocket?"

Vance folded the paper carefully and placed it in his wallet.

"The time has come," he said slowly, "to tell you everything. It may be, when you have the facts in hand, you can figure out some course of procedure. I can see legal difficulties ahead; but I now have all the evidence we can ever hope for." He was uneasy and troubled. "Scarlett's intrusion in to-night's happenings changed the murderer's plans. Anyway, I can now convince you of the incredible and abominable truth."

Markham studied him for several moments, and a startled light came in his eyes.

"God Almighty!" he breathed. "I see what you mean." He clicked his teeth together. "But first I must phone the hospital. There's a chance that Scarlett can help us—if he lives."

He went to the rear of the museum and mounted the spiral stairs to the study. A few minutes later he reappeared, his face dark and hopeless.

"I spoke to the doctor," he said. "There's not one chance in a thousand for Scarlett. Concussion of the brain—and suffocation. They've got the pulmotor on him now. Even if he does pull through he'll be unconscious for a week or two."

"I was afraid of that." I had rarely seen Vance so distressed. "We were too late. But—dash it all!—I couldn't have foreseen his quixotism. And I warned him. . . ."

"Come, old man." Markham spoke with paternal kindness. "It's not your fault. There was nothing you could have done. And you were right in keeping the truth to yourself—"

"Excuse *me*!" Heath was exasperated. "I myself ain't exactly an enemy of truth. Why can't I get in on this?"

"You can, Sergeant." Vance placed his hand on the other's shoulder. "Let's go to the drawing-room. 'And every mountain and hill

shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain."

He moved toward the stairs; and we followed him.

## 21. THE MURDERER

(Saturday, July 14, 10:40 P.M.)

As we entered the drawing-room Brush rose. He was pale and palpably frightened.

"Why are you worried?" Vance asked.

"Suppose, sir, I should be blamed!" the man blurted. "It was I who left the front door open yesterday morning—I wanted to get some fresh air. And then you came and said something had happened to Mr. Kyle. I know I shouldn't have unlatched the door." (I realized then why he had acted in so terrified a manner.)

"You may cheer up," Vance told him. "We know who killed Mr. Kyle, and I can assure you, Brush, that the murderer didn't come in the front door."

"Thank you, sir." The words were like a sigh of relief.

"And now tell Hani to come here. Then you may go to your room."

Brush had scarcely left us when there was the sound of a key being inserted in the front door. A moment later Doctor Bliss appeared at the entrance to the drawing-room.

"Good-evening, doctor," Vance greeted him. "I hope we're not intrudin'. But there are several questions we wish to ask Hani during Mr. Salveter's absence."

"I understand," Bliss returned, with a sad nod. "You know, then, of Salveter's excursion to Boston."

"He phoned me and asked if he might go."

Bliss looked at Vance with heavy, inquisitive eyes.

"His wanting to go north at this time was most unusual," he said; "but I did not raise any objection. The atmosphere here is very depressing, and I sympathized with his desire to escape from it."

"What time did he leave the house?" Vance put the question carelessly.

"About nine. I offered to drive him to the station. . . ."

"At nine, what? And where was he between eight and nine?"

Bliss looked unhappy.

"He was with me in the study. We were going over details regarding the reproductions of Hotepheres' tomb furniture."

"Was he with you when Mr. Scarlett arrived?"

"Yes." Bliss frowned. "Very peculiar, Scarlett's visit. He evidently wanted to talk to Salveter alone. He acted most mysteriously—treated Salveter with a sort of resentful coldness. But I continued to discuss the object of Salveter's trip north—"

"Mr. Scarlett waited?"

"Yes. He watched Salveter like a hawk. Then, when Salveter went out, Scarlett went with him."

"Ah! And you, doctor?" Vance was apparently absorbed in selecting a cigarette from his case.

"I stayed in the study."

"And that's the last you saw of either Scarlett or Salveter?"

"Yes I went for a walk about half past nine. I looked in the museum on my way out, thinking possibly Scarlett had remained and would join me; but the room was dark. So I strolled down the avenue to Washington Square. . . ."

"Thank you, doctor." Vance had lighted his cigarette and was smoking moodily. "We sha'n't trouble you any more to-night."

Hani entered the room.

"You wish to see me?" His manner was detached and, I thought, a trifle bored.

"Yes." Vance indicated a chair facing the table. Then he turned quickly to Bliss who was on the point of going out.

"On second thought, doctor, it may be advisable for us to question you again regarding Mr. Salveter.—Would you mind waiting in the study?"

"Not at all." Bliss shot him a comprehending glance, and went down the hall. A few moments later we heard the study door close.

Vance gave Hani a curious look, which I did not understand.

"I have something I wish to tell Mr. Markham," he said. "Will you be good enough to stand in the hall and see that no one disturbs us?"

Hani rose.

"With pleasure, *effendi*." And he took his post outside.

Vance closed the folding doors, and coming back to the centre-table, settled himself comfortably.

"You, Markham—and you, Sergeant—were both right yesterday morning when you concluded that Doctor Bliss was guilty of murdering Kyle—"

"Say, listen!" Heath leapt to his feet. "What the hell—!"

"Oh, quite, Sergeant. Please sit down and control yourself."

"I said he killed him! And you said—"

"My word! Can't you be tranquil? You're so upsettin', Sergeant." Vance made an exasperated gesture. "I'm aware you remarked inelegantly that Bliss had 'croaked' Mr. Kyle. And I trust you have not forgotten that I said to you last night that we often arrive at the same destination at the same time—but from opposite directions."

"That was what you meant, was it?" Heath resumed his seat surlily. "Then why didn't you let me arrest him?"

"Because that's what he wanted you to do."

"I'm floundering," Heath wailed. "The world has gone nuts."

"Just a moment, Sergeant." Markham spoke peremptorily. "I'm beginning to understand this affair. It's not insane in the least.—Let



Mr. Vance continue."

Heath started to expostulate, but instead made a grimace of resignation, and began chewing on his cigar.

Vance regarded him sympathetically.

"I knew, Sergeant—or at least I strongly suspected—within five minutes after entering the museum yesterday morning, that Bliss was guilty. Scarlett's story about the appointment gave me the first clew. Bliss's telephone call in the presence of every one and his remarks about the new shipment struck me as fitting in perfectly with a preconceived plan. Then, when I saw the various clews, I felt positive they had been planted by Bliss himself. With him it was not only a matter of pointing suspicion to himself, but—on second view—of throwing suspicion on another. Fortunately he overstepped the grounds of plausibility; for had some one else committed the crime, the planted clews would have been less numerous and less obvious. Consequently, I leapt to the conclusion that Bliss had murdered Kyle and had, at the same time, striven to lead us to think that he was the victim of a plot—"

"But, Mr. Vance," interrupted Heath, "you said—"

"I did not say one word to give you the definite impression that I exonerated Bliss. Not once did I say he was innocent. . . . Think back. You'll remember I said only that the clews did not ring true—that things were not what they seemed. I knew the clews were traps, set by Bliss to deceive us. And I also knew—as Mr. Markham knew—that if we arrested Bliss on the outward evidence, it would be impossible to convict him."

Markham nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, Sergeant. Mr. Vance is quite correct. I can't recall a single remark of his inconsistent with his belief in Bliss's guilt."

"Although I knew Bliss was guilty," Vance continued, "I didn't know what his ultimate object was or whom he was trying to involve. I suspected it was Salveter—though it might have been either Scarlett or Hani or Mrs. Bliss. I at once saw the necessity of determining the real victim of his plot. So I pretended to fall in with the obvious situation. I couldn't let Bliss think that I suspected him,—my only hope lay in pretending that I believed some one else was guilty. But I did avoid the traps set for us. I wanted Bliss to plant other clews against his victim and perhaps give us some workable evidence. That was why I begged you to play a waiting game with me."

"But what was Bliss's idea in having himself arrested?" Markham asked. "There was danger in that."

"Very little. He probably believed that even before an indictment he or his lawyer could persuade you of his innocence and of Salveter's guilt. Or, if he had been held for trial, he was almost sure of an acquittal, and would then be entirely safe on the caressin' principle of double jeopardy, or *autrefois acquit*. . . . No, he was running no great risk. And remember, too, he was playing a big game. Once he had been arrested, he would have felt justified in pointing openly to Salveter as the murderer and plotter. Hence I fought against your arresting him, for *it was the very thing he wanted*. As long as he thought he was free from suspicion, there was no point in his defending himself at Salveter's expense. And, in order to involve Salveter, he was forced to plant more evidence, to concoct other schemes. And it was on these schemes that I counted for evidence."

"I'm sunk!" The ashes of Heath's cigar toppled off and fell over his waistcoat, but he didn't notice them.

"But, Sergeant, I gave you many warnings. And there was the motive. I'm convinced that Bliss knew there was no more financial help coming from Kyle; and there's nothing he wouldn't have done to insure a continuation of his researches. Furthermore, he was intensely jealous of Salveter: he knew Mrs. Bliss loved the young cub."

"But why," put in Markham, "did he not merely kill Salveter?"

"Oh, I say! The money was a cardinal factor,—he wanted Meryt-Amen to inherit Kyle's wealth. His second'ry object was to eliminate Salveter from Meryt-Amen's heart: he had no reason for killing him. Therefore he planned subtly to disqualify him by making it appear that Salveter not only had murdered his uncle but had tried to send another to the chair for it."

Vance slowly lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Bliss was killing three birds with one stone. He was making himself a martyr in Meryt-Amen's eyes; he was eliminating Salveter; he was insuring his wife a fortune with which he could continue his excavations. Few murders have had so powerful a triple motive. . . . And one of the tragic things is that Mrs. Bliss more than half believed in Salveter's guilt. She suffered abominably. You recall how she took the attitude that she wanted the murderer brought to justice. And she feared all the time that it was Salveter. . . ."

"Still and all," said Heath, "Bliss didn't seem very anxious to get Salveter mixed up in the affair."

"Ah, but he was, Sergeant. He was constantly involving Salveter while pretending not to. A feigned reluctance, as it were. He couldn't be too obvious about it—that would have given his game away. . . . You remember my question of who had charge of the medical supplies. Bliss stuttered, as if trying to shield some one. Very clever, don't y' know."

"But if you knew this—" Heath began.

"I didn't know *all* of it, Sergeant. I knew only that Bliss was guilty. I was not sure that Salveter was the object of his plot. Therefore I had to investigate and learn the truth."

"Anyhow, I was right in the first place when I said Bliss was guilty," Heath declared doggedly.

"Of course you were, Sergeant." Vance spoke almost affectionately. "And I felt deuced bad to have to appear to contradict you." He rose and, going to Heath, held out his hand. "Will you forgive me?"

"Well . . . maybe." Heath's eyes belied his gruff tone as he grasped Vance's hand. "Anyhow, I was right!"

Vance grinned and sat down.

"The plot itself was simple," he continued after a moment. "Bliss phoned Kyle in the presence of every one and made the appointment for eleven. He specifically mentioned the new shipment, and suggested that Kyle should come early. You see, he had decided on the murder—and on the whole plot in fact—when he made the fatal rendezvous. And he deliberately left the scarab pin on the study desk. After killing Kyle he placed the pin and the financial report near the body. And note, Markham, that Salveter had access to both objects. Moreover, Bliss knew that Salveter was in the habit of going to the museum after breakfast; and he timed Kyle's appointment so that Salveter and his uncle would probably meet. He sent Salveter to the Metropolitan to get him out of the house while he himself killed Kyle. And he also fixed the statue of Sakhmet so that it would look like a trap. The murderer could easily have come back at any time before we arrived and planted the pin and the report and made the foot-prints—provided of course Bliss had been asleep with the opium. . . ."

Heath sat upright and squinted at Vance.

"That trap was only a stall?" he asked indignantly.

"Nothing else, Sergeant. It was set up after the murder, so that even if Salveter had had an alibi, he still could have been guilty. Furthermore, the possibility of Kyle's having been killed by an absent person was another point in favor of Bliss. Why should Bliss have made a death-trap when he had every opportunity to kill Kyle by direct contact? The trap was merely another counter-clue."

"But the pencil used in the trap," interposed Markham. "It was not the kind Salveter used."

"My dear Markham! Bliss used one of his own pencils for the 'upright' in order to create another clue against himself. A man actually planning a death-trap is not going to use his own pencil,—he would use the pencil of the man he was trying to involve. The doctor therefore used his own pencil—in order to throw suspicion elsewhere. But the trap did not fool me. It was too fortuitous. A murderer would not have taken such a chance. The falling statue might not have fallen exactly on Kyle's head. And another thing: a man struck in that fashion is not likely to fall in the position we found Kyle, with his head just beneath the place where the statue struck him, and with his arms stretched out. When I made my experiment, and the statue fell exactly where Kyle's head had been, I realized how unlikely it was that he had actually been killed by the statue falling." Vance's eyes twinkled. "I did not raise the point at the time, for I wanted you to believe in the death-trap."

"Right again!" Heath slapped his forehead dramatically with his palm. "And I never thought of it! . . . Sure, I'll forgive you, Mr. Vance!"

"The truth is, Sergeant, I did everything I could to make you overlook the inconsistency of it. And Mr. Markham didn't see it either. [32] As a matter of fact, Kyle was killed while he was looking into the cabinet, by a blow from someone behind him. I have an idea, too, that one of those heavy flint or porphyry maces was used. His body was arranged in the position we found it, and the statue of Sakhmet was then dropped on his skull, obliterating the evidence of the first blow."

"But suppose," objected Markham, "you hadn't seen the loose ring on the curtain?"

"The trap was arranged so that we would discover it. If we had overlooked it, Bliss would have called our attention to it."

"But the finger-prints—" began Heath, in a kind of daze.

"They were purposely left on the statue. More evidence, d'ye see, against Bliss. But he had an alibi in reserve. His first explanation was so simple and so specious:—he had moved Sakhmet because it wasn't quite straight. But the second explanation why there were no other finger-prints on Sakhmet was to come later, after his arrest—to wit, no one had actually wielded the statue: it was a death-trap set by Salveter!"

Vance made an open-handed gesture.

"Bliss covered every clue against himself with a stronger clue pointing to Salveter. . . . Regard, for instance, the evidence of the footprints. Superficially these pointed to Bliss. But there was the omnipresent counter-clue—namely: he was wearing bedroom slippers yesterday morning, and only one tennis shoe was to be found in the study. The other tennis shoe was in his room, *exactly where he said he had left it the night before*. Bliss simply brought one shoe downstairs, made the footprints in the blood, and placed the shoe in the waste-basket. He wanted us to find the prints and to discover the shoe. And we did—that is, the Sergeant did. His answer to the footprints, after his arrest, would merely have been that some one who had access to his room had taken one tennis shoe downstairs and made the tracks to involve him."

Markham nodded.

"Yes," he said; "I'd have been inclined to exonerate him, especially after the discovery of opium in his coffee cup."

"Ah, that opium! The perfect alibi! What jury would have convicted him after the evidence of the opium in his coffee? They would have regarded him as the victim of a plot. And the District Attorney's office would have come in for much severe criticism. . . . And how simple the opium episode was! Bliss took the can from the cabinet, extracted what he needed for the ruse, and placed the powder in the bottom of his coffee cup."

"You didn't think he had been narcotized?"

"No. I knew he hadn't. A narcotic contracts the pupils; and Bliss's were distended with excitement. I knew he was pretending, and that made me suspect I'd find a drug in his coffee."

"But what about the can?" Heath put the question. "I never did get that can business straight. You sent Hani—"

"Now, Sergeant!" Vance spoke good-naturedly. "I knew where the can was, and I merely wanted to ascertain how much Hani knew."

"But I see the Sergeant's point," Markham put in. "We don't know that the opium can was in Salveter's room."

"Oh, don't we, now?" Vance turned toward the hall. "Hani!"

The Egyptian opened the sliding door.

"I say,"—Vance looked straight into the man's eyes—"I'm dashed admirin' of your deceptive attitude, but we could bear some facts for a change.—Where did you find the opium tin?"

"Effendi, there is no longer any need for dissimulation. You are a man of profound wisdom, and I trust you. The tin was hidden in Mr. Salveter's room."

"Thanks awfully." Vance was almost brusque. "And now return to the hall."

Hani went out and softly closed the door.

"And by not going down to breakfast yesterday morning," Vance continued, "Bliss knew that his wife and Salveter would be in the breakfast-room alone, and that Salveter might easily have put the opium in the coffee. . . ."

"But," asked Markham, "if you knew Bliss put the opium in his own coffee, why all the interest in the samovar?"

"I had to be sure who it was Bliss's plot was aimed at. He was trying to make it appear that *he* was the victim of the plot; and since his object was to involve some one else, I knew the real victim would have had to have access to the coffee yesterday morning."

Heath nodded ponderously.

"That's easy enough. The old boy was pretending some one had fed him knock-out drops, but if the bird he was aiming at couldn't have fed him the drops, his plot would have gone blooey. . . . But look here, Mr. Vance;—he suddenly remembered something—"what was the idea of the doc's trying to escape?"

"It was a perfectly logical result of what had gone before," Vance explained. "After we had refused to arrest him, he began to worry. Y' see, he yearned to be arrested; and we disappointed him frightfully. Sittin' in his room, he got to planning. How could he make us re-order his arrest and thus give him the chance to point out all the evidences of Salveter's heinous plot against him? He decided to attempt an escape. That gesture, he figured, would surely revive suspicion against him. So he simply went out, drew his money openly from the bank, taxied to the Grand Central Station, asked loudly about trains to Montreal, and then stood conspicuously by the gate waiting for the train. . . . He knew that Guilfoyle was following him; for, had he really intended making his escape, you may rest assured Guilfoyle would never have traced him. You, Sergeant, accepted Bliss's action at its face value; and I was afraid that his silly disappearance would produce the very result he intended—namely, his re-arrest. That was why I argued against it so passionately."

Vance leaned back but did not relax. There was a rigid alertness in his attitude.

"And because you did not manacle him, Sergeant," he continued, "he was forced to take a further step. He had to build up a case against Salveter. So he staged the drama with the dagger. He deliberately sent Salveter to the study to get a memorandum-book in the desk—where the dagger was kept. . . ."

"And the sheath!" exclaimed Markham.

"Oh, quite. That was the real clew against Salveter. Having put the sheath in Salveter's room, Bliss suggested to us that we might find the would-be assassin by locating the sheath. I knew where it was the moment he so helpfully mentioned it; so I gave Hani a chance to lie about it. . . ."

"You mean Hani didn't find the sheath in the hall?"

"Of course not."

Vance again called Hani from the hall.

"Where did you find the sheath of the royal dagger?" he asked.

Hani answered without a moment's hesitation.

"In Mr. Salveter's room, *effendi*—as you well know."

Vance nodded.

"And by the by, Hani, has any one approached this door to-night?"

"No, *effendi*. The doctor is still in his study."

Vance dismissed him with a gesture, and went on:

"Y' see, Markham, Bliss put the sheath in Salveter's room, and then threw the dagger into the headboard of his bed. He phoned me and, when we arrived, told an elaborate but plausible tale of having been assaulted by an *inconnu*."

"He was a damn good actor," Heath commented.

"Yes—in the main. But there was one psychological point he overlooked. If he had actually been the victim of a murderous attack he would not have gone down-stairs alone in the dark to phone me. He would have first roused the house."[\[33\]](#)

"That's reasonable." Markham had become impatient. "But you said something about the picture not being complete—"

"The letter!" Vance sat up and threw away his cigarette. "That was the missing factor. I couldn't understand why the forged hieroglyphic letter didn't show up last night,—it was the perfect opportunity. But it was nowhere in evidence; and that's what troubled me. . . . However, when I found Scarlett working in the museum, I understood. The doctor, I'm convinced, intended to plant the forged letter—which he had placed temporarily in the desk-table drawer—in Meryt-Amen's room or some place where we'd find it. But when he looked into the museum through the study door he saw Scarlett at work at the desk-table. So he let the letter go, reserving it for future use—in case we didn't arrest Salveter after the dagger episode. And when I deliberately avoided the clews he had prepared against Salveter, I knew the letter would appear very soon. I was afraid Scarlett might in some way block Bliss's scheme, so I warned him to keep away from the house. I don't know what more I could have done."

"Nor I." Markham's tone was consoling. "Scarlett should have followed your advice."

"But he didn't." Vance sighed regretfully.

"You think, then, that Scarlett suspected the truth?"

"Undoubtedly. And he suspected it early in the game. But he wasn't sure enough to speak out. He was afraid he might be doing the doctor an injustice; and, being an English gentleman, he kept silent. My belief is, he got to worrying about the situation and finally went to Bliss—"

"But something must have convinced him."

"The dagger, Markham. Bliss made a grave error in that regard. Scarlett and Bliss were the only two persons who knew about that smuggled weapon. And when I showed it to Scarlett and informed him it had been used in an attempt on Bliss's life, he knew pretty conclusively that Bliss had concocted the whole tale."

"And he came here to-night to confront Bliss. . . ."

"Exactly. He realized that Bliss was trying to involve Salveter; and he wanted to let Bliss know that his monstrous scheme was seen through. He came here to protect an innocent man—despite the fact that Salveter was his rival, as it were, for the affections of Meryt-Amen. That would be like Scarlett. . . ." Vance looked sad. "When I sent Salveter to Boston I believed I had eliminated every possibility of danger. But Scarlett felt he had to take matters in his own hands. His action was fine, but ill-advised. The whole trouble was, it gave Bliss the opportunity he'd been waiting for. When he couldn't get the forged letter from the museum last night, and when we declined his invitation to find the sheath in Salveter's room, it was necessary for him to play his ace—the forged letter."

"Yes, yes. I see that. But just where did Scarlett fit?"

"When Scarlett came here to-night Bliss no doubt listened to his accusation diplomatically, and then on some pretext or other got him into the museum. When Scarlett was off guard Bliss struck him on the head—probably with one of those maces in the end cabinet—and put him in the sarcophagus. It was a simple matter for him to get the jack from his car, which he keeps parked in the street outside,—you recall that he offered to drive Salveter to the station. . . ."

"But the letter?"

"Can't you see how everything fitted? The attack on Scarlett took place between eight and eight-thirty. Salveter was probably up-

stairs bidding adieu to Mrs. Bliss. At any rate, he was in the house, and therefore could have been Scarlett's murderer. In order to make it appear that Salveter *was actually the murderer of Scarlett* Bliss crumpled up the forged telltale letter and stuck in it Scarlett's pocket. He wanted to make it appear that Scarlett had come to the house to-night to confront Salveter, had mentioned the letter he'd found in the desk-table drawer, and had been killed by Salveter."

"But why wouldn't Salveter have taken the letter?"

"The assumption would have been that Salveter didn't know that Scarlett had the letter in his pocket."

"What I want to know," put in Heath, "is how Bliss found out about Salveter's original letter."

"That point is easily explained, Sergeant." Vance drew out his cigarette-case. "Salveter undoubtedly returned to the museum yesterday morning, as he told us, and was working on his letter when Kyle entered. He then put the letter in the table-drawer, and went to the Metropolitan Museum on his errand. Bliss, who was probably watching him through a crack in the study door, saw him put the paper away, and later took it out to see what it was. Being an indiscreet letter to Meryt-Amen, it gave Bliss an idea. He took it to his study and rewrote it, making it directly incriminating; and then tore up the original. When I learned that the letter had disappeared I was worried, for I suspected that Bliss had taken it. And when I saw it had been destroyed and thrown away, I was convinced we would find another letter. But since I had the original, I believed that the forged letter would, when it appeared, give us evidence against Bliss."

"So that's why you were so interested in those three words?"

"Yes, Sergeant. I hardly thought Bliss would use *tem* and *was* and *ankh* in rewriting the letter, for he couldn't have known that Salveter had told us about the letter and specifically mentioned these three words. And not one of the three words was in the forgery."

"But a handwriting expert—"

"Oh, I say, Sergeant! Don't be so *naïf*. A handwriting expert is a romantic scientist even when the writing is English script and familiar to him. And all his rules are based on chirographic idiosyncrasies. No art expert can tell with surety who drew a picture—and Egyptian writing is mostly pictures. Forged Michelangelo drawings, for instance, are being sold by clever dealers constantly. The only approach in such matters is an aesthetic one—and there is no aesthetics in Egyptian hieroglyphs."

Heath made a wry face.

"Well, if the forged letter couldn't be admitted as evidence, what was the doctor's idea?"

"Don't you see, Sergeant, that even if the letter couldn't be absolutely identified with Salveter, it would have made every one believe that Salveter was guilty and had escaped a conviction on a legal technicality. Certainly Meryt-Amen would have believed that Salveter wrote the letter; and that was what Bliss wanted."

Vance turned to Markham.

"It's a legal point which really doesn't matter. Salveter might not have been convicted; but Bliss's plot would none the less have succeeded. With Kyle dead, Bliss would have had access to one-half of Kyle's fortune—in his wife's name, to be sure—and Meryt-Amen would have repudiated Salveter. Thus Bliss would have won every trick. And even legally Salveter might have been convicted had it not been for Hani's removal of two direct clues from Salveter's room—the opium can and the sheath. Furthermore, there was the letter in Scarlett's pocket."

"But, Vance, how would the letter have been found?" Markham asked. "If you had not suspected the plot and looked for Scarlett's body, it might have remained in the sarcophagus almost indefinitely."

"No." Vance shook his head. "Scarlett was to have remained in the sarcophagus only for a couple of days. When it was discovered to-morrow that he was missing Bliss would probably have found the body for us, along with the letter."

He looked questioningly at Markham.

"How are we going to connect Bliss with the crime, since Salveter was in the house at the time of the attack?"

"If Scarlett should get well—"

"If! . . . Just so. But suppose he shouldn't—and the chances are against him. Then what? Scarlett at most could only testify that Bliss had made an abortive and unsuccessful attack on him. True, you might convict him for felonious assault, but it would leave Kyle's murder still unsolved. And if Bliss said that Scarlett attacked him and that he struck Scarlett in self-defense, you'd have a difficult time convicting him even for assault."

Markham rose and walked up and down the room. Then Heath asked a question.

"How does this Ali Baba fit into the picture, Mr. Vance?"

"Hani knew from the first what had happened; and he was shrewd enough to see the plot that Bliss had built up about Salveter. He loved Salveter and Meryt-Amen, and he wanted them to be happy. What could he do except lend his every energy to protecting them? And he has certainly done this, Sergeant. Egyptians are not like Occidentals. It was against his nature to come out frankly and tell us what he suspected. Hani played a clever game—the only game he could have played. He never believed in the vengeance of Sakhmet. He used his superstitious logomachy to cover up the truth. He fought with words for Salveter's safety."

Markham halted in front of Vance.

"The thing is incredible! I have never known a murderer like Bliss."

"Oh, don't give him too much credit." Vance lighted the cigarette he had been holding for the past five minutes. "He frightfully overdid the clues: he made them too glaring. Therein lay his weakness."

"Still," said Markham, "if you hadn't come into the case I'd have brought a murder charge against him."

"And you would have played into his hands. Because I didn't want you to, I appeared to argue against his guilt."

"A palimpsest!" Markham commented after a pause.

Vance took a deep draw on his cigarette.

"Exactly. *Palimpsestos*—again rub smooth.' First came the true story of the crime, carefully indicated. Then it was erased, and the story of the murder, with Salveter as the villain, was written over it. This too, was erased, and the original story—in grotesque outline and filled with inconsistencies and loopholes—was again written. We were supposed to read the third version, become sceptical about it, and find the evidences of Salveter's guilt between the lines. My task was to push through to the first and original version—the twice

written-over truth."

"And you did it, Mr. Vance!" Heath had risen and gone toward the door. "The doc is in the study, Chief. I'll take him to Headquarters myself."

## 22. THE JUDGMENT OF ANÛBIS

(Saturday, July 14, 11 P.M.)

"I say, Sergeant! Don't be rash." Despite the drawling quality of Vance's tone Heath halted abruptly. "If I were you I'd take a bit of legal advice from Mr. Markham before arresting the doctor."

"Legal advice be damned!"

"Oh, quite. In principle I agree with you. But there's no need to be temerarious about these little matters. Caution is always good." Markham, who was standing beside Vance, lifted his head.

"Sit down, Sergeant," he ordered. "We can't arrest a man on theory." He walked to the fireplace and back. "This thing has to be thought out. There's no evidence against Bliss. We couldn't hold him an hour if a clever lawyer got busy on the case."

"And Bliss knows it," said Vance.

"But he killed Kyle!" Heath expostulated.

"Granted." Markham sat down beside the table and rested his chin in his hands. "But I've nothing tangible to present to a grand jury. And, as Mr. Vance says, even if Scarlett should recover I'd have only an assault charge against Bliss."

"What wallops me, sir," moaned Heath, "is how a guy can commit murder almost before our very eyes, and get away with it. It ain't reasonable."

"Ah, but there's little that's reasonable in this fantastic and ironical world, Sergeant," remarked Vance.

"Well, anyhow," returned Heath, "I'd arrest that bird in a minute and take my chances at making the charge stick."

"I feel the same way," Markham said. "But no matter how convinced we are of the truth, we must be able to produce conclusive evidence. And this fiend has covered all the evidence so cleverly that any jury in the country would acquit him, even if we could hold him for trial—which is highly dubious."

Vance sighed and looked up.

"The law!" He spoke with unusual fervor. "And the rooms in which this law is put on public exhibition are called courts of justice. *Justice!*—oh, my precious aunt! *Summum jus, summa injuria*. How can there be justice, or even intelligence, in echolalia? . . . Here we three are—a District Attorney; a Sergeant of the Homicide Bureau; and a lover of Brahms' B-flat piano concerto—with a known murderer within fifty feet of us; and we're helpless! Why? Because this elaborate invention of imbeciles, called the law, has failed to provide for the extermination of a dangerous and despicable criminal, who not only murdered his benefactor in cold blood, but attempted to kill another decent man, and then endeavored to saddle an innocent third man with both crimes so that he could continue digging up ancient and venerated corpses! . . . No wonder Hani detests him. At heart Bliss is a ghoul; and Hani is an honorable and intelligent man."

"I admit the law is imperfect," Markham interrupted tartly. "But your dissertation is hardly helpful. We're confronted with a terrible problem, and a way must be found to handle it."

Vance still stood before the table, his eyes fixed on the door.

"But your law will never solve it," he said. "You can't convict Bliss; you don't even dare arrest him. He could make you the laughing-stock of the country if you tried it. And furthermore, he'd become a sort of persecuted hero who had been hounded by an incompetent and befuddled police, who had unjustly pounced on him in a moment of groggy desperation in order to save their more or less classic features."

Vance took a deep draw on his cigarette.

"Markham old dear, I'm inclined to think the gods of ancient Egypt were more intelligent than Solon, Justinian, and all the other law-givers combined. Hani was spoofing about the vengeance of Sakhmet; but, after all, that solar-disked lady would be just as effective as your silly statutes. Mythological ideas are largely nonsense; but are they more nonsensical than the absurdities of present-day law? . . ."

"For God's sake, be still." Markham was irritable.

Vance looked at him in troubled concern.

"Your hands are tied by the technicalities of a legalistic system; and, as a result, a creature like Bliss is to be turned loose on the world. Moreover, a harmless chap like Salveter is to be put under suspicion and ruined. Also, Meryt-Amen—a courageous lady—"

"I realize all that." Markham raised himself, an agonized look on his face. "And yet, Vance, there's not one piece of convincing evidence against Bliss."

"Most distressin'. Your only hope seems to be that the eminent doctor will meet with a sudden and fatal accident. Such things do happen, don't y' know."

Vance smoked for a moment.

"If only Hani's gods had the supernatural power attributed to them!" he sighed. "How deuced simple! And really, Anûbis hasn't shown up at all well in this affair. He's been excruciatingly lazy. As the god of the underworld—"

"That's enough!" Markham rose. "Have a little sense of propriety. Being an aesthete without responsibilities is no doubt delightful, but the world's work must go on. . . ."

"Oh, by all means." Vance seemed wholly indifferent to the other's outburst. "I say, you might draw up a new law altering the existing rules of evidence, and present it to the legislature. The only difficulty would be that, by the time those intellectual Sandows got through debating and appointing committees, you and I and the Sergeant and Bliss would have passed forever down the dim corridors of time."

Markham slowly turned toward Vance. His eyes were mere slits.

"What's behind this childish garrulity?" he demanded. "You've got something on your mind."

Vance seated himself on the edge of the table and, putting out his cigarette, thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"Markham," he said, with serious deliberation, "you know, as well as I, that Bliss is outside the law, and that there's no human way to convict him. The only means by which he can be brought to book is trickery."

"Trickery?" Markham was momentarily indignant.

"Oh, nothing reprehensible," Vance answered lightly, taking out another cigarette. "Consider, Markham. . . ." And he launched out into a detailed recapitulation of the case. I could not understand the object of his wordy repetitions, for they seemed to have little bearing on the crucial point at issue. And Markham, also, was puzzled. Several times he attempted to interrupt, but Vance held up his hand imperatively and continued with his résumé.

After ten minutes Markham refused to be silenced.

"Come to the point, Vance," he said somewhat angrily. "You've gone over all this before. Have you—or haven't you—any suggestion?"

"Yes, I have a suggestion," Vance spoke earnestly. "It's a psychological experiment; and there is a chance that it'll prove effective. I believe that if Bliss were confronted suddenly with what we know, and if a little forceful chicanery were used on him, he might be surprised into an admission that would give you a hold on him. He doesn't know we found Scarlett in the sarcophagus, and we might pretend that we have got an incriminating statement from the poor chap. We might go so far as to tell him that Mrs. Bliss is thoroughly convinced of the truth; for if he believes that his plot has failed and that there is no hope of his continuing his excavations, he may even confess everything. Bliss is a colossal egoist, and, if cornered, might blurt out the truth and boast of his cleverness. And you must admit that your one chance of shipping the old codger to the executioner lies in a confession."

"Chief, couldn't we arrest the guy on the evidence he planted against himself?" Heath asked irritably. "There was that scarab pin, and the bloody foot-marks and the finger-prints—"

"No, no, Sergeant," Markham was impatient. "He has covered himself at every point. And the moment we arrested him he'd turn on Salveter. All we'd achieve would be the ruination of an innocent man and the unhappiness of Mrs. Bliss."

Heath capitulated.

"Yeah, I can see that," he said sourly, after a moment. "But this situation slays me. I've known some clever crooks in my day; but this bird Bliss has 'em all beat . . . . Why not take Mr. Vance's suggestion?"

Markham halted in his nervous pacing, and set his jaw.

"I guess we'll have to," he fixed his gaze on Vance. "But don't handle him with silk gloves."

"Really, now, I never wear 'em. Chamois, yes—on certain occasions. And in winter I'm partial to pigskin and reindeer. But silk! Oh, my word! . . ."

He went to the folding door and threw it open. Hani stood just outside in the hall, with folded arms, a silent, watchful sentinel.

"Has the doctor left the study?" Vance asked.

"No, *effendi*," Hani's eyes looked straight ahead.

"Good!" Vance started down the hall. "Come, Markham. Let's see what a bit of extra-legal persuasion will do."

Markham and Heath and I followed him. He did not knock on the study door, but threw it open unceremoniously.

"Oh, I say! Something's amiss," Vance's comment came simultaneously with our realization that the study was empty. "Dashed queer." He went to the steel door leading to the spiral stairs, and opened it. "No doubt the doctor is communin' with his treasures." He passed through the door and descended the steps, the rest of us trailing along.

Vance drew up at the foot of the stairs and put his hand to his forehead.

"We'll never interview Bliss again in this world," he said in a low voice.

There was no need for him to explain. In the corner opposite, in almost the exact place where we had found Kyle's body the preceding day, Bliss lay sprawled face downward in a pool of blood. Across the back of his crushed skull stretched the life-sized statue of Anúbis. The heavy figure of the underworld god had apparently fallen on him as he leaned over his precious items in the cabinet before which he had murdered Kyle. The coincidence was so staggering that none of us was able to speak for several moments. We stood, in a kind of paralyzed awe, looking down on the body of the great Egyptologist.

Markham was the first to break the silence.

"It's incredible!" His voice was strained and unnatural. "There's a divine retribution in this."

"Oh, doubtless," Vance moved to the feet of the statue and bent over. "However, I don't go in for mysticism myself. I'm an empiricist—same like Weininger said the English are." [34] He adjusted his monocle. "Ah! . . . Sorry to disappoint you, and all that. But there's nothing supernatural about the demise of the doctor. Behold, Markham, the broken ankles of Anúbis. . . . The situation is quite obvious. While the doctor was leaning over his treasure, he jarred the statue in some way, and it toppled over on him."

We all bent forward. The heavy base of the statue of Anúbis stood where it had been when we first saw it; but the figure, from the ankles up, had broken off.

"You see," Vance was saying, pointing to the base, "the ankles are very slender, and the statue is made of limestone—a rather fragile substance. The ankles no doubt were cracked in shipping, and the tremendous weight of the body weakened the flaw."

Heath inspected the statue closely.

"That's what happened, all right," he remarked, straightening up. . . . "I ain't had many breaks in my life, Chief," he added to Markham with feigned jauntiness; "but I never want a better one than this. Mr. Vance mighta lured the doc into a confession—and he mighta failed. Now we got nothing to worry about."

"Quite true," Markham nodded vaguely. He was still under the influence of the astounding change in the situation. "I'm leaving you in charge, Sergeant. You'd better call the local ambulance and get the Medical Examiner. Phone me at home as soon as the routine work is finished. I'll take care of the reporters in the morning. . . . The case is on the shelf, thank God!"

He stood for some time, his eyes fixed on the body. He looked almost haggard, but I knew a great weight had been taken off of his mind by Bliss's unexpected death.

"I'll attend to everything, sir," Heath assured him. "But what about breaking the news to Mrs. Bliss?"



"Hani will do that," said Vance. He put his hand on Markham's arm. "Come along, old friend. You need sleep. . . . Let's stagger round to my humble abode, and I'll give you a brandy-and-soda. I still have some *Napoléon*-'48 left."

"Thanks." Markham drew a deep sigh.

As we emerged into the front hall Vance beckoned to Hani.

"Very touchin', but your beloved employer has gone to Amentet to join the shades of the Pharaohs."

"He is dead?" the Egyptian lifted his eyebrows slightly.

"Oh, quite, Hani. Anûbis fell on him as he leaned over the end cabinet. A most effective death. But there was a certain justice in it. Doctor Bliss was guilty of Mr. Kyle's murder."

"You and I knew that all along, *effendi*." The man smiled wistfully at Vance. "But I fear that the doctor's death may have been my fault. When I unpacked the statue of Anûbis and set it in the corner, I noticed that the ankles were cracked. I did not tell the doctor, for I was afraid he might accuse me of having been careless, or of having deliberately injured his treasure."

"No one is going to blame you for Doctor Bliss's death," Vance said casually. "We're leaving you to inform Mrs. Bliss of the tragedy. And Mr. Salveter will be returning early to-morrow morning. . . . *Es-salâmu alei-kum*."

"Ma es salâm, effendi."

Vance and Markham and I passed out into the heavy night air.

"Let's walk," Vance said. "It's only a little over a mile to my apartment, and I feel the need of exercise."

Markham fell in with the suggestion, and we strolled toward Fifth Avenue in silence. When we had crossed Madison Square and passed the Stuyvesant Club, Markham spoke.

"It's almost unbelievable, Vance. It's the sort of thing that makes one superstitious. Here we were, confronted by an insoluble problem. We knew Bliss was guilty, and yet there was no way to reach him. And while we were debating the case he stepped into the museum and was accidentally killed by a falling statue on practically the same spot where he murdered Kyle. . . . Damn it! Such things don't happen in the orderly course of the world's events. And what makes it even more fantastic is that you suggested that he might meet with an accident."

"Yes, yes. Interestin' coincidence." Vance seemed disinclined to discuss the matter.

"And that Egyptian," Markham rumbled on. "He wasn't in the least astonished when you informed him of Bliss's death. He acted almost as if he expected some such news—"

He suddenly drew up short. Vance and I stopped, too, and looked at him. His eyes were blazing.

"Hani killed Bliss!"

Vance sighed and shrugged.

"Of course he did, Markham. My word! I thought you understood the situation."

"Understood?" Markham was spluttering. "What do you mean?"

"It was all so obvious, don't y' know," Vance said mildly. "I realized, just as you did, that there was no chance of convicting Bliss; so I suggested to Hani how he could terminate the whole silly affair—"

"You suggested to Hani?"

"During our conversation in the drawing-room. Really, Markham old dear, I'm not in the habit of indulgin' in weird conversations about mythology unless I have a reason. I simply let Hani know there was no legal way of bringing Bliss to justice, and intimated how he could overcome the difficulty and incidentally save you from a most embarrassin' predicament. . . ."

"But Hani was in the hall, with the door closed." Markham's indignation was rising.

"Quite so. I told him to stand outside the door. I knew very well he'd listen to us. . . ."

"You deliberately—"

"Oh, most deliberately." Vance spread his hands in a gesture of surrender. "While I babbled to you and appeared foolish no doubt, I was really talking to Hani. Of course, I didn't know if he would grasp the opportunity or not. But he did. He equipped himself with a mace from the museum—I do hope it was the same mace that Bliss used on Kyle—and struck Bliss over the head. Then he dragged the body down the spiral stairs and laid it at the feet of Anûbis. With the mace he broke the statue's sandstone ankles, and dropped the figure over Bliss's skull. Very simple."

"And all that rambling chatter of yours in the drawing-room—"

"Was merely to keep you and Heath away in case Hani decided to act."

Markham's eyes narrowed.

"You can't get away with that sort of thing, Vance. I'll send Hani up for murder. There'll be finger-prints—"

"Oh, no there won't, Markham. Didn't you notice the gloves on the hat-rack? Hani is no fool. He put on the gloves before he went to the study. You'd have a harder time convicting him than you'd have had convicting Bliss. Personally, I rather admire Hani. Stout fella!"

For a time Markham was too angry to speak. Finally, however, he gave voice to an ejaculation.

"It's outrageous!"

"Of course it is," Vance agreed amiably. "So was the murder of Kyle." He lighted a cigarette and puffed on it cheerfully. "The trouble with you lawyers is, you're jealous and blood-thirsty. You wanted to send Bliss to the electric chair yourself, and couldn't; and Hani simplified everything for you. As I see it, you're merely disappointed because some one else took Bliss's life before you could get round to it. . . . Really, y' know, Markham, you're frightfully selfish."

I feel that a short postscript will not be amiss. Markham had no difficulty, as you will no doubt remember, in convincing the press that Bliss had been guilty of the murder of Benjamin H. Kyle, and that his tragic "accidental" death had in it much of what is commonly called divine justice.

Scarlett, contrary to the doctor's prediction, recovered; but it was many weeks before he could talk rationally. Vance and I visited him in the hospital late in August, and he corroborated Vance's theory about what had happened on that fatal night in the museum. Scarlett went to England early in September,—his father had died, leaving him an involved estate in Bedfordshire.



Mrs. Bliss and Salveter were married in Nice late the following spring; and the excavations of Intef's tomb, I see from the bulletins of the Archaeological Institute, are continuing. Salveter is in charge of the work, and I am rather happy to note that Scarlett is the technical expert of the expedition.

Hani, according to a recent letter from Salveter to Vance, has become reconciled to the "desecration of the tombs of his ancestors." He is still with Meryt-Amen and Salveter, and I'm inclined to think that his personal love for these two young people is stronger than his national prejudices.

## Footnotes

[1] Doctor Mindrum W. C. Bliss, M.A., A.O.S.S., F.S.A., F.R.S., Hon. Mem. R.A.S., was the author of "The Stele of Intefoe at Koptos"; a "History of Egypt during the Hyksos Invasion"; "The Seventeenth Dynasty"; and a monograph on the Amen-hotpe III Colossi.

[2] According to the Bliss-Weigall chronology the period between the death of Sebknefru-Rê and the overthrow of the Shepherd Kings at Memphis was from 1898 to 1577 B.C.—to wit: 321 years—as against the 1800 years claimed by the upholders of the longer chronology. This short chronology is even shorter according to Breasted and the German school. Breasted and Meyer dated the same period as from 1788 to 1580. These 208 years, by the way, Vance considered too short for the observable cultural changes.

[3] As legal adviser, monetary steward and constant companion of Philo Vance, I kept a complete record of the principal criminal cases in which he participated during Markham's incumbency. Four of these cases I have already recorded in book form—"The Benson Murder Case," "The 'Canary' Murder Case," "The Greene Murder Case," and "The Bishop Murder Case."

[4] Sergeant Ernest Heath, of the Homicide Bureau, had worked with Markham on most of his important cases. He was an honest, capable, but uninspired police officer, who, after the Benson and the "Canary" murder cases, had come to respect Vance highly. Vance admired the Sergeant; and the two—despite their fundamental differences in outlook and training—collaborated with admirable smoothness.

[5] Kha-ef-Rê was the originator of the great Sphinx, and also of one of the three great Gizeh pyramids—*Wer Kha-ef Rê* (Kha-ef-Rê is mighty), now known as the Second Pyramid.

[6] Popularly, and incorrectly, called the Memnon Colossi.

[7] Captain Dubois was then the finger-print expert of the New York Police Department; and Doctor Emanuel Doremus was the Medical Examiner.

[8] The daughter of this particular Pharaoh—Nefra—incidentally is the titular heroine of H. Rider Haggard's romance, "Queen of the Dawn." Haggard, following the chronology of H. R. Hall, placed Intef in the Fourteenth Dynasty instead of the Seventeenth, making him a contemporary of the great Hyksos Pharaoh, Apopi, whose son Khyan—the hero of the book—marries Nefra. The researches of Bliss and Weigall seem to have demonstrated that this relationship is an anachronism.

[9] The ancient Egyptian name of Heracleopolis.

[10] This unusual name, I learned later, was the result of his father's interest in Egyptian mythology while in Maspero's service.

[11] I learned from Vance that Doctor Bliss had read, in the British Museum, the Abbott Papyrus of the Twentieth Dynasty, which reported the inspection of this and other tombs. The report stated that, in early times, Intef V's tomb had been entered but not robbed: the raiders had evidently been unable to penetrate to the actual grave chamber. Bliss, therefore, had concluded that the mummy of Intef would still be found in the original tomb. An old native named Hasan had showed him where two obelisks had stood in front of the pyramid of Intef (Intef-o); and through this information he had succeeded in locating the pyramid, and had excavated at that point.

[12] This colored portrait (with the Queen's name spelled Nefertiti) appears in "Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt."

[13] I learned subsequently from Scarlett that Mrs. Bliss's mother had been a Coptic lady of noble descent who traced her lineage from the last Saïte Pharaohs, and who, despite her Christian faith, had retained her traditional veneration for the native gods of her country. Her only child, Meryt-Amen ("Beloved of Amûn"), had been named in honor of the great Ramses II, whose full title as Son of the Sun-God was Ra-mosê-su Mery-Amûn. (The more correct English spelling of Mrs. Bliss's name would have been Meryet-Amûn, but the form chosen was no doubt based on the transliterations of Flinders Petrie, Maspero, and Abercrombie.) Meryet-Amûn was not an uncommon name among the queens and princesses of ancient Egypt. Three queens of that name have already been found—one (of the family of Ah-mosê I) whose mummy is in the Cairo Museum; another (of the family of Ramses II) whose tomb and sarcophagus are in the Valley of the Queens; and a third, whose burial chamber and mummy were recently found by the Egyptian Expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art on the hillside near the temple of Deir el Bahri at Thebes. This last Queen Meryet-Amûn was the daughter of Thut-mosê III and Meryet-Rê, and the wife of Amen-hotpe II. The story of the finding of her tomb is told in Section II of the Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art for November 1929.

[14] I am not quite sure why Vance added this parenthetical phrase, unless it was because the word *simoon* comes from the Arabic *samma* (meaning to be poisoned), and he thought that Hani would better recognize the word in its correct etymological form.

[15] The irrigation to which Scarlett referred was the system that resulted in the Aswân Dam, the Asyût Weir, and the Esneh Barrage.

[16] Sir E. A. Wallis Budge defines *ka* (or, more correctly, *ku*) both as "the double of a man" and "a divine double." Breasted, explaining the *ka*, says it was the "vital force" which was supposed to animate the human body and also to accompany it into the next world. G. Elliot Smith calls the *ka* "one of the twin souls of the dead." (The other soul, *ba*, became deified in identification with Osiris.) *Ka* was the spirit of a mortal person, which remained in the tomb after death; and if the tomb were violated or destroyed, the *ka* had no resting-place. Our own word "soul" is not quite an accurate rendition of *ka*, but is perhaps as near as we can come to it in English. The German word *Doppelgänger*, however, is an almost exact translation.

[17] An old Arabic proverb meaning: "The only answer to a fool is silence."

[18] Guilfoyle, I recalled, was the detective of the Homicide Bureau who was set to watch Tony Skeel in the "Canary" murder case, and who reported on the all-night light at the Drukker house in the Bishop murder case.

[19] The prism referred to by Salveter was the terra-cotta one acquired by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago during its reconnoitering expedition of 1919-20. The document was a variant duplicate of the Taylor prism in the British Museum, written about two years earlier under another eponym.

[20] Vance was here indulging in hyperbole, and believed it no more than John Dennis believed that "a man who could make so vile a pun would not scruple to pick a pocket." Vance knew several Egyptologists and respected them highly. Among them were Doctor

Ludlow Bull and Doctor Henry A. Carey of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who had once generously assisted him in his work on the Menander fragments.

[21] Chief Inspector O'Brien was at that time in charge of the entire Police Department of the City of New York.

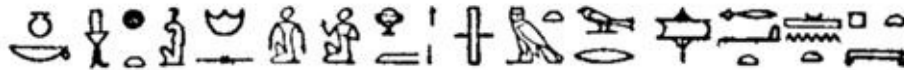
[22] The Sun Cholera Mixture for dysentery (a recipe of Doctor G. W. Busteed) was so named because its formula had been published by the New York *Sun* during the cholera excitement in New York in June, 1849. It was admitted to the first edition of the National Formulary in 1883. Its constituents were tincture of capsicum, tincture of rhubarb, spirits of camphor, essence of peppermint, and opium.

[23] Sir E. A. Wallis Budge was for many years Keeper of the Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities in the British Museum.

[24] Swacker, a bright, energetic youth, was Markham's secretary.

[25] A similar dagger was found on the royal mummy in the tomb of Tut-ankh-Amûn by the late Earl of Carnarvon and Howard Carter, and is now in the Cairo Museum.

[26] Vance was referring jocularly to the declaration of Sakhmet in the Chapter of Opening the Mouth of Osiris Ani in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*:



"I am the Goddess Sakhmet, and I take my seat upon the side of the great west (wind?) of the skies."

[27] Salveter was here referring to the Earl of Carnarvon, Colonel the Honorable Aubrey Herbert, General Sir Lee Stack, George J. Gould, Woolf Joel, Sir Archibald Douglas Reid, Professor Lafleur, H. G. Evelyn-White, and Professor Georges-Aaron Bénédict. Since that time two more names have been added to the fatal list—those of the Honorable Richard Bethell, secretary to Howard Carter, and Lord Westbury.

[28] Theogonius was a friend of Simon Magus, who, because of his fear of the Emperor Caligula, pretended imbecility in order to hide his wisdom. Suetonius refers to him as Theogonius, but Scaliger, Casaubon and other historians give "Telegenius" as the correct spelling.

[29] Vance of course was referring to the French *Fête Nationale* which falls on July 14th.

[30] This was my guess during Vance's operation. Later I calculated the weight of the lid. It was ten feet long, four feet wide, and was surmounted by a large carved figure. A conservative estimate would give us ten cubic feet for the lid; and as the density of granite is approximately 2.70 grams per cubic centimeter, or 170 pounds per cubic foot, the lid would have weighed at least 1,700 pounds.

[31] The actual dedication reads: "I inscribe this book of adventure to my son, Arthur John Rider Haggard, in the hope that in days to come he, and many other boys whom I shall never know, may in the acts and thoughts of Allan Quartermain and his companions, as herein recorded, find something to help him and them to reach to what, with Sir Henry Curtis, I hold to be the highest rank whereto we can obtain—the state of dignity of English gentlemen."

[32] Nor did I. But while this record of mine was running serially in the *American Magazine* several readers wrote to me pointing out the inconsistency.

[33] It will be recalled in the Greene murder case the murderer, pretending to be frightened at the sinister danger lurking in the dim corridors of the old Greene mansion, made a similar error in psychological judgment by descending to the pantry in the middle of the night for no other reason than to gratify a mild appetite for food.

[34] Vance was here referring to the famous passage in the Chapter—"Das Judentum"—in Otto Weininger's "Geschlecht und Charakter": "*Der Engländer hat dem Deutschen als tüchtiger, Empiriker, als Realpolitiker im Praktischen wie im Theoretischen, imponiert, aber damit ist seine Wichtigkeit für die Philosophie auch erschöpft. Es hat noch nie einen tieferen Denker gegeben, der beim Empirismus stehen geblieben ist; und noch nie einen Engländer, der über ihn selbstständig hinausgekommen wäre.*"

## 06. KENNEL

### 1. THE BOLTED BEDROOM

(Thursday, October 11; 8.45 a.m.)

It was exactly three months after the startling termination of the Scarab murder case<sup>[1]</sup> that Philo Vance was drawn into the subtlest and the most perplexing of all the criminal problems that came his way during the four years of John F.-X. Markham's incumbency as District Attorney of New York County.

Indeed, so mystifying was this case, so apparently inexplicable were its conflicting elements, that the police were for adding it to their list of unsolved murder mysteries. And they would have been justified in their decision; for rarely in the annals of modern crime has there been a case that seemed to reverse so completely the rational laws by which humanity lives and reasons. In the words of the doughty and practical Sergeant Ernest Heath of the Homicide Bureau, the case "didn't make sense." On the surface it smacked of strange and terrifying magic, of witch-doctors and miracle-workers; and every line of investigation ran into a blank wall.

In fact, the case had every outward appearance of being what arm-chair criminologists delight in calling the perfect crime. And, to make the plotting of the murderer even more mystifying, a diabolical concatenation of circumstances was superimposed upon the events by some whimsical and perverse god, which tended to strengthen every weak link in the culprit's chain of ratiocination, and to turn the entire bloody affair into a maze of incomprehensibility.

Curiously enough, however, it was the very excess of ardor on the part of the murderer when attempting to divert suspicion, that created a minute hole in the wall of mystery, through which Vance was able to see a glimmer of light. In the process of following that light to the truth, Vance did what I believe was the shrewdest and profoundest detective work of his career. It was his peculiar knowledge of special and out-of-the-way facts, combined with his almost uncanny perception of human nature, that made it possible for him to seize upon apparently unimportant clues and resolve them into a devastating syllogism.

Vance for years had been a breeder of Scottish terriers. His kennels were in New Jersey, an hour's ride from New York, and he spent much of his time there studying pedigrees, breeding for certain characteristics which he believed essential to the ideal terrier, and watching the results of his theories. Sometimes I think he manifested a greater enthusiasm in his dogs than in any other recreative phase of his life; and the only time I have seen evidences of a thrill in his eyes comparable to that when he had unearthed and acquired a magnificent Cézanne water-color or discovered a rare piece of Chinese ceremonial jade in a mass of opaque modern recuttings, was when one of his dogs went up to Winners.

I mention this fact—or idiosyncrasy, if you prefer—because it so happened that Vance's ability to look at a certain stray Scottish terrier and recognize its blood-lines and show qualities, was what led him to one phase of the truth in the remarkable case which I am now recording.

That which led Vance to another important phase of the truth was his knowledge of Chinese ceramics. He possessed, in his home in East 38th Street, a small but remarkable collection of Chinese antiquities—museum pieces he had acquired in his extensive travels—and had written various articles for Oriental and art journals on the subject of Sung and Ming monochrome porcelains.

Scotties and Chinese ceramics! A truly unusual combination. And yet, without a knowledge of these two antipodal interests, the mysterious murder of Archer Coe, in his old brownstone house in West 71st Street, would have remained a closed book for all time.

The opening of the case was rather tame: it promised little in the line of sensationalism. But within an hour of the telephone call Markham received from the Coe butler, the District Attorney's office and the New York Police Department were plunged into one of the most astounding and baffling murder mysteries of our day.

It was shortly after half-past eight on the morning of October 11, that Vance's door-bell rang; and Currie, his old English valet and majordomo, ushered Markham into the library. I was temporarily installed in Vance's duplex roof-garden apartment at the time. There was much legal and financial work to be done—an accumulation of months, for Vance had insisted that I accompany him on the Mediterranean cruise he took immediately after the solving of the Scarab murder. For years, almost since our Harvard days, I had been Vance's legal adviser and monetary steward (a post which included as much of friendship as of business) and his affairs kept me fairly busy—so busy, in fact, that a two months' interregnum meant much overtime labor afterwards.

On this particular autumn morning I had risen at seven and was busily engaged with a mass of cancelled checks and bank statements when Markham arrived.

"Go ahead with your chores, Van Dine," he said, with a perfunctory nod. "I'll rout out the sybarite myself." He seemed a trifle perturbed as he disappeared into Vance's bedroom, which was just off the library.

I heard him call Vance a bit peremptorily, and I heard Vance give a dramatic groan.

"A murder, I presume," Vance complained through a yawn. "Nothing less than gore would have led your footsteps to my boudoir at this ungodly hour."

"Not a murder—" Markham began.

"Oh, I say! What time might it be, then?"

"Eight forty-five," Markham told him.

"So early—and not a murder!" (I could hear Vance's feet hit the floor.) "You interest me strangely. . . . Your wedding morn perhaps?"

"Archer Coe has committed suicide," Markham announced, not without irritation.

"My word!" Vance was now moving about. "That's even stranger than a murder. I crave elucidation. . . . Come, let's sit down while I sip my coffee."

Markham re-entered the library, followed by Vance clad in sandals and an elaborate Mandarin robe. Vance rang for Currie and ordered Turkish coffee, at the same time settling himself in a large Queen Anne chair and lighting one of his favorite *Régie* cigarettes.

Markham did not sit down. He stood near the mantelpiece, regarding his host with narrowed, inquisitive eyes.

"What did you mean, Vance," he asked, "by Coe's suicide being stranger than murder?"

"Nothing esoteric, old thing," Vance drawled languidly. "Simply that there would be nothing particularly remarkable in any one's pushing old Archer into the Beyond. He's been inviting violence all his life. Not a sweet and love-inspiring chappie, don't y' know. But there's something deuced remarkable in the fact that he should push himself over the border. He's not the suicidal type—far too egocentric."

"I think you're right. And that idea was probably in the back of my head when I told the butler to hold everything till I got there."

Currie entered with the coffee, and Vance sipped the black, cloudy liquid for a moment. At length he said:

"Do tell me more. Why should you be notified at all? And what did the butler pour into your ear over the phone? And why are you here curtailing my slumbers? Why everything? Why anything? Just why? Can't you see I'm bursting with uncontrollable curiosity?" And Vance yawned and closed his eyes.

"I'm on my way to Coe's house." Markham was annoyed at the other's attitude of indifference. "Thought maybe you'd like to—what's your favorite word?—'toddle' along." This was said with sarcasm.

"Toddle," Vance repeated. "Quite. But why toddle blindly? Do be magnanimous and enlighten me. The corpse won't run away, even if we are a bit latish."

Markham hesitated, and shrugged. Obviously he was uneasy, and obviously he wanted Vance to accompany him. As he had admitted, something was in the back of his head.

"Very well," he acquiesced. "Shortly after eight this morning Coe's butler—the obsequious Gamble—phoned me at my home. He was in a state of nerves, and his voice was husky with fear. He informed me, with many hems and haws, that Archer Coe had shot himself, and asked me if I would come to the house at once. My first instinct was to tell him to notify the police; but, for some reason, I checked myself and asked him why he had called me. He said that Mr. Raymond Wrede had so advised him—"

"Ah!"

"It seems he had first called Wrede—who, as you know, is an intimate family friend—and that Wrede had immediately come to the house."

"And Wrede said 'get Mr. Markham.'" Vance drew deep on his cigarette. "Something dodging about in the recesses of Wrede's brain, too, no doubt. . . . Well, any more?"

"Only that the body was bolted in Coe's bedroom."

"Bolted on the inside?"

"Exactly."

"Amazin'!"

"Gamble brought up Coe's breakfast at eight as usual, but received no answer to his knocking. . . ."

"So he peeped through the keyhole—yes, yes, butlers always do. Some day, Markham, I shall, in a moment of leisure, invent a keyhole that can't be seen through by butlers. Have you ever stopped to think how much of the world's disturbance is caused by butlers being able to see through keyholes?"

"No, Vance, I never have," returned Markham wearily. "My brain is inadequate—I'll leave that speculation to you. . . . Nevertheless, because of your dalliance in the matter of inventing opaque keyholes, Gamble saw Coe seated in his armchair, a revolver in his hand, and a bullet wound in his right temple. . . ."

"And, I'll warrant, Gamble added that his master's face was deathly pale—eh, what?"

"He did."

"But what about Brisbane Coe? Why did Gamble call Wrede when Archer's brother was in the house?"

"Brisbane Coe didn't happen to be in the house. He's at present in Chicago."

"Ah! Most convenient. . . . So when Wrede arrived he advised Gamble to phone direct to you, knowing that you knew Coe. Is that it?"

"As far as I can make out."

"And you, knowing that I had visited Coe on various occasions, thought you'd pick me up and make it a conclave of acquaintances."

"Do you want to come?" demanded Markham, with a trace of anger.

"Oh, by all means," Vance replied dulcetly. "But, really, y' know, I can't go in these togs." He rose and started towards the bedroom. "I'll hop into appropriate integuments." As he reached the door he stopped. "And I'll tell you why your invitation enthralls me. I had an appointment with Archer Coe for three this afternoon to look at a pair of peach-bloom vases fourteen inches high he had recently acquired. And, Markham, a collector who has just acquired a pair of peach-bloom vases of that size doesn't commit suicide the next day."

With this remark Vance disappeared, and Markham stood, his hands behind him, looking at the bedroom door with a deep frown. Presently he lighted a cigar and began pacing back and forth.

"I shouldn't wonder if Vance were right," he mumbled, as if to himself. "He's put my subconscious thought into words."

A few minutes later Vance emerged, dressed for the street.

"Awfully thoughtful of you, and all that, to pick me up," he said, smiling jauntily at Markham. "There's something positively fascinating about the possibilities of this affair. . . . And by the by, Markham, it might be convenient to have the pugnacious Sergeant[2] on hand."

"So it might," agreed Markham drily, putting on his hat. "Thanks for the suggestion. But I've already notified him. He's on his way uptown now."

Vance's eyebrows went up whimsically.

"Oh, pardon! . . . Well, let's grope our way hence."

We entered Markham's car, which was waiting outside, and were driven rapidly up Madison Avenue. We cut through Central Park to the West Side, came out at the 72nd-Street entrance, and went for a block against traffic on Central Park West. Turning into 71st Street, we drew up at No. 98.

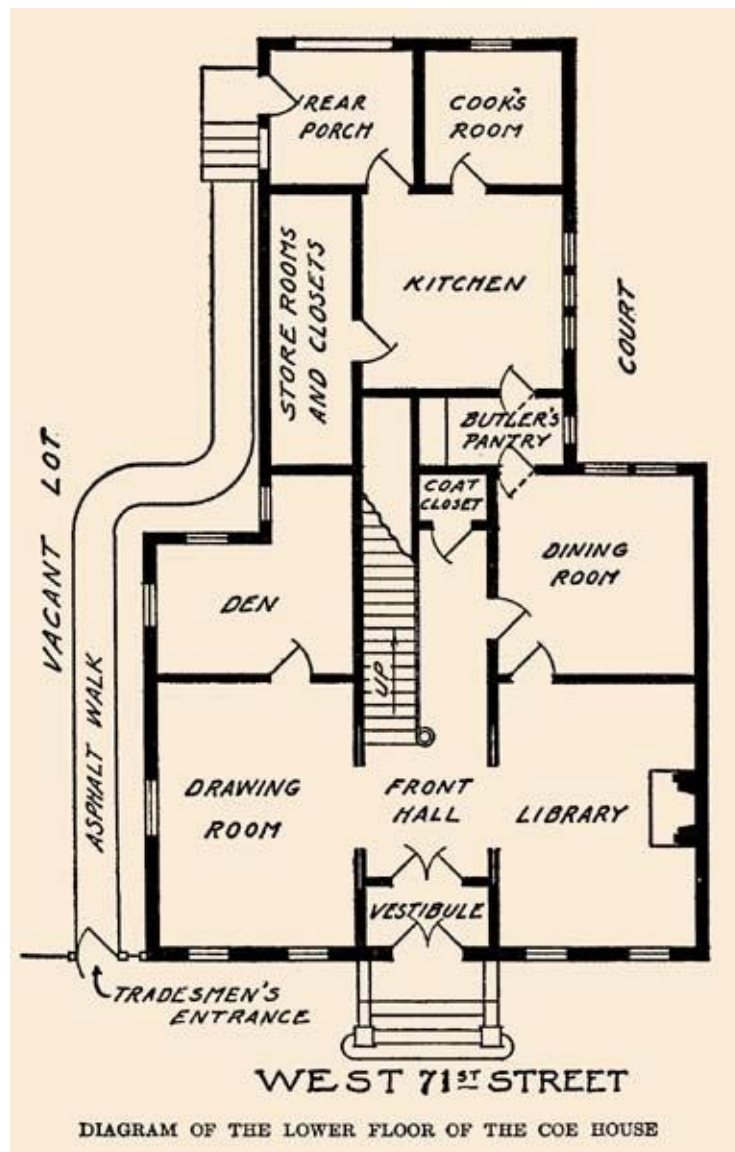
The Coe house was an old brownstone mansion of double frontage occupying two city lots, built in a day when dignity and comfort

were among the ideals of New York architects. The house was uniform with the other residences in the block, with the exception that most of the houses were single structures with only a twenty-foot frontage. The basements were three or four feet below the street level and opened on a sunken, paved areaway. Flights of stone stairs, with wide stone balustrades, led to the first floors, each house being entered through a conventional vestibule.

As we ascended the steps of the Coe house the door was opened for us before we had time to pull the old-fashioned brass bell-knob; and the flushed face of Gamble looked out at us cringingly. The butler made a series of suave bows as he pulled the heavy oak door ajar for us to enter.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Markham." His voice reeked of oily subservience. "It's very terrible, sir. And I really didn't know just what I should do—"

Markham brushed the man aside and we stepped into the dimly lighted hallway. A heavy deep-napped carpet covered the entire hall, and several dingy oil paintings made enormous black squares against the dark tapestry on the walls. Ahead of us a broad flight of carpeted stairs led upward into a vault of darkness. On the right hung a pair of deep maroon portières evidently veiling double sliding doors. To the left were other portières; but these were drawn back, and we could look through the open doors into a stuffy drawing-room, filled with all manner of heavy ancient furniture.



Two men came forward from this room to greet us. The one in advance I recognized immediately as Raymond Wrede. I had met him several times at the Coe home when I had accompanied Vance there to inspect some particular "find" in Chinese pottery or bronzes, which Archer Coe had made. Wrede, I knew, was a close friend of the Coe family, and particularly of Hilda Lake, Archer Coe's niece. He was a studious man in his late thirties, slightly gray, with an ascetic, calm face of the chevaline type. He was mildly interested in



Oriental ceramics—probably as a result of his long association with Coe—though his particular fancy was ancient oil lamps; and he owned a collection of rare specimens for which (I have been told) the Metropolitan Museum of Art had offered him a small fortune.

As he greeted us this morning, there was a look bordering on bewilderment in his wide-set, gray eyes.

He bowed formally to Markham, whom he knew slightly; nodded perfunctorily to me; and extended his hand to Vance. Then, as if suddenly remembering something, he turned toward the man behind him, and made a brief presentation, which in reality was an explanation.

"Signor Grassi.<sup>[3]</sup> . . . Mr. Grassi has been a house guest of Mr. Coe's for several days. He represents an Italian museum of Oriental antiquities at Milan."

Grassi bowed very low, but said nothing. He was considerably shorter than Wrede, slim, immaculately dressed, with shiny black hair brushed straight back from his forehead, and a complexion whose unusual pallor was accentuated by large luminous eyes. His features were regular, and his lips full and shapely. His manicured hands moved with an almost feline grace. My first impression was that he was effeminate, but before many days had passed I radically changed my opinion.

Markham wasted no time on ceremony. He turned abruptly to Gamble.

"Just what is the situation? A police sergeant and the Medical Examiner will be here any moment."

"Only what I told you on the telephone, sir." The man, beneath his obsequious manner, was patently frightened. "When I saw the master through the keyhole I knew he was dead—it was quite unnerving, sir—and my first impulse was to break in the door. But I thought it best to seek advice before taking such a responsibility. And, as Mr. Brisbane Coe was in Chicago, I phoned to Mr. Wrede and begged him to come over immediately. Mr. Wrede was good enough to come, and after looking at the master he suggested that I call you, sir, before doing anything else—"

"It was obvious"—Wrede took up the story—"that poor Coe was dead, and I thought it best to leave everything intact for the authorities. I didn't want to insist on having the door broken in."

Vance was watching the man closely.

"But what harm could that have done?" he asked mildly. "Since the door was bolted on the inside, suicide was rather plainly indicated—eh, what?"

"Perhaps you are right, Mr. Vance." Wrede appeared ill at ease. "But—somehow—my instinct told me that it might be best—"

"Quite—quite." Vance took out his cigarette-case. "You, too, were sceptical—despite the appearances."

Wrede gave a start, and stared fixedly at Vance.

"Coe," Vance continued, "wasn't exactly the suicidal type—was he?"

"No-o." Wrede's eyes did not shift.

Vance lighted a cigarette.

"My own feeling is you acted quite wisely."

"Come!" Markham turned toward the stairs and made a peremptory gesture to Gamble. "Lead the way."

The butler turned and mounted the stairs. Markham, Vance and I followed, but Wrede and Grassi remained below. At the head of the stairs Gamble fumbled along the wall and pressed an electric switch-button. A light flooded the upper hallway. Directly ahead of us was a wide door, ivory enamelled. Gamble stood by the switch and, without a word, indicated the door.

Markham came forward, tried the knob, and shook it. Then he knelt down and looked through the keyhole. When he rose his face was grim.

"It looks as if our suspicions were unfounded," he said in a low voice. "Coe is sitting in his chair, a black hole in his right temple, and his hand is still clutching a revolver. The electric lights are on. . . . Look, Vance."

Vance was gazing at an etching on the wall at the head of the stairs.

"I'll take your word for it, Markham," he drawled. "Really, y' know, it doesn't sound like a pretty sight. And I'll see it infinitely better when we've forced an entry. . . . I say! Here's an early Marin. Rather sensitive. Same feeling for delicate composition we find in his later water-colors. . . ."

At this moment the front door bell rang violently, and Gamble hastened down the stairs. As he drew the door back, Sergeant Ernest Heath and Detective Hennessey burst into the lower hallway.

"This way, Sergeant," Markham called.

Heath and Hennessey came noisily up the stairs.

"Good morning, sir." The Sergeant waved a friendly hand to Markham. Then he cocked an eye at Vance. "I mighta known you'd be here. The world's champeen trouble-shooter!" He grinned good-naturedly, and there was genuine affection in his tone.

"Come, Sergeant," Markham ordered. "There's a dead man in this room, and the door's bolted on the inside. Break it open."

Heath, without a word, hurled himself against the crosspiece of the door just above the knob, but without result. A second time his shoulder crashed against the crosspiece.

"Give me a hand, Hennessey," he said. "That's a bolt—no foolin'. Hard wood."

The two men threw their combined weight against the door, and now there was a sound of tearing wood as the bolt's screws were loosened.

During the process of battering in the door, Wrede and Grassi mounted the stairs, followed by Gamble, and stood directly behind Markham and Vance.

Two more terrific thrusts by Heath and Hennessey, and the heavy door swung inward, revealing the death chamber.

## 2. THE DEAD MAN

(Thursday, October 11; 9.15 a.m.)

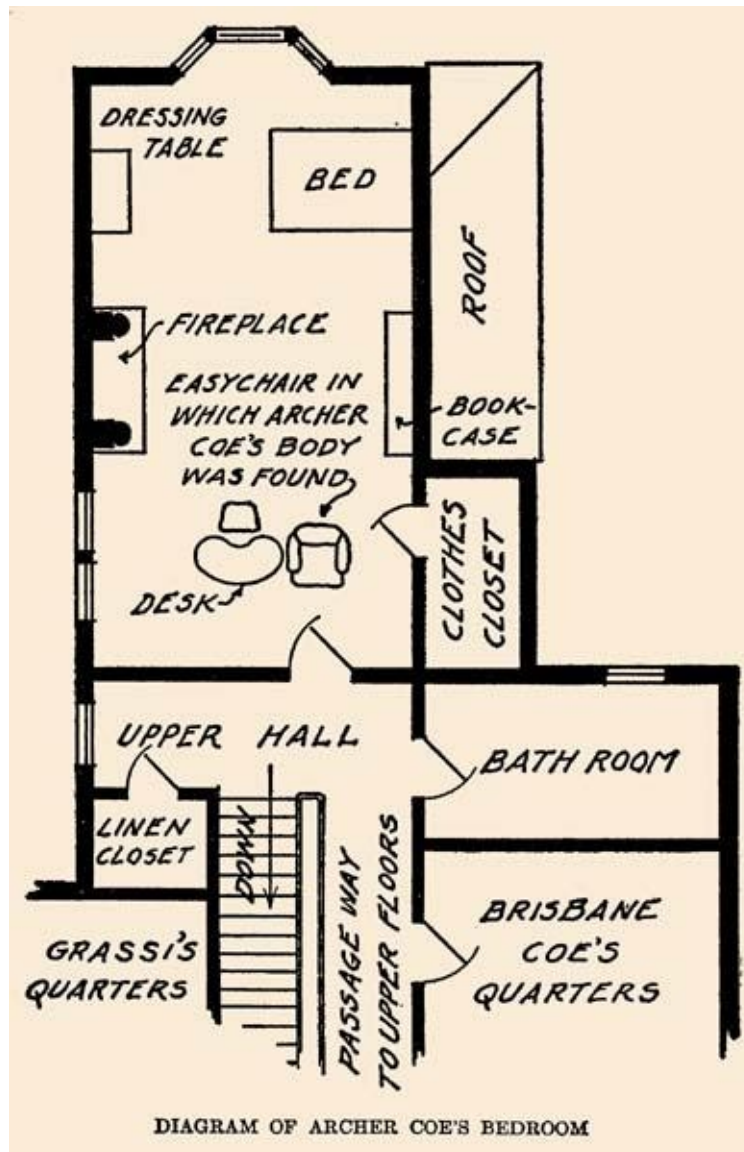
The room, which was at the extreme rear of the house, was long and narrow, with windows on two sides. There was a bay window opposite the door, and a wide double window at the left, facing east. The dark green shades were all drawn, excluding the daylight. But the room was brilliantly lighted by an enormous crystal chandelier in the centre of the ceiling.

At the rear of the room stood an enormous canopied bed, which, I noticed, had not been slept in. The covers were turned back with meticulous precision. The bedroom, like the drawing-room, contained far too much furniture. On the right was a large embayed book-case filled with octavo and quarto volumes, and, facing the door was a mahogany kidney-shaped desk covered with books, pamphlets and papers—the desk of a man who spends many hours at literary labor. To the left of this desk, in the east wall, was a large fireplace with an Empire mantel of bronze and Venetian marble, supported by two ugly caryatides. Gas logs were in the grate. About the walls hung at least a dozen Chinese scroll paintings. Had there not been a bed and a dressing-table in the room, one would have taken it for a collector's sanctum.

These details of the room, however, protruded themselves upon us later. What first focused our attention was the inert body of Archer Coe, with its quiet pallid face and the black grisly spot on the right temple. The body was slumped down in a velour upholstered armchair beside the desk. The head seemed to lie almost on the left shoulder, as if the impact of the bullet had forced it into an unnatural angle.

There was an expression of peace on the thin aquiline features of the dead man; and his eyes were closed as though in sleep. His right hand—the one nearest the fireplace—lay on the end of the desk clutching a carved, ivory-inlaid revolver of fairly large calibre. His left hand hung at his side over the tufted arm of the chair.





There was a straight Windsor chair behind the desk, and I could not help wondering why Coe had selected the armchair at the side of the desk, facing the door. Was it because he had considered it more comfortable for his last resting place in this life? The answer to this passing speculation of mine did not come for many hours; and when it did come, as a result of Vance's deductions, it constituted one of the vital links in the evidential chain of this strange and perplexing case.

Coe's body was clothed in a green silk-wool dressing-gown which came nearly to his ankles; but on his feet, which were extended straight in front of him, was a pair of high, heavy street shoes, laced and tied. Again a question flashed through my mind: Why did Coe not wear bedroom slippers with his dressing-gown? The answer to this question also was to prove a vital point in the solution of the tragedy.

Vance went immediately to the body, touched the dead man's hand, and bent forward over the wound in the forehead. Then he walked back to the door with its hanging bolt, scrutinized it for a moment, ran his eye around the heavy oak framework and lintel, and turned slowly back to the room. A frown wrinkled his brow. Very deliberately he reached in his pocket and took out another cigarette. When he had lighted it, he strolled to the west wall of the room and stood gazing at a faded ninth-century Chinese painting of Uccushma.<sup>[4]</sup>

In the meantime the rest of us had pressed round the body of Coe, and stood inspecting it in silence. Wrede and Grassi seemed appalled in the actual presence of death. Wrede spoke to Markham.

"I trust I did right in advising Gamble to call you before breaking in the door. I realize now that if there had remained a spark of life —"

"Oh, he was quite dead hours ago," Vance interrupted, without turning from the painting. "Your decision has worked out perfectly."

Markham swung about.

"What do you mean by that, Vance?"

"Merely that, if the door had been broken in, and the room overrun with solicitous friends, and the body handled for signs of life, and all the locked-in evidence probably destroyed, we would have had a deuced difficult time arrivin' at any sensible solution of what really went on here last night."

"Well, it's pretty plain to me what went on here last night." It was Heath who projected himself, a bit belligerently, into the talk. "This guy locked himself in, and blew his brains out. And even you, Mr. Vance, can't make anything original outa that."

Vance turned slowly and shook his head.

"Tut, tut, Sergeant," he said pleasantly. "It's not I who am going to spoil your simple and beautiful theory."

"No?" Heath was still belligerent. "Then who is?"

"The corpse," answered Vance mildly.

Before Heath could reply, Markham, who had been watching Vance closely, turned quickly to Wrede and Grassi.

"I will ask you gentlemen to wait downstairs. . . . Hennessey, please go to the drawing-room and see that these gentlemen do not leave it until I give them permission. . . . You understand," he added to Wrede and Grassi, "that it will be necessary to question you about this affair after we have had the verdict of the Medical Examiner."

Wrede showed his resentment at Markham's peremptory manner; but Grassi, with a polite smile, merely bowed; and the two, followed by Hennessey, passed out of the room and down the stairs.

"And you," said Markham to Gamble, "wait at the front door and bring Doctor Doremus here the moment he arrives."

Gamble shot a haunted look at the body, and went out.

Markham closed the door, and then wheeled about, facing Vance, who now stood behind Coe's desk gazing down moodily at the dead man's hand clutching the revolver.

"What's the meaning of all these mysterious innuendos?" he demanded testily.

"Not innuendos, Markham," Vance returned quietly, keeping his eyes on Coe's hand. "Merely speculations. I'm rather interested in certain aspects of this fascinatin' crime."

"Crime?" Markham gave a mirthless smile. "It was all very well for us to theorize before we got here—and I was inclined to agree with you that suicide seemed incompatible with Coe's temperament—but facts, after all, form the only reasonable basis for a decision. And the facts here seem pretty clean-cut. That door was bolted on the inside; there's no other means of entrance or exit to this room; Coe is sitting here with the lethal weapon—"

"Oh, call it a revolver," interrupted Vance. "Silly phrase, 'lethal weapon.'"

Markham snorted.

"Very well. . . . With a revolver in his hand, and a hole in his right temple. There are no signs of a struggle; the windows and shades are down, and the lights burning. . . . How, in Heaven's name, could it have been anything but suicide?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Vance shrugged wearily. "But it wasn't suicide—really, don't y' know." He frowned again. "And that's the weird part of it. Y' see, Markham, it should have been suicide—and it wasn't. There's something diabolical—and humorous—about this case. Humorous in a grim, satirical sense. Some one miscalculated somewhere—the murderer was sitting in a game with the cards stacked against him. . . . Positively amazin'!"

"But the facts," protested Markham.

"Oh, your facts are quite correct. As you lawyers say, they're irresistible. But you have overlooked additional facts."

"For instance?"

"Regard yon bedroom slippers." Vance pointed to the foot of the bed where a pair of soft red Mephisto slippers were neatly arranged. "And then regard these heavy blucher boots which the corpse is wearing. And yet he has on his dressing-gown, and is sitting in his easy chair. A bit incongruous, what? Why did the hedonistic and luxury-loving Coe not change his footwear to something more relaxing for this great moment in his life. And note that haste was not a factor. His robe—an execrable color, by the by—is neatly buttoned; and the girdle is tied in an admirable bow-knot. We can hardly assume that he suddenly decided on suicide half-way through his changing from street clothes to negligée. And yet, Markham, something must have stopped him—something must have compelled him to sit down, stretch his legs out, and close his eyes before he had finished the operation of making himself sartorially comfortable."

"Your reasoning is not altogether convincing," Markham countered. "A man might conceivably wear heavy shoes with a dressing-gown."

"Perhaps." Vance nodded. "I sha'n't be narrow-minded in these matters. But, assuming Coe is a suicide, why should he have chosen this chair facing the door? A man bent on doing a workmanlike job of shooting himself would instinctively sit up straight, where he could perhaps brace his arms and steady his hand. If he were going to sit by the desk at all he would, I think, have chosen the straight chair where he could rest both elbows on the top and thus insure a steady, accurate aim."

"His arm is on the end of the desk," put in Heath.

"Oh, quite—and in a rather awkward position—eh, what? Considering how low the easy chair is, Coe could not possibly have had his elbow on the desk when he pulled the trigger. If so, the shot would have gone over his head. His arm was necessarily lower than the desk when the gun was fired—if *he fired it*. Therefore, we must assume that after the bullet had entered his brain, he lifted his right arm to the desk and arranged it neatly in its present position."

"Maybe yes and maybe no," muttered Heath, after a pause during which he studied the body and raised his own right hand to his forehead. Then he added aggressively: "But you can't get away from that bolted door."

Vance sighed.

"I wish I could get away from it. It bothers me horribly. If it wasn't for the fact that the door was bolted on the inside, I'd be more inclined to agree that it was suicide."

"What's that!" Markham looked at Vance in amazement. "Now you're talking in paradoxes."

"Oh, no." Vance shook his head slightly. "A man of Coe's intelligence wouldn't plan suicide and then deliberately make it difficult for any one to reach his body. What could he have gained by securely bolting the door on the inside so that it would have to be broken in? The act of shooting would have been over in a second; and there was no danger of his being disturbed in his own bedroom. Had he

killed himself he would have wanted Gamble—or some one else—to find him at the earliest possible moment. He would certainly not have placed deliberate difficulties in their way."

"But," argued Markham, "your very theory contradicts itself. Who but Coe could have bolted the door on the inside?"

"No one, apparently," answered Vance with a dispirited sigh. "And that's what makes the affair so dashed appealin'. The situation reads thus: A man is murdered; then he rises and bolts the door after the slayer has departed; and later he arranges himself in an easy chair so as to make it appear like suicide."

"That's a swell theory!" grunted Heath disgustedly. "Anyway, we'll know more about it when Doc Doremus gets here. And my bet is he's going to wash the whole case up by calling it suicide."

"And my bet is, Sergeant," Vance replied mildly, "that he's going to do nothing of the sort. I have an irresistible feelin' that Doctor Doremus will inform us that it is *not* suicide."

Heath screwed his face into a questioning frown and studied Vance. Then he snorted.

"Well, we'll see," he mumbled.

Vance paid scant attention. His eyes were moving over the desk. At one side of the blotter lay a quarto volume of "Li Tai Ming Ts'u T'ou P'u," by Hsiang Yuan-p'ien.<sup>[5]</sup> A pair of gold library shears were inserted between the pages, and Vance opened the book at this point, revealing a large colored plate of an amphora-shaped P'in Kuo Hung vase of a slightly neutralized red glaze shading into a liver color, and broken by patches of olive green and spots of russet brown.

"You see, Markham," he said, "Coe was apparently dreaming of his latest acquisition in peach-bloom shortly before he departed this life. And it is rather safe to assume that a man contemplating suicide does not indulge his acquisitiveness and investigate the history of his ceramic wares just before sending a bullet into his brain."

Markham waited without answering.

"And here's something else rather significant." Vance pointed to a small pile of blank note paper in the middle of the blotter. "This paper is lying a little on the bias, in the position that a right-handed man would place it if he contemplated writing on it. And, also, note that at the head of the first page is yesterday's date—Wednesday, October 10—"

"Ain't that natural?" put in Heath. "All these birds who commit suicide write letters first."

"But, Sergeant," smiled Vance, "the letter isn't written. Coe got no farther than the date."

"Can't a guy change his mind?" Heath persisted.

Vance nodded.

"Oh, quite. But, in that case, the pen would, in all probability, be in the holder set. And you will observe that the pen container is empty, and that there is no pen visible on the desk."

"Maybe it's in his pocket."

"Maybe." Vance stepped back and, bending over, ran his gaze over the floor round the desk. Then he knelt down and looked under the desk. Presently he reached out his arm and, from beneath the right-hand tier of drawers, drew forth a fountain-pen. Rising, he held the pen out.

"Coe dropped the pen, and it rolled under the desk." He placed it beside the note paper. "Men don't ordinarily drop fountain-pens in the middle of writing something and then fail to pick them up."

Heath glowered in silence, and Markham asked:

"You think Coe was interrupted in the midst of writing something?"

"Interrupted? . . . In a way perhaps." Vance himself seemed puzzled. "Still there are no signs of a struggle, and he is reclining in an easy chair at the end of the desk. Furthermore, his features are quite serene; his eyes are closed peacefully—and the door was bolted on the inside. . . . Very strange, Markham."

He walked to the shaded window and back, smoking leisurely. Suddenly he stopped and lifted his head, looking Markham straight in the eyes.

"Interrupted—yes! That's it! But not by any outside agency—not by an intruder. He was interrupted by something more subtle—more deadly. He was interrupted *while he was alone*. Something happened—something sinister intruded—and he stopped writing, dropped the pen, forgot it, rose, and seated himself in that easy chair. Then came the end, swift and unexpected—*before he could change his shoes*. . . . Don't you see? Those shoes are another indication of that terrible interruption."

"And the gun?" asked Heath contemptuously.

"I doubt if Coe even saw the gun, Sergeant."

### 3. A STARTLING DISCOVERY

(Thursday, October 11; 9.30 a.m.)

At this moment the front door downstairs opened and shut with a bang, and we could hear a rather strident feminine voice address the butler.

"Morning, Gamble. Take my clubs and tell Liang to rustle me up some tea and muffins."

Then there came a sound of footsteps on the stairs, and Gamble's appealing voice said:

"But, Miss Lake, I beg of you—just a moment, please."

"Tea and muffins," came Miss Lake's voice curtly; and the footsteps continued up the stairs.

Markham and Heath and I stepped toward the door just as the young woman reached the upper landing.

Miss Hilda Lake was a short, somewhat stockily built woman of about thirty, strong, resilient and athletic-looking. Her blue-gray eyes were steady and, I thought, a trifle hard; her nose was small and too broad for beauty; and her lips were full though unemotional. Her yellow-brown hair was cut short and combed straight back from a broad, low forehead. A soft felt hat was tucked under her arm. She wore a tweed suit and heavy tan oxfords with rubber soles. A white shirtwaist with a green four-in-hand added a final touch of mannishness to her appearance.

As she reached the head of the stairs and saw Markham, she came forward with a swinging stride and held out her hand.

"Greetings," she said. "What brings you here so early? Business with uncle, I suppose." She ran her eyes appraisingly over Heath and me as she spoke, and frowned. Then before Markham could answer she added: "Anything wrong?"

"Something seriously wrong, Miss Lake," Markham replied, trying to bar her way into the room. "If you will be so good as to wait —"

But the young woman, with an aggressive gesture, brushed past us and entered the room. The moment she caught sight of Archer Coe she went swiftly to him and knelt down, putting her arm about him.

"Hey! Don't touch that body!" Heath stepped quickly up to her and put his hand on her shoulder none too gently, pulling her to her feet.

She swung toward him angrily, both hands sunk deep into the outer pockets of her tweed jacket, and stood glowering at him, her feet wide apart.

Markham stepped diplomatically into the breach.

"Nothing must be touched, Miss Lake," he explained, "until the Medical Examiner arrives."

She regarded Markham calculatingly.

"Is it also against the law to tell me what's happened?" she asked.

"We know little more than you do," Markham returned mildly. "We have just arrived, and we found your uncle's body exactly as you see it."

She turned, without taking her hands from her pockets, and contemplated the inert figure in the armchair.

"Well, what do you *think* has happened?" She put the question in a hard, even tone.

"There is every appearance of suicide. . . ."

"Suicide?" She turned back to Markham coldly. "I wouldn't call it that."

Vance, who had been standing at the rear of the room near the bed, came forward.

"Neither would I, Miss Lake," he said.

She moved her head slightly and lifted her eyebrows.

"Ah! Good morning, Mr. Vance. In the excitement of the moment I didn't see you. . . . You are quite right—it's not suicide." Her eyes narrowed. "It's been a long time since you called. Ceramics and corpses would seem to be the only attractions this house holds for you." (I thought I detected a note of resentment in her voice.)

Vance ignored the unfriendly criticism.

"Why do you repudiate the suicide theory?" he asked with pronounced courtesy.

"Very simple," she replied. "Uncle was too great an egotist to deprive the world of his presence."

"But egotism," Vance submitted, "is often the cause of suicide. Boredom, don't y' know—the inability to find a responsive appreciation. Suicide gives the egotist his one supreme moment of triumph." Vance spoke with academic aloofness.

"Uncle Archer needed no supreme moments," Hilda Lake returned contemptuously. "He had such moments every time he acquired a Chinese knick-knack. An utterly worthless piece of soft Chün porcelain in a silk nest, which was of no use to any human being, gave him a greater thrill than I would get out of beating Bobby Jones."

"And of just what use would *that* achievement be to any human being?" smiled Vance.

"Oh, I know how you feel about ancient pottery," she returned good-naturedly. "And, anyway, I wasn't trying to be erudite—I was merely indulging in analogies by way of explaining why I don't think uncle killed himself."

"Forgive me." Vance bowed. "You are unquestionably right. But neither Mr. Markham nor Sergeant Heath agrees with us. They are quite ready to dismiss the case as suicide."

She looked from Markham to Heath with a hard, cold smile.

"And why not?" she asked. "It would be so easy—and would save a lot of bally scandal."

Markham was piqued by the woman's attitude.

"Who, Miss Lake," he asked in his typical courtroom manner, "would have any reason for desiring your uncle's death?"

"I, for one," she answered unhesitatingly, looking Markham straight in the eye. "He irritated me beyond words. There was no sympathy between us. He stood in the way of everything I wanted to do; and he was able to make life pretty miserable for me because

he held the purse-strings. A nice cold arctic day it was for me when he was appointed my guardian and I was made dependent on him." (Her voice became bitter. There was a clouded angry look in her eyes, and her square jaw was set slightly forward.) "His death at any time these past ten years would have been a godsend to me. Now that he's out of the way I'll get my patrimony and be able to do what I want to do without interference."

Markham and Heath regarded her in amazed indignation. There was something icily venomous in her manner—a calculating hatred more potent and devastating even than her words. It was Vance's languid and indifferent voice that broke the momentary silence that followed her tirade.

"My word! Really, y' know, Miss Lake, you're dashed refreshin' in your frankness. . . . Are we to accept your comments as a confession of murder?"

"Not at present," was the even reply. "But if the authorities are set on calling it suicide, I may come forward later and claim the credit for his demise—by way of upholding the honor of the family. You see, I regard a good healthy justifiable murder in higher esteem than a paltry suicide."

The blood was mounting to Markham's cheeks: he was becoming angry at Hilda Lake's apparent flippancy.

"This is scarcely the time for jesting," he reproved her.

"Oh, of course." She looked at him with chilly eyes. "It's the perfect occasion for solemnity. . . . Well, I was never partial to emulating the owl. However, I'll do my best in the circumstances."

Markham regarded her sternly, but her fixed gaze did not waver.

"Who besides yourself," he asked, trying to control his feelings, "would have had reason to murder your uncle?"

The woman looked up at the ceiling with meditative shrewdness and sat down on the edge of the desk.

"Any number of persons." She spoke indifferently. "*De mortuis*—and all that kind of rot—but, after all, the fact that Uncle Archer is dead doesn't make him any more admirable. And there are several people who would prefer him dead to alive."

Heath had stood solemnly by during this astonishing conversation, puffing at a long black cigar and studying the woman with puzzled belligerence. At this point he spoke sourly.

"If you think your uncle was such a wash-out and you were so glad to find he'd been croaked, why did you run over to him and kneel down, and pretend to be worried?"

Hilda Lake gave the Sergeant a withering, yet whimsical, look.

"My dear Mr. Policeman, I simply wanted to make sure he was dead."

Markham stepped forward.

"You're a brutally unfeeling woman, Miss Lake," he said through set jaws.

Vance proffered her his cigarette-case.

"Won't you have a *Régie*?" he asked.

"No, thanks." She was now looking down at Archer Coe's body. "I rarely smoke. Bad for the wind—upsets the nerves. . . . Yes," she mused, as if reverting to her conversation with Markham, "there won't be any great mourning at dear uncle's passing."

Markham returned to the point.

"Would you care to name any one in particular who might be pleased with Mr. Coe's death?"

"That wouldn't be cricket," she returned. "But I'll say this much: there are several Chinese gentlemen whom uncle has swindled and tricked out of rare treasures, who will be delighted to learn that his collecting days are over. And you probably know yourself, Mr. Markham, that there were many unpleasant rumors after uncle's return from China last year—gossip about his desecrating graveyards and removing funerary urns and figures. He received several threatening letters."

Markham nodded.

"Yes, I remember. He showed me one or two of them. . . . Do you seriously believe an outraged Oriental killed him?"

"Certainly not. The Chinese have more sense than to kill any one for a piece of bric-à-brac."

Vance yawned and strolled between Hilda Lake and Markham. Again he held out his cigarette-case.

"Oh, do have a cigarette," he pleaded. "Sometimes they quiet the nerves, don't y' know."

The woman looked up at him and gave a hard, questioning smile. Then, after a moment's hesitation she took one of his *Régies*, and he lighted it for her.

"What do *you* think of this affair, Mr. Vance?" she asked casually.

"Dashed if I know." He spoke lightly. "Your suggestion of a Chinaman is most fascinatin'. I wonder if there are any *objets d'art* missing from the house."

"I wouldn't be surprised." She blew a long ribbon of smoke toward the ceiling. "Personally, I hope they're all gone. I'd infinitely prefer Wedgwood and Willow ware."

Markham again took the floor.

"I'm afraid we're all talking a bit dramatically. . . . If your uncle's death was not suicide, Miss Lake, how do you account for the fact that the door of this room was bolted on the inside?"

Hilda Lake rose to her feet, a puzzled look on her face.

"Bolted on the inside?" she repeated, turning toward the door. "Ah! So you had to break in!" She stood still for several moments looking at the hanging bolt. "That's different."

"In just what way?" asked Vance.

"Maybe, after all, it was suicide!"

A bell sounded downstairs, and we could hear Gamble opening the front door.

Markham stepped quickly to Hilda Lake's side, and put his hand on her arm.

"The Medical Examiner is probably coming. Will you be so good as to go to your room and wait there?"

"Right-o." She strode to the door, her hands still in her pockets. Before she went out she turned. "But please send Gamble up with my tea and muffins. I'm positively starving."

A minute later Doctor Emanuel Doremus was ushered into the room. He was a wiry, nervous man, cynical, hard-bitten, and with a jaunty manner. He wore a brown top-coat, and a derby set far back on his head. He resembled a stock salesman far more than he did a doctor.

He greeted us with a wave of the hand, and glanced about the room. Then he teetered back and forth on his toes, and pinned a baleful eye on Heath.

"More shenanigan," he complained. "I was in the midst of hot-cakes and sausages when I got your message. You always pick on me at meal-time, Sergeant. . . . Well, what have you got for me now?"

Heath grinned and jerked his thumb toward Coe's body. He was used to the Medical Examiner's grouching.

Doremus turned his head and let his indifferent eyes rest on the dead man for several moments.

"The door was bolted on the inside, doctor," Markham volunteered. "We had to break it in."

Doremus drew a deep sigh and turned back to Heath with a grunt of disgust.

"Well, what about it?" he asked impatiently. "Couldn't you have let me finish my breakfast? All you needed was an order to remove the body." He reached in his pocket and drew out a small pad of printed blanks. "If you'd have given me the low-down, I'd have sent an assistant." His voice had become peevish.

"Mr. Markham told me to call you personally, doc," Heath explained. "It ain't *my* funeral."

Doremus, holding his fountain-pen poised, cocked an eye at Markham.

"Straight case of suicide," he announced breezily. "Nothing to worry about. I'll give you the approximate time of death, if you want it. And the routine autopsy. . . ."

Vance was lighting another cigarette leisurely.

"I say, doctor," he asked languidly; "would it be unprofessional if you looked at the body?"

Doremus spun round.

"I'm going to look at the body," he snapped. "I'm going to dissect it—I'm going to give it a *post mortem*. What more do you want?"

"Just why, doctor," pursued Vance, "do you jump at the conclusion that it's suicide?"

Doremus sighed impatiently.

"The gun's in his hand; the bullet wound is in the right place; and I know a dead man when I see one. Furthermore, the door—"

"Was bolted on the inside," Vance finished. "Oh, quite. But what about the body?"

"Well, what about it?" Doremus began filling in the order. "There's the body—look at it yourself."

"I have looked at it, don't y' know."

"You see, doc," Heath explained, with a grin of satisfaction, "Mr. Vance and I made a bet. I said you'd say suicide; and he said you'd say murder."

"I'm a doctor, not a detective," Doremus returned acidly. "The guy's dead, with a bullet hole in his right temple. He's holding a gun in his right hand. It's just the kind of wound that could have been self-inflicted. His position is natural—and the door was locked on the inside. The rest of it is up to you fellows in the Homicide Bureau. If the bullet from the gun don't fit, the autopsy'll show it. You'll get all the data tomorrow. Then you can draw your own conclusions."

Vance had sat down in a chair near the west wall and was smoking placidly.

"Would you mind, doctor, taking a close look at that bullet hole before you return to your hot-cakes and sausages? And you might also scrutinize the dead man's mouth."

Doremus stared at Vance a moment; then he approached Archer Coe's body and bent over it. He inspected the wound carefully, and I saw his eyebrows go up. He lifted the hair from the left temple, and there was visible to all of us a dark bruised indentation on the scalp along the hair line. Doremus touched it with delicate fingers, and for the first time I got a distinct impression of the man's professional competency. Then he lifted Coe's upper lip slightly, and seemed to inspect his teeth, which appeared blood-stained from where I stood. After a close inspection of the dead man's mouth, he again focused his attention on the bullet wound in the right temple.

Presently he stood up straight, pushed his derby even farther back on his head, and fixed a calculating gaze on Vance.

"What's in your mind?" he asked truculently.

"Nothing at all—the brain's a mere vacuum." Vance took his cigarette from his lips and yawned. "Did you find anything illuminatin'?"

Doremus nodded, his eyes still on Vance.

"Yeah. Plenty!"

"Oh, really, now?" Vance smiled ingratiatingly. "And you still think it's suicide?"

Doremus crammed his hands into his pockets and made a wry face.

"Hell, no! . . . There's something queer here—something damned queer." His eyes shifted to Coe's body. "There's blood in his mouth, and he's got a slight fracture of the skull on the left frontal. He's had a dirty blow by a blunt instrument of some kind. . . . Damned queer!"

Markham, his eyes mere slits, came forward.

"What about that bullet wound in his right temple?"

Doremus looked up, took one hand from his pocket, and pointed toward the dead man's head.

"Mr. Markham," he said with precise solemnity, "that baby had been dead for hours when that bullet entered his head!"

#### 4. A STRANGE INTERRUPTION

(Thursday, October 11; 10 a.m.)

The only person in the room who was not staggered by this unexpected announcement was Vance. Heath stood staring at the corpse as if he almost expected it to rise. Markham slowly took his cigar from his mouth and looked vaguely back and forth between Doremus and Vance. As for myself, I must admit that a cold chill ran up my spine. The sight of a dead man sitting with a revolver in his hand and a bullet wound in his temple, coupled with the knowledge that the bullet had been fired into him after death, affected me like a piece of African sorcery. Its unreality and unnaturalness aroused in me those obscure primordial fears that are hidden deep in even the most civilized organisms.

Vance, as I say, was unaffected. He merely nodded his head slightly and lighted another cigarette with steady fingers.

"Interestin' situation—eh, what?" he murmured. "Really, Markham, a man doesn't ordinarily shoot himself after death. . . . I fear you simply must eliminate the suicide theory."

Markham frowned deeply.

"But the bolted door—"

"A dead man doesn't ordinarily bolt doors either," Vance returned.

Markham turned, with slightly dazed eyes, to Doremus.

"Can you determine what killed him, doctor?"

"If given time." Doremus had become sullen: he did not like the turn of events.

"I say, doctor," drawled Vance, "what's the state of *rigor mortis* in our victim?"

"It's well advanced." Doremus, as if to verify his statement, again leaned over Coe's body and, after attempting to move the head, grasped the arm hanging over the chair and then kicked Coe's outstretched feet. "Yep, well advanced. Dead eight to twelve hours."

"Can't you come closer than that?" asked Heath sourly.

"Give me a chance." The Medical Examiner was irritable. "I'm going to take a closer look at this guy before I go. . . . Lend me a hand, Sergeant, and we'll put him on the bed. . . ."

"Just a moment, doctor." Vance spoke peremptorily. "Take a look at the hand on the desk. Is it clutching the revolver tightly?"

Doremus shot the other an angry look, hesitated, and then, bending over Coe's hand, fumbled with the dead man's fingers.

"He's clutching the gun tight, all right." With difficulty he bent Coe's fingers and removed the revolver, taking great care not to make finger-prints on it.

Heath came forward and gingerly inspected the weapon. Then he wrapped it in a large pocket handkerchief, and placed it on the blotter.

"And, doctor," pursued Vance, "was Coe's finger pressed directly against the trigger?"

"Yep," was Doremus's curt answer.

"Then we may assume that the revolver was placed in Coe's hand before *rigor mortis* set in, what?"

"Assume anything you like!"

Markham's diplomacy again came to the fore.

"We can't assume anything without help from you, doctor," he said graciously. "The point Mr. Vance raises may prove an important one. We'd like your opinion."

Doremus partly curbed his irritation.

"Well, I'll tell you. He"—pointing to Coe's body—"may have had the gun in his hand when he died. I wasn't present, y' understand. And if the gun was already in his hand, then nobody put it there later."

"In that case how could it have been fired?"

"It couldn't. But how do *you* know it was fired? There's no way of telling until the *post mortem* whether the bullet in his head came from the gun he was holding."

"Do the calibre of the revolver and the wound correspond?"

"Yes, I'd say so. The gun's a .38, and the wound looks the same size."

"And," put in Heath, "one chamber of the gun's been fired."

Markham nodded, and looked again at the Medical Examiner.

"If it should prove to be true, doctor, that the revolver in Coe's hand fired the shot in his head, then we could assume, could we not, as Mr. Vance suggested, that the revolver had been placed in the dead man's hand before *rigor mortis* set in?"

"Sure you could." Doremus's tone was greatly modified. "Nobody could have forced the gun into his hand and made it appear natural after *rigor mortis* had set in."

Though Vance's eyes were moving idly about the room, he was listening closely to this conversation.

"There is," he remarked, in a low voice, "another possibility. Far-fetched, I'll admit, but tenable. . . . Men have been known to do queer things after death."

We all looked at him with questioning astonishment.

"Don't go spiritualistic on us, Vance," Markham snapped. "Just what do you mean by dead men doing queer things?"

"There are recorded instances of suicides who have shot themselves and then thrown the weapon thirty feet away. Dr. Hans Gross in his 'Handbuch für Untersuchungsrichter'—"

"But that hardly applies here."

"No-o." Vance drew deeply on his cigarette. "Quite so. Just a fleeting thought."

Markham studied Vance a moment; then turned back to Doremus.



"Did Coe die of that blow on the head?"

The Medical Examiner once more teetered on his toes, and pursed his lips. Then, without a word, he made another examination of Coe's head. Straightening up, he looked Markham in the eye.

"There's something funny here. There's been an internal hemorrhage—what might be expected from a severe blow on the head. Blood in the mouth and all that. . . . But, Mr. Markham,"—Doremus spoke impressively—"that blow on the left frontal wasn't powerful enough to kill a man. A slight fracture, but nothing serious—just enough to stun him. . . . Nope, he didn't die of concussion or a fractured skull."

"And he didn't die of the revolver shot," added Vance. "Most fascinatin'! . . . Still, the johnny's dead, don't y' know."

Doremus swung jerkily about to Heath.

"Come on, Sergeant."

He and Heath lifted Coe's body and carried it to the bed. Together they removed the clothes from the dead man, hung them over a chair by the bed, and Doremus began his examination. He went over the body carefully from head to foot for abrasions and wounds, and ran his fingers over the bones in search of a possible fracture. The body was lying on its back, and as Doremus pressed his hand over the right side we could see him pause and bend forward.

"Fifth rib broken," he announced. "And a decided bruise."

"That's certainly not a serious injury," ventured Markham.

"Oh, no. Nothing at all. He might not even have known it, except for a little soreness."

"Did it happen before or after death?"

"Before. Otherwise there'd be no epidermal discoloration."

"And that blow on the head was also before death, I take it."

"Sure thing. He got a little bunged up before he died, but that isn't what killed him."

"Perhaps," suggested Vance, "the blow on the head and the broken rib are related. He may have been stunned and, in falling, struck his rib against some object."

"Possibly." Doremus nodded without looking up. He was now inspecting the palms of Coe's hands.

"Was the blow on the head powerful enough to have rendered him unconscious?" Vance was looking around the room at the various pieces of furniture, and there was a veiled interest in his eyes.

"Oh, yes," Doremus told him. "More than likely."

Vance's gaze came to rest on a heavy teak-wood chest near the east windows. Going to it he opened the lid and looked in. Then he closed it almost immediately.

"And," pursued Vance, turning back to the Medical Examiner, "would Coe have regained consciousness very soon after that blow on his head?"

"That's problematical." Doremus straightened and screwed up his face into a perplexed frown. "He might have remained unconscious for twelve hours, and he might have come to in a few minutes. All depends. . . . But that's not what's bothering me. There are a couple of small abrasions on the inside of the right-hand fingers and a slight cut on the knuckle—and they're all fresh. I'd say he'd put up a scrap with whoever cracked him over the head. And yet his clothes were certainly neat—no sign of having been mussed—and his hair's combed and slicked down. . . ."

"Yeah, and there was a gun in his hand, and he was sitting restful-like and looking peaceful," added Heath with puzzled disgust. "Somebody musta dolled him up after the battle. A swell situation."

"But they didn't change his shoes," put in Markham.

"Which explains his still wearing his street shoes with his bathrobe." Heath addressed this remark to Vance.

Vance gazed mildly at the Sergeant for a moment.

"Why should any one re-dress a person he has just knocked unconscious, and then comb his hair? It's a sweet, kind-hearted thought, Sergeant, but somehow it's not the usual procedure. . . . No, I'm afraid we'll have to account for Coe's coiffure and sartorial condition along other lines."

Heath studied Vance critically.

"You mean he changed his clothes himself and combed his hair after his head was bashed in?"

"It's not impossible," said Vance.

"In that case," Markham asked, "why did he not also change his shoes?"

"Something intervened."

During this speculation Doremus had turned Coe's body over so that it now lay on its face. I was watching him and I saw him suddenly lean forward.

"Aha! Now I've got it!"

His exclamation brought us all up short.

"Stabbed, by George!" he announced excitedly.

We all drew close to the bed and looked down at the area on the body at which Doremus was pointing.

Just below Coe's right shoulder-blade and near the spine was a small diamond-shaped wound about half an inch in diameter. It was a clean-cut wound etched with black coagulated blood. Apparently there had been no external bleeding. This fact struck me as unusual, and Markham must have received the same impression, for, after a moment's silence, he asked Doremus about it.

"All wounds do not bleed externally," Doremus explained. "This is especially true of clean, quick stabs that pass through thin membranes into the viscera: they frequently show little or no external blood. Like contusions. The bleeding is internal. . . . This stab closed immediately and the lips of the wound adhered. An internal hemorrhage was caused. Very simple. . . . Now we have an explanation of everything."

Vance smiled cynically.

"Oh, have we, now? We have only an explanation of the cause of Coe's death. And that explanation complicates the situation



horribly. It makes the case even more insane."

Markham shot him a quick glance.

"I can't see that," he said. "It at least clarifies one point we have been discussing. We now know what stopped him in the middle of changing his clothes."

"I wonder. . . ." Vance crushed out his cigarette in an ash-tray on the night-table, and picked up the silk-wool dressing-gown which Coe had been wearing when we found him. He held it up to the light and inspected it minutely. There was no cut or hole of any kind in it. We all looked on in stupefied silence.

"No, Markham," Vance said, placing the gown over the foot of the bed. "Coe didn't have on his dressing-gown when he was stabbed. That change was made later."

"Still and all," Heath argued, "the guy mighta had his hand under the robe when he did the stabbing."

Vance shook his head ruefully.

"You forget, Sergeant, that the gown was buttoned tightly and that the belt was neatly tied around Coe's middle. . . . But let us see if we can verify the matter."

He walked quickly to the clothes-closet in the west wall, whose door was slightly ajar. Opening the door wide, he stepped inside. A moment later he emerged with a clothes-hanger from which depended a coat and waistcoat of the same sombre gray material as that of the trousers Coe had been wearing.

Vance ran his fingers over the coat in the vicinity of the right shoulder, and there was revealed a slit in the material the exact size of the wound in Coe's back. There was a similar slit in the back of the waistcoat, coinciding with the one in the coat.

Vance held the two articles of clothing close to the light and touched the slits with his fingers.

"These holes," he said, "are slightly stiffened at the edges, as if some substance had dried on them. I think that substance will be found to be blood. . . . There's no doubt that Coe was fully dressed when he was stabbed, and that the blood on the dagger, or knife, soiled the edges of these two cuts when it was withdrawn."

He replaced the hanger in the closet.

After a moment Markham expressed the thought uppermost in all our minds.

"That being the case, Vance, the murderer must have taken Coe's coat and vest off, hung them in the closet, and then put the dressing-gown on the stabbed man."

"Why the murderer?" Vance parried. "The indications are that some one else came here after Coe was dead and sent a bullet through his head. Couldn't this other hypothetical person have made the change in the corpse's habiliments?"

"Does that theory help us any?" Markham asked gruffly.

"Not a bit," Vance cheerfully admitted, "even if it were true—which, of course, we don't know. And I'll admit it sounds incredible. I merely made the suggestion by way of indicating that, at this stage of the game, we should not jump at conclusions. And the more obvious the conclusion, the more cautious we should be. This is not, my dear Markham, an obvious case."

Doremus was becoming bored. Criminal technicalities were not in his line: his entire interest was medical; and with the finding of the wound in Coe's back, he felt that he had discharged his duties for the time being. He gave a cavernous yawn, stretched himself, and reached for his hat which he had placed on the floor beside the bed.

"Well, that lets me out," He squinted at Heath. "I suppose you want a quick autopsy."

"I'll say we do." The Sergeant's head was enveloped in a cloud of cigar smoke. "When can we get it?"

"Tonight—if you must have it." Doremus drew a sheet over the prone figure on the bed, and made out an order for the removal of the body. "Get him down to the morgue as soon as possible." He shook hands cordially with every one and walked briskly toward the door.

"Just a moment, doctor," Markham's voice halted him. "Any remote possibility of suicide here?"

"What!" Doremus wheeled in surprise. "Not a chance. That bird was stabbed in the back—couldn't possibly have done it himself. He died of internal hemorrhage caused by the stab. He's been dead eight or ten hours—maybe longer. The broken rib and the blow on the left frontal are minor affairs—didn't do any particular damage. The bullet in his right temple don't mean a thing—he was already dead. . . . Suicide? Huh!" And with a wave of the hand he went out.

Markham stood for a time looking unhappily at the floor. Finally he made a commanding gesture to Heath.

"You'd better notify the boys, Sergeant. Get the finger-print men and the photographer. We're in for it. . . . And you'll take charge, of course."

Before Markham had finished speaking, Heath was on his way to the extension telephone which stood on a tabouret beside the desk. A moment later he was in touch with the Police Headquarters Telegraph Bureau. After turning in a brief report to be relayed to the various departments, he ordered the Bureau to notify the Department of Public Welfare to send a wagon immediately for Coe's body.

"I hope, sir," he said a bit pleadingly to Markham, turning from the phone, "that you are not going to step out on this case. I don't like the way things stack up. Almost anything mighta happened here last night." (I had rarely seen the Sergeant so perturbed; and I could not blame him, for every phase of the crime seemed utterly contradictory and incomprehensible.)

"No, Sergeant," Markham assured him; "I shall remain and do all I can. There must be some simple explanation, and we're sure to find it sooner or later. . . . Don't be discouraged," he added, in a kindly tone. "We haven't begun the investigation yet."

Vance had seated himself in a low-backed chair near the windows and was smoking placidly, his eyes on the ceiling.

"Yes, Markham,"—he spoke languidly, yet withal thoughtfully—"there's some explanation, but I doubt if it will prove to be a simple one. There are too many conflicting elements in this equation; and each one seems to eliminate all the others. . . ."

He took a deep inhalation on his cigarette.

"Let us summarize, for the sake of clarity, before we proceed with our interviews of the family and guests. . . . First, Coe was struck over the head and perhaps rendered unconscious. Then he probably tumbled against some hard object and broke a rib. All this was evidently preceded by some sort of physical *contretemps*. Coe was, we may assume, in his street clothes at the time. Later on—how much later we don't know—he was stabbed in the back through his coat and waistcoat with a small, peculiarly shaped instrument, and

he died of internal hemorrhage. At some time subsequent to the stabbing, his coat and waistcoat were removed and carefully hung up in the clothes-closet. His dressing-gown was put on, buttoned, and the belt neatly tied about him. Moreover, his hair was correctly combed. *But his street shoes were not changed to bedroom slippers.* Furthermore, we found him sitting in a comfortable attitude in an easy chair—in a position he could not possibly have been in when he was stabbed. And his broken rib indicates clearly that he was at one time prostrate over some hard object. . . . Then, as if all this were not incongruous enough, we know that after he was killed by the stab in his back and before *rigor mortis* had set in, a bullet crashed into his right temple. The gun from which the bullet was presumably fired was clutched tightly in his right hand, so tightly that the official Æsculapius had difficulty in removing it. And we must not forget the serene expression on Coe's face: it was not the expression of a man who had been struggling with an antagonist and been knocked unconscious by a blow on the head. And this fact, Markham, is one of the strangest phases of the case. Coe was in a peaceful, or at least a satisfied, state of mind when he departed this life. . . ."

Vance puffed again on his cigarette, and his eyes became dreamy.

"So much for the present situation as it relates to Coe's dead body and to the hypothetical events leading up to his demise. Now, there are other elements in the situation that must be taken into consideration. For instance, we found him in a room securely and powerfully bolted on the inside, and with no other means of ingress or egress. All the windows are closed, and all the shades drawn. The electric lights are burning, and the bed has not been slept in. What took place here last night, therefore, must have happened before Coe's usual time for retiring. Furthermore, I am inclined to think that we must also consider the implied fact that, just before his death, he had been reading about peach-bloom vases and that he had started to write a letter or make a memorandum of some kind. That dated piece of stationery and that fountain-pen on the floor must be added to the problem. . . ."

At this point we could hear hurried footsteps mounting the stairs, and the next moment Gamble stood at the door with a startled look in his eyes.

"Mr. Markham," he stammered, "excuse the interruption, sir, but—but there's something queer—very queer, sir—down in the front hall."

## 5. THE WOUNDED SCOTTIE

(Thursday, October 11; 10.30 a.m.)

The butler's attitude was one of amazement rather than fear; and we all regarded him with misgivings.

"Well, what's in the hall?" barked Markham. Vance's recapitulation had produced an irritating effect on him.

"A dog, sir!" Gamble announced.

Markham gave a start of exasperation.

"What of it?"

"A wounded dog, sir," the butler explained.

Before Markham could answer, Vance had leaped to his feet.

"That's the thing I've been waiting for!" There was a suppressed note of excitement in his voice. "A wounded dog! My word! . . ."  
He went swiftly to the door. "Come along, Gamble," he called, as he passed quickly down the stairs.

We all followed in silent amazement. The situation up to this point had been topsy-turvy enough, but this new element seemed to shunt the case still further off the track of rationality.

"Where is it?" Vance demanded when he had reached the lower hallway.

Gamble stepped to the heavy portières at the right of the entrance door, and drew one of them aside.

"I heard a strange sound just now," he explained. "Like a whine, sir. It startled me terribly. When I looked back of this curtain, there I saw the dog."

"Does it belong to any one in the house?" Markham asked.

"Oh, no, sir!" the man assured him. "That's why I was so startled. There's never been a dog in this house since I've been here—and that's going on ten years."

As he held back the portière, we could see the small, prone shape of a slightly brindled Scottish terrier, lying on its side with its four short legs stretched out. Over the left eye was a clotted wound; and on the floor was a black stain of dried blood. The eye beneath the wound was swollen shut, but the other eye, dark hazel and oval, looked up at us with an expression of tragic appeal.

Vance was already on his knees beside the dog.

"It's all right, lassie," he was murmuring. "Everything's all right."

He took the dog tenderly in his arms, and stood up.

"What street's this?" he asked of no one in particular. "Seventy-first? . . . Good! . . . Open that door, Gamble."

The butler, apparently as much surprised as any of the rest of us, hurried to obey.

Vance stepped into the vestibule, the dog held gently against his breast.

"I'm going to Doctor Blamey,"<sup>[6]</sup> he announced. "He's just up the street. I'll be back presently." And he hurried down the stone steps.

This new development left us all even more puzzled than before. Vance's animated response to Gamble's announcement regarding the dog, and his cryptic remark as he hurried downstairs, added another element of almost outlandish mystery to a situation already incredibly complicated.

When Vance had disappeared with the wounded Scottie in his arms, Heath, frowning perplexedly, turned to Markham and crammed his hands into his trousers' pockets.

"This case is beginning to get to me, sir," he complained. "Now, what do you suppose is the meaning of this dog business? And why was Mr. Vance so excited? And anyhow, what could a dog have to do with the stabbing?"

Markham did not answer. He was staring at the front door through which Vance had just passed, chewing his cigar nervously. Presently he fixed Gamble with an angry look.

"You never saw that dog before?"

"No, sir." The butler had become oily again. "Never, sir. No dog at all has ever been in this house—"

"No one here was interested in dogs?"

"No one, sir. . . . It's most mysterious. I can't imagine how it got in the house."

Wrede and Grassi had come to the drawing-room door, and stood looking out curiously into the hall.

Markham, seeing them, addressed himself to Wrede.

"Do you, Mr. Wrede, know anything about a small black shaggy dog that might have found access to this house?"

Wrede looked puzzled.

"Why, no," he answered, after a slight hesitation. "No one here cared for dogs. I happen to know that both Archer and Brisbane detested pets."

"What about Miss Lake?"

"She has no use for dogs. She likes cats. She had a blue Persian at one time, but Archer made her get rid of it. That was years ago."

Markham frowned.

"Well, a dog has just been found here in the hall—back of those curtains."

"That's most remarkable." Wrede seemed genuinely astonished. "I can't imagine where it came from. It must have followed some one in, without being seen."

Markham did not answer, and Heath, taking his cigar from his mouth, stepped forward belligerently, and thrust out his jaw.

"But *you* like dogs, don't you?" he shot forth, in his best third-degree manner.

Wrede was taken aback by the Sergeant's sudden aggressiveness.

"Why, yes," he said. "I'm very fond of them. I've always kept one till I moved into the apartment next door. . . ."

"What kind of a dog?" demanded Heath, without relaxing his bellicose manner.

"A Doberman Pinscher," Wrede told him, and turned to Markham. "I don't exactly understand this man's questions."

"We're all a little on edge," Markham apologized. "Some very peculiar things went on in this house last night. Coe did not commit suicide—he was murdered."

Wrede did not appear surprised.

"Ah!" he murmured. "I was afraid of that."

Grassi now gave a guttural exclamation, and stepped into the hall.

"Murdered?" he repeated. "Mr. Coe was murdered?" His face was abnormally pale, and his dark eyes stared at Markham in frightened wonderment. "I understood he had taken his own life with a revolver."

"He was stabbed in the back," Markham informed him. "The bullet did not enter his head till after death."

Again the Italian gave a curious guttural exclamation and leaned heavily against the casing of the drawing-room door. So white was his face that for a moment I thought he was going to faint. Heath was watching him like a tiger, and at this point he moved deliberately forward until his face was within six inches of Grassi's.

"Stabbed with a dagger!" he spat out. "*In the back*. Wop stuff. What d'ye know about it?"

As quickly as he had gone pale, the Italian drew himself together, and stood erect with great dignity, looking Heath steadily in the eyes. A slow sneering smile curled the corners of his heavy lips.

"I know nothing about it, sir," he said with quiet suavity. "I am not of the police. Perhaps *you* know a great deal about it." His tone, though on the surface polite, was an insult.

Heath was piqued.

"We know plenty," he boasted truculently. "And when we get going, it won't be so damn pleasant for you."

Markham stepped forward and placed his hand on Heath's shoulder.

"This can wait, Sergeant," he said placatingly. "We've considerable preliminary investigating to do before we question Mr. Grassi."

Heath snorted and walked reluctantly toward the stairs.

"You gentlemen will have to wait in the drawing-room for a while," Markham said to Grassi and Wrede. "And please be so good as to keep the door closed until we want you."

At these words, Hennessey waved the two men back into the drawing-room and drew the sliding doors shut.

"Come, Sergeant," Markham said. "We'd better make a once-over of Coe's room before the boys get here."

Heath sullenly led the way upstairs.

During the next five minutes or so, Markham and the Sergeant walked about Coe's quarters giving them a cursory inspection. As I have said, the room was at the rear with windows in the east and south walls. Heath went to each window and raised the shades. When he had completed his rounds he went up to Markham, who was standing before the clothes-closet door, looking inside.

"Here's a funny one, sir. The windows are all shut tight—but that ain't all. Every one of 'em is locked. And this room is on the second story, so that no one could get in from the outside. Why all the precaution?"

"Archer Coe was a peculiar man, Sergeant," Markham replied. "He was always afraid burglars would break in and steal his treasures."

The answer did not satisfy Heath.

"Who'd want this junk?" he grumbled sceptically, and moved to the desk.

Markham, after casually inspecting the closet, walked across the room to the teak-wood chest beneath one of the east windows. I then remembered that Vance had regarded this chest curiously during his conversation with Doctor Doremus about Coe's broken rib.

Heath was now standing in the middle of the room, gazing about him disgustingly.

"It's a cinch," he said, "that nobody could get in or out of this joss-house except by the door. It beats me."

The fact was that the only door in the room other than the main door which we had found bolted on the inside, was the one leading into the small clothes-closet. There was no private bathroom: the house had been built in an era when one common bathroom on the second floor was considered the height of sanitary luxury. We learned later, however, that Miss Lake had installed another bathroom on the third floor. Archer Coe, and his brother Brisbane, whose bedroom was at the front of the house on the same floor as Archer's, had shared the main bathroom which led off the hall between their quarters.

"I've seen nothing of the weapon that killed Coe," Markham remarked.

"It's not here," Heath asserted dogmatically. "It was withdrawn from Coe's body, and I'll bet the guy cached it where it wouldn't be found."

"That's possible," Markham agreed. "Anyway, I think you'd better open the windows—it's close in here. And you might turn off the electric lights."

"Nothing doing." The Sergeant was indignant. "You see, sir," he hastened to explain apologetically, "somebody pressed those window catches and also pushed the light switch. And I want to know who it was. I'm going to have Cap Dubois[7] get me the fingerprints."

A few minutes later Vance returned to the house. As he entered the room his face was troubled, and anger smouldered in his gray eyes.

"There's a good chance she'll live," he reported; "but that was a vicious blow some one dealt her. A blunt instrument of some kind. Doctor Blarney is fixing her up, and I'll know more about her condition tonight." (I had rarely seen Vance so upset.)

"What does it all mean?" Markham asked him. "Where does that dog fit in?"

"I don't know yet." Vance sank into a chair and took out his case of *Régies*. "But I have a feelin' it's our opening wedge. That little dog is the one totally irrelevant item in this whole bloody affair—she's our one contact with the world outside. She doesn't belong here, and therefore will have something important to say to us. Furthermore, she was wounded in this house."

Markham's eyes suddenly narrowed.

"And the wound was similar to the one on Coe's head, and in the same place."

Vance nodded dubiously.

"But that may be merely a coincidence," he returned after a moment. "In any event, no one in this house cared for dogs. There's never been one here, and I've often heard both Coe and his brother express themselves on the subject. I once had to sit for half an hour listening to Brisbane read aloud Ambrose Bierce's libelous attack on dogs.<sup>[8]</sup> No member of this household brought that dog in, Markham. But had the dog got in by mistake, no member of the family would have hesitated to strike it."

"You think an outsider brought it in?"

"No, that wouldn't be reasonable either." Vance frowned meditatively. "That's the strange thing about the dog's presence here. It was probably a terrible accident—a fatal miscalculation. That's why I'm so deuced interested. And then there's this point to be considered: the person who found the dog here *was afraid to let her out*. Instead—for his own safety—he tried to kill her and then hid her behind the portières downstairs. And he almost succeeded in killing her."

"Could the doctor tell at what time she was hurt?"

"Not exactly. But from the condition of the swelling about the eye and the dried blood in the wound, he said it might have been as long as twelve hours ago."

"That coincides."

"Oh, yes—quite. The dog either witnessed the stabbing or was present in the house shortly afterward."

"It's a curious situation," Markham murmured.

"Yes, it's curious," Vance agreed. "And damnable. But once we trace the dog's ownership, we may know something pertinent."

Markham looked doubtful.

"How, in Heaven's name, are we going to trace a stray dog?" he asked dispiritedly. "The city is full of them. And if it belonged to the person who entered here last night, the owner is certainly not going to advertise for it or even answer a 'found' advertisement."

"True." Vance nodded. "But the matter isn't as obscure and difficult as that. That little Scottie is no mere pet-shop companion. Far from it. She'd make trouble in the ring for some of our leading winners. I went over her as carefully as I could when she lay on Blamey's operating table. She has a short back, a fine spring of ribs, and a perfect tail; and she's low to the ground, with well bent stifles and sturdy hind-quarters. Also she has amazin' bone and substance. I know a little about Scotties, Markham, and I have an idea she's got both Laurieston and Ornsay blood in her. Her sturdiness and substance, coupled with her somewhat bold and slightly light eye, indicates the Laurieston strain—a great strain, by the by, but not sufficiently sensitive for my taste. On the other hand, she has certain very definite refinements—a lean, clean head and a sensitive muzzle, small ears, and a slightly receding occiput—all of which spells Ornsay."

"That's all very well"—Markham was annoyed by Vance's technicalities—"but what do those things mean to any one but a breeder? I can't see that they get us anywhere."

"Oh, but they do," smiled Vance. "They get us much forrader. The breeding of certain blood-lines in this country is known to every serious dog fancier. And a bitch like this one is the result of years of intensive breeding. There are such things as pedigrees and stud books and A. K. C. records and professional handlers and licensed judges; and it is not altogether impossible to trace a blue-blooded dog once you have a few clues as to its blood-lines and cross-strains. Furthermore, she's in perfect show condition now; and the chances are that a dog as good as this one has been shown. And whenever a dog is shown, another set of facts is put on record."

Heath had been listening to Vance with bored scepticism. Now he asked a question.

"Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Vance, that you can find the owner of any good dog you run across?"

"Oh, no, Sergeant," Vance hastened to assure him. "I only say that, provided a dog has been put on record and shown, and also provided one has a definite idea of the dog's progenitors, there is a good chance that, with patience, the owner may be found."

"Huh!" Heath was unimpressed. "But even if you did find the owner of this mut, where would you be? The owner might simply say, 'Oh, thank you, kind sir. The little devil ran away last Thursday.'"

Vance smiled.

"So he might, Sergeant. But well-bred dogs don't follow strangers into unknown houses. Moreover, dogs as good as this one are not generally permitted to roam the streets unattended." He lay back in his chair and partly closed his eyes. "There's something particularly strange about that dog's presence in this house last night. If I had the explanation, I'd know infinitely more about the murderer."

Heath gave Vance a shrewd look.

"Maybe the murderer was somebody who was fond of dogs," he suggested through his teeth. (It was obvious that he had Wrede in mind.)

"Oh, quite the contr'ry, Sergeant." Vance looked at Heath quizzically. "Until we have further data, we must assume that the murderer viciously injured the Scottie—probably to keep her quiet—"

What Vance was going to say further was interrupted by a noise of footsteps and voices in the lower front hall. A moment later, three plain-clothes men and two uniformed officers from the local precinct station clattered into the room. On seeing the District Attorney they hesitated.

"I have taken charge of the case," Markham told them. "We're handling it from Headquarters, but we'll want two men to guard the house."

"Certainly, sir." A heavy-set, gray-haired man saluted, and turned to the uniformed officers. "You, Hanlon and Riordan, stay here. Mr. Markham'll give you orders." He turned back to the District Attorney. "If there's anything else, Chief, let me know. I'm Lieutenant Smith."

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

## 6. THE IVORY-HEADED STICK

(Thursday, October 11; 11 a.m.)

The three plain-clothes men went out—reluctantly, I thought; but in important criminal cases handled by Headquarters, the men from the local station are automatically eliminated.

They had scarcely departed when the finger-print experts—Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy—arrived, with the official photographer, Peter Quackenbush. Under Heath's orders, they went systematically about their work.

"What I want most," the Sergeant told them, "are the prints on those window-catches, the push-button of the electric-light switch, and the door-knob. We'll get the finger-prints of the people in the house later for comparison. . . . What I want to know is who locked those windows and turned on the lights in this room. And I want to know who went out of this room last."

Vance beckoned Heath to one side.

"I can throw some light into the gloom of your uncertainties, Sergeant," he said. "Coe himself locked the windows and pulled down the shades; and he also switched on the lights. But I'll admit I'm in a Stygian darkness as to who was the last person to handle the door-knob. And I'm frightfully afraid that we won't be able to ascertain that important fact by sign-manuals."

Heath blinked and looked up questioningly. He was about to answer, but instead he called to Captain Dubois.

"Say, Cap, take the right thumb-print of the body on the bed, and see if you can check it with the prints on the window-catches and the light switch."

Dubois turned from one of the east windows, where he was sprinkling a light saffron powder over the flat surface of the lever of the catch, and, picking up his small black satchel, went to the bed. A few minutes later he returned with a piece of cardboard on which was an ink impression of Coe's thumb. Holding it under the light, he inspected it with a jeweller's-glass. Then he laid it on the desk and, going back to the window, closely inspected the flat surface of the catch. After a moment he gave a grunt.

"You had the right dope, Sergeant," he said, taking the glass from his eye. "It looks like the guy on the bed locked this window."

He then went through the same process of minute comparison with the catches on the other windows. When he was through he came to Heath.

"All the same—as far as I can see. Two of the lock-plates are blurred, but they seem to match."

The Sergeant shot Vance a sidelong look, but Vance had again relaxed in his chair and was smoking dreamily with closed eyes.

"Now, Cap," said Heath, "try the switch and the door-knob."

Dubois went to the switch and, after sprinkling the powder over it, blew upon it gently and studied it through his jeweller's-glass.

"Same here," he nodded. "I can't be sure, you understand, until I get the photographic enlargements and compare 'em. But the prints look the same—the whorl type with a pronounced ridge dot and several distinctive bifurcations."

"Never mind the enlargements," Heath told him. "Try the knob."

Again Dubois used his insufflator to puff the powder over the door-knob, and inspected the result closely with the aid of a flash-light.

"I'd say the same person handled the knob," he told the Sergeant. "But it's not as clear as it might be."

Heath grunted.

"No use trying the outside knob," he said. "Too many people have handled it this morning."

He smoked a while in silence.

"Try that gun on the desk, wrapped in my handkerchief."

Dubois obeyed.

"Nothing here," he told the Sergeant after a few minutes. "The trigger's incised and wouldn't take a print. And on the left side of the butt there's a blur on the ivory which may or may not be the dead bird's thumb-print."

"Nothing else on the gun?" Heath asked with obvious disappointment.

"Nope." Dubois inserted the glass in his eye and again leaned over the revolver. "Looks to me as if it had been wiped clean before the fellow picked it up."

"It had." Vance spoke lethargically. "It's a waste of time to inspect the gun. If there are any marks on it, they're Coe's."

The Sergeant stood glaring at Vance. Finally he shrugged, and waved his hand in dismissal to Dubois.

"Thanks, Cap. I guess that'll be all."

"Want me to have photographs made and verify the findings?"

Vance had risen and was crushing out his cigarette.

"Really, y' know, Sergeant," he remarked, "it's not necessary."

Heath hesitated; then he shook his head at Dubois.

"Don't bother."

Dubois and Bellamy and the photographer had scarcely quitted the room when Commanding Officer Moran of the Detective Bureau, followed closely by Detectives Burke and Snitkin of the Homicide Bureau, came in.

Moran greeted us pleasantly and asked Markham several questions concerning the case. News of it had been relayed to him from the Telegraph Division after Heath's report over the telephone. He seemed relieved to find Markham on the scene, and, at the District Attorney's request, officially assigned Heath to the case. He left us almost immediately, manifestly glad to get away.

Burke and Snitkin had come at Heath's specific request, and, after greeting the Sergeant, stood by the mantelpiece awaiting orders.

Markham had sat down in the Windsor chair at the desk, and after telephoning his office that he would be delayed, he lighted a fresh cigar and made a peremptory gesture to Heath.

"Let's see what we can find out from the people in the house, Sergeant." He deferred to Vance. "What do you say to beginning with

Gamble?"

Vance nodded.

"Quite. A bit of domestic gossip to start with. And don't fail to pry into the movements and whereabouts of brother Brisbane last night."

There was, however, another interruption before the examinations took place. The front door-bell rang, and Hennessey called up the stairs.

"Hey, Sergeant! The Public Welfare chariot is here."

Heath bawled out an order, and presently two men bearing a coffin-shaped basket entered the room. They lifted Coe's body into it, and, without a word, carried their gruesome burden out.

"And now let's have the windows open," ordered Markham. "And turn out those ghastly electric lights."

Snitkin and Burke leaped to obey him; and a moment later the fresh October air was drifting into the room.

Markham drew a deep breath and looked at his watch.

"Get Gamble up here, Sergeant," he said, leaning back in his chair.

Heath sent one of the uniformed officers to the street with instructions to keep all strangers away from the house. The other he stationed in the hall outside of Coe's room. He ordered Burke to the lower hall to answer the front door. Then he disappeared down the stairs.

Presently he returned with the butler in tow.

Markham beckoned Gamble to the desk. The man came boldly forward, but, despite his effort, he could not disguise his nervous fear. His face was a bluish white, and his eyes shifted constantly.

"We want some information about the conditions in this house last night," Markham began gruffly. "And we want the truth—understand?"

"Certainly, sir—anything I know, sir." The man tried to meet Markham's stern gaze, but his eyes fell almost immediately.

"First, take a look at that revolver." Markham pointed to the ivory-inlaid weapon on the desk before him. "Ever seen it before?"

Gamble glanced at it quickly and nodded his head.

"Yes, sir. I've seen it often. It was Mr. Archer Coe's revolver."

"Where did he keep it?"

"In the drawer of the library table, downstairs."

"When did you see it last?"

"Yesterday morning, sir, when I was straightening up the library. Mr. Coe had left a record-book on the table, and when I put it away in the drawer, I saw the revolver."

Markham nodded, as if satisfied.

"Now sit down over there." He pointed to a straight chair by the door. When Gamble had seated himself, Markham continued. "Who was in the house last night after dinner?"

"Yesterday was Wednesday, sir," the man answered. "There is no dinner here on Wednesdays. It's the servants' night off. Every one dines out—except Mr. Archer Coe occasionally. I fix a cold supper for him sometimes before I go."

"And last night?"

"Yes, sir. I prepared a salad and cold cuts for him. The rest of the family had engagements outside."

"What time did you go?"

"About six-thirty, sir."

"And there was no one but Mr. Archer Coe in the house at that time?"

"No, sir—no one. Miss Lake telephoned from the Country Club early in the afternoon that she would not be home till late. And Mr. Grassi, Mr. Coe's guest, went out shortly before four."

"Do you know where he went?"

"I understood he had an appointment with the Curator of Oriental Antiquities of the Metropolitan Museum."

"And Mr. Brisbane Coe, you said over the phone, was in Chicago." Markham's statement was actually a question.

"He wasn't in Chicago at that time, sir," Gamble explained. "He was *en route*, so to speak. He took the five-thirty train from the Grand Central last evening."

Vance lifted his eyebrows and shifted forward in his chair.

"The Lake Shore Limited, eh?" he remarked. "Why the slow train? Why not the Twentieth Century? He would have saved three hours' travel."

"Mr. Brisbane is very conservative, sir," Gamble explained. "And very cautious. He dislikes travelling on fast trains, and always took the slower ones."

"Well, well." Vance sank back in his chair, and Markham resumed the interrogation.

"How do you know Mr. Coe took the five-thirty train?"

Gamble looked perplexed.

"I didn't exactly see him off, sir," he replied, after blinking several times. "But I phoned for the reservations, and packed his suitcase, and got him a taxi."

"What time did he leave the house?"

"A little before five, sir."

Vance again roused himself from apparent lethargy.

"I say, Gamble,"—he spoke without looking up—"when did the cautious Mr. Brisbane decide on his jaunt to Chicago?"

The butler turned his head toward Vance in mild surprise.

"Why, not until after four o'clock. It was a rather sudden decision, sir—or so it seemed to me."

"Does he usually make these sudden decisions?"

"Never, sir. This was the first time. And I must say it struck me as most unusual. He generally plans on his Chicago trips the day before."

"Ah!" Vance raised his eyes languidly. "Does he make many trips to Chicago?"

"About one a month, I should say, sir."

"And does he tarry long on these visits?"

"Only a day or so."

"Do you know what the attraction is in Chicago?"

"Not exactly, sir." Gamble was growing restless. He clasped his hands tightly together and gazed straight ahead. "But several times I have heard him discussing the meetings there of some learned society. My impression is that he goes to Chicago to attend them."

"Yes, quite reasonable. . . . Queer chap, Brisbane," Vance mused. "He's interested in all sorts of out-of-the-way subjects. . . . So he made a sudden decision to migrate west after four o'clock yesterday, and departed before five. . . . Most interestin'. . . . And, by the by, Gamble, did he tell any one but you of his decision?"

"I hardly think so, sir—except Mr. Archer, of course. The fact is, there was no one else in the house."

"Did he speak to any one over the phone between four o'clock and his departure?"

"No one, sir."

"And there were no visitors to whom he might have confided his intentions?"

"No, sir. No one called."

"Most interestin'," Vance repeated. "And now, Gamble, think carefully before you answer. Did you notice anything unusual in Mr. Brisbane Coe's manner last evening?"

The man gave a slight start, and I noticed that the pupils of his eyes expanded. His gaze turned quickly to Vance, and he swallowed twice before answering.

"I did, sir—so help me God, I did! He was not altogether himself. He's usually very calm and even-going. But before he left here he seemed distracted and—and fidgety. And he did a most peculiar thing, sir, before he left the house:—he shook hands with Mr. Archer. I've never seen him shake hands with Mr. Archer before. And he said 'Good-bye, brother.' It was most peculiar, for he has never, to my knowledge, called Mr. Archer by anything but his first name."

"Oh really now!" Vance was studying the butler closely. "And how did Mr. Archer take this unwonted burst of fraternal affection?"

"I doubt if he even noticed it, sir. He was studying a piece of egg-shell china under an electric bulb; and he scarcely answered Mr. Brisbane."

"That would be like Archer," Vance commented to Markham. "When he was absorbed in an example of Chinese ceramic art, the roof could have toppled in, and he wouldn't have been aware of it. . . . Do you mind if I continue with Gamble?"

Markham nodded his assent, and Vance turned again to the butler.

"As I understand it, when Mr. Brisbane had gone you and Mr. Archer were left alone in the house."

"Why, yes, sir." The man was breathing heavily: all of his obsequiousness had departed. "But I only stayed long enough to prepare Mr. Archer's supper. . . ."

"And left Mr. Archer alone?"

"Yes! He was sitting in the library downstairs reading."

"And where did you go and how disport yourself?"

Gamble leaned forward earnestly.

"I had dinner in Childs, and then I went to a motion picture."

"Not an exciting evening, was it, Gamble? . . . And what other servants are there in the house?"

For some reason the man breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"There's only two, sir, besides myself." His voice was steadier now. "The Chinese cook—"

"Ah, a Chinese cook, eh? How long has he been here?"

"Only a few months."

"Go on."

"Then there's Miss Lake's personal maid. And that's all, sir—except the woman that comes twice a week to clean house."

"When did the cook and Miss Lake's maid leave the house yesterday?"

"Right after lunch. That's the usual order on Wednesdays, sir."

"And when did they return?"

"Late last night. I myself came in at eleven; and it was about half-past eleven when Myrtle—that's the maid's name—returned. I was just retiring—about midnight, I should say, sir—when I heard the cook sneak in."

Vance's eyebrows went up.

"Sneak?"

"He always sneaks, sir." There was a note of animosity in Gamble's voice. "He's very sly and tricky and—and devious, sir—if you know what I mean."

"Probably his oriental upbringing," remarked Vance casually, with a faint smile. "So the cook sneaked in about midnight, eh? . . . Tell me, is it usual for the servants to stay out late Wednesdays?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, if any one were familiar with the domestic arrangements here, he would know that he could count on the house being free from servants Wednesday nights."

"That's right, sir."

Vance smoked thoughtfully a moment. Then:

"Do you know at what hour Miss Lake and Mr. Grassi came in last night?"

"I couldn't say, sir." Gamble shot Vance a curious look from the corner of his eye. "But it must have been very late. It was after one



o'clock before I went to sleep, and neither of them had returned at that time."

"Mr. Grassi has a key to the house?"

"Yes, sir. I had an extra one made for him at Mr. Coe's request."

"How long has Mr. Grassi been Mr. Coe's guest?"

"It was a week yesterday."

Vance was silent for a moment. His eyes, as they looked out of the east windows, were placid, but there was the suggestion of a frown on his forehead; and I knew that something was troubling him. Without change of expression he put an apparently irrelevant question to Gamble.

"Did you, by any chance, see Mr. Archer Coe after you returned to the house last night?"

"No—I didn't see him, sir." There was a slight hesitancy in the reply, and Vance looked toward the man quickly.

"Come, come, Gamble," he admonished severely. "What's on your mind?"

"Well, sir—it's really nothing; but when I went up to bed I noticed that the library doors were open and that the lights were on. I thought, of course, that Mr. Archer was still in the library. And then I noticed the light in Mr. Archer's bedroom here, through the keyhole—it's quite noticeable in a dark hall as you come up the stairs, sir—and I took it for granted that he had retired. So I went back to the library and turned out the lights and shut the doors."

"You heard no sound in here?"

"No, sir." Gamble leaned forward and regarded Vance with staring eyes. "Do you think he was dead then?"

"Oh, undoubtedly. If you'd taken the trouble to glance through the keyhole last night, you'd have seen him just as you saw him this morning."

Gamble appeared stunned.

"Good God, sir! And I never knew!" he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper.

Vance yawned mildly.

"Really, y' know," he said, "we sha'n't hold it against you. . . . And, by the by, there's a question I forgot to ask. Did Mr. Brisbane Coe take a walking-stick with him when he set forth for Chicago?"

Gamble drew himself together, and gave a puzzled nod.

"Yes, sir. He never goes anywhere without a stick. He's subject to rheumatism—"

"So he's told me a score of times. . . . And what kind of stick did he take with him?"

"His ivory-headed stick, sir. It's his favorite. . . ."

"The one with the crooked handle and the carvings?"

"Yes, sir. It's a most unusual stick, sir. Mr. Brisbane bought it in Borneo years ago. . . ."

"I know the stick well, Gamble. I've seen him carrying it on various occasions. . . . You're quite sure, are you, that he took this particular stick with him to Chicago?"

"Positive. I handed it to him myself at the door of the taxicab."

"You'd swear to that?"

Gamble was as mystified as the rest of us at Vance's insistence.

"Yes, sir!" he returned resolutely.

Vance kept his eyes on the man, and stood up. He walked very deliberately to where Gamble sat, and looked down at him searchingly.

"Gamble,"—he spoke pointedly—"did you see Mr. *Brisbane* Coe in this house after you returned last night?"

The butler went white, and his lips began to tremble. The question was so unexpected that even I received a distinct shock from it. Markham half rose in his chair, and Heath froze into a startled attitude, his cigar half raised to his lips. Gamble cringed beneath Vance's steady gaze.

"No, sir—no, sir!" he cried. "Honest to God, I didn't! I would have told you if I had."

Vance shrugged and turned away.

"Still, he was here last night."

Markham struck the desk noisily with his fist.

"What's back of that remark?" he demanded. "How do you know Brisbane Coe was here last night?"

Vance looked up blandly, and said in a mild tone:

"Very simple: his ivory-headed stick is hanging over the back of one of the chairs in the lower hall."

## 7. THE MISSING MAN

(Thursday, October 11; 11.45 a.m.)

There was a momentary tense silence. Vance's statement, with the possibilities it suggested, threw a pall of vague horror over all of us. I was watching Gamble, and again I saw the pupils of his eyes dilate. Unsteadily he rose, and bracing himself with one hand on the back of his chair, glared at Vance like a man who had seen a malignant spectre.

"You—are sure you saw the stick, sir?" he stammered, with a hideous contortion of the face. "I didn't see it. And Mr. Brisbane never hangs his stick over the hall chair. He always puts it in the umbrella-stand. Maybe some one else—"

"Don't be hysterical, Gamble," Vance interrupted curtly. "Who but Mr. Brisbane himself would bring that precious stick back to the house and hang it over a chair in the hall?"

"But, Mr. Vance, sir," the man persisted in an awed tone, "he once reprimanded me for hanging it over a chair—he said it might fall and get broken. Why, sir, should he hang it over the chair?"

"Less noisy, perhaps, than chucking it into a brass umbrella-holder."

Markham was leaning over the desk scowling at Vance.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

Vance lifted his eyes slowly and let them rest on the District Attorney.

"I opine, my dear Markham," he said slowly, "that brother Brisbane didn't want any one to hear him when he returned here last night."

"And why do you 'opine' any such thing?" Markham's irritation was bordering on anger.

"There may have been sinister business afoot," Vance returned evasively. "Brisbane started for Chicago on a night when he knew no one but Archer would be home. And then he missed his train—to speak euphemistically. He returned to the house—with his stick. And here's his stick hanging over the back of a tufted chair . . . but no Brisbane. And Archer—the sole occupant of this cluttered domicile last night—has gone to his Maker in most outlandish fashion."

"Good God, Vance!" Markham sank back in his chair. "You don't mean that Brisbane—?"

"Tut, tut! There you go jumping at conclusions again. . . ." Vance spoke in an offhand manner, but he could not entirely disguise his deep concern over the situation. He began walking up and down, his hands sunk deep in his coat pockets. "I can understand Brisbane's presence here last night," he murmured as if to himself, "but I can't understand the presence of his stick here this morning. It's very curious—it doesn't fit into the picture. Even if he had not taken the Lake Shore Limited to Chicago, there were other trains later on. The Iroquois goes about midnight, and there's another slow train around twelve-thirty. . . ."

Heath took his cigar from his mouth.

"How do you know the bird didn't take one of those trains—that is, supposing he'd missed the Lake Shore Limited?"

"By the stick in the lower hall, Sergeant."

"Couldn't a guy forget his stick?"

"Not Brisbane Coe—and certainly not in the circumstances. . . ."

"What circumstances?" cut in Markham.

"That's what I don't know exactly," Vance made a wry face. "But I begin to see a method in all this seeming madness; and that stick downstairs stands out like some terrible and accusing error. . . ."

He stopped abruptly, and suddenly swinging about, went toward the door.

"I'll be back in a minute. There's a possibility. . . ." He passed swiftly into the hall.

Heath looked disgustedly at Markham.

"What's he got on his mind, sir?"

"I couldn't tell you, Sergeant," Markham was even more puzzled than Heath.

"Well, sir, if you ask me," the Sergeant submitted surlily, "I think Mr. Vance is leaning too heavily on that stick. We've only got this guy's word"—he jerked his thumb toward Gamble—"that he took it with him in the first place. And until we know definitely that he didn't go to Chicago, we're stirring up a lot of trouble for nothing."

Markham, I felt, was inclined to agree, but he made no comment.

Presently Vance returned to the room, smoking abstractedly. His face was crestfallen.

"He's not there," he announced. "I thought Brisbane might be in his room. But the shades are up; and the bed hasn't been slept in; and the lights are out." He sat down wearily. "His room's empty."

The Sergeant planted himself in front of Vance.

"Look here, Mr. Vance, even if he did miss the Lake Shore Limited, he's probably on his way to Chicago. Anybody might forget a stick. His suit-case ain't here—"

Vance leaped to his feet.

"The suit-case—that's it! What would he have done with the suit-case if he had not taken the early train and had intended to go on to Chicago later. . . ?"

"He'd have checked it in the station, wouldn't he?" asked Heath contemptuously.

"Exactly!" Vance wheeled to Gamble. "Describe that suit-case."

"It was quite an ordinary case, sir," the man replied in a dazed tone. "Black seal-skin, leather lined, with rounded corners, and the initials 'B. C' in gold letters on one end."

Vance turned back to Heath.

"Can you check on that in the parcel room at the station, Sergeant? It's important."

Heath looked interrogatively toward Markham, and received a significant nod.

"Sure I can," he said. He beckoned Snitkin with a jerk of the head. "Got the dope?"

The detective grinned.

"Hell, yes," he rumbled. "A cinch."

"Then hop to it," ordered Heath. "And phone me pronto. . . . Make it snappy."

Snitkin disappeared from the room with an alacrity that seemed out of all keeping with his bulk.

Markham drummed nervously on the desk and fixed a sombre, inquisitive gaze on Vance who was now standing by one of the east windows looking meditatively out into the October sunshine.

"Where do you think Brisbane Coe fits into this affair?" he asked.

"I don't know—I'm not sure." Vance spoke quietly, without turning. "But many strange things happened here last night. Certain plans went awry. Events overlapped one another. Nothing happened on schedule. And until we know more of the preliminaries, we'll merely go on plunging around in the dark."

"But Brisbane Coe," persisted Markham.

Vance turned slowly back to the room.

"There has always been bad blood between Archer and Brisbane, for some reason. I've never understood it. It wasn't merely the antagonism of similar temperaments. It went deeper than that. . . . By the by, maybe Miss Lake could enlighten us while we're waiting for Snitkin's call. . . . I say, Gamble; ask the young lady to be good enough to join us here."

The butler went out, and we could hear him mounting the stairs to the third floor.

Five minutes later Hilda Lake came swinging into the room, dressed in a dazzling yellow *bouclé* sport suit.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting and all the usual amenities," she said, sitting down and crossing her knees; "but I hadn't quite finished doffing my golf togs when the far-from-admirable Crichton summoned me. Anyway, I should be furious with you. Why was I denied my muffins and tea?"

Vance apologized.

"We've been using Gamble a bit intensively."

"Oh, he's full of the family's scandals. I sincerely hope he never takes it into his head to turn blackmailer. He'd impoverish us. . . . Did you get many racy items from him?"

"Alas, no!" Vance sighed with simulated lugubriousness. "The fact is, Gamble has been passionately upholding the honor of the Coes."

Hilda Lake looked at Gamble with comical amazement.

"You positively stagger me, Gamble. I'll speak to Uncle Brisbane today and have your wages raised."

"In the meantime," said Vance, "I'm sure you're hungry. . . . Gamble, take tea and muffins to Miss Lake's quarters." The man, who had been standing in the door, bowed and disappeared; and Vance turned pleasantly back to Miss Lake. "By the time your breakfast is ready we will let you return to your rooms." Then he added with a serious mien. "There are a few questions we'd like you to answer."

She gave Vance a cold look, and waited with imperturbable calm.

"What was the cause," he asked, "of the animosity between Archer and Brisbane Coe?"

"Oh, that!" A cynical smile curled her lips. "Money—nothing else. Old Major Coe left everything to Uncle Archer. Uncle Brisbane had only an allowance—until Uncle Archer should die. Then the money was to go to him. The situation naturally irked him, and he got pretty nasty about it at times. It amused me no end,—I was in the same predicament. The fact is, I've often been tempted to make an alliance with Uncle Brisbane for the purpose of murdering Uncle Archer. Together we could have got away with it, don't you think?"

"I'm sure you could—even alone," Vance returned lightly. "What held you back?"

"My unspeakable golf score. I've needed all my time and energy to improve my game."

"Most distressin'," sighed Vance. "And now some one has killed Uncle Archer for you."

"I'm sure it's my reward for virtue." Though her tone was hard, there was an undercurrent of bitter passion in it. "Or perhaps," she added, "Uncle Brisbane went ahead on his own."

"That might bear looking into," smiled Vance. "The only difficulty is that Gamble tells us Mr. Brisbane hopped to Chicago at five-thirty last evening."

The woman's eyes flickered—there was little doubt that Vance's statement had been unexpected; but she replied almost at once.

"That doesn't mean anything. Uncle Brisbane has dabbled enough in criminology to prepare a perfect alibi in the event he himself contemplated a flutter in crime."

Vance regarded her amiably before speaking again.

"What takes him on those periodical trips to Chicago?" he asked with sudden seriousness.

Hilda Lake shrugged.

"Heaven knows. He never mentioned the matter to me and I never asked." She leaned forward. "Perhaps it's a lady!" she exclaimed in a taunting tone. "If he told any one, that person was Uncle Archer. And I'm afraid it's too late to get any information from that quarter now."

"Yes, a bit too late," agreed Vance. He sat down on the edge of the desk and clasped his hands around one knee. "But let us suppose that after Mr. Brisbane announced his intention of going to Chicago last evening, he remained in New York all night. What would you say to that?"

Hilda Lake scrutinized Vance shrewdly for a time before replying. Then she answered gravely:

"In that case you may eliminate Uncle Brisbane as a suspect. He's much too smooth and canny to leave any such loopholes. He has a very tricky and clever mind—too many persons underestimate him—and if he planned a murder, I'm sure he'd arrange it so as to escape detection." She paused momentarily. "Did Uncle Brisbane remain in New York last night?"

"I don't know," Vance responded candidly. "I was merely indulging in suppositions."

"How clever of you!" There was a steely look in her eyes, and her forehead puckered with a slight frown.

At this moment Gamble passed the door on his way upstairs, with a small covered serving-tray in his hands.

Vance stood up.

"Ah! There are your muffins, Miss Lake. I sha'n't keep you any longer."

"Thanks awfully." She rose and went quickly from the room.

Vance stood at the door until Gamble returned from the third floor, and ordered him to wait in the lower hall. When the man had gone below, he glanced at his watch and strolled back into the room.

"I'd rather not go on till we hear from Snitkin. Do you mind waiting, Markham?"

Markham got up and paced to the bed and back.

"Have it your own way," he grumbled. "But I can't see the importance of the suit-case. There's small probability, it seems to me, of its being at the station. And in the event it isn't there, we will be no better off than we are now."

"On the other hand," Vance returned, "if it *is* at the station, we may conclude that Brisbane did not go to Chicago last night."

Markham studied Vance gloweringly.

"And if he didn't go, what then?"

"Oh, I say—really! My word, Markham, I'm no Delphic oracle. We've only started this—what do the yellow journals call it?—probe. . . . But I'm quite sure Brisbane intended to go to Chicago at some time last night. And if he didn't go, something unexpected kept him here."

"But his being in New York doesn't connect him with Archer Coe's murder."

"Certainly not. . . . But I crave enlightenment." He suddenly sobered. "Markham, that last-minute decision of Brisbane's to get out of town had some connection with Archer's death—I'm sure of that. He knew something—or feared something. Or perhaps . . . But, anyway, he intended to go to Chicago last night. And maybe he did go . . . but I want to be sure."

He strolled to the mantel and looked critically at a small, three-legged bowl of delicate green, with a carved teak-wood cover surmounted by a handle of white jade.

"Ming celadon," he said, running his fingers over the lustrous glaze. "A perfect velvety texture, and an unusual shape. A very rare piece. Celadon, Markham, has baffled occidental artificers; even the Chinese can no longer produce it. It's very old—some experts have placed its origin as far back as the Sui dynasty in the sixth and seventh centuries, naming Ho Chou as its inventor. But the most beautiful celadons, I think, are Ming—those that came from the hands of the Ching-tê-chên experts. I rather imagine, don't y' know, that this is such a piece." He inspected it closely, particularly studying the down-flow of the glaze about the base. "There's a great similarity between the *Kuan-yao* of the Sung dynasty and the Imperial celadons made in the province of Kiang-si; but, as a rule, the Lung-chuan factories used a reddish *paté*. And this piece has a white *paté*—a characteristic of Ching-tê-chên celadons. . . ."

"Vance," interrupted Markham irritably, "you're boring me to tears."

"My word!" Vance put down the celadon bowl and sighed. "And I was trying to entertain you until Snitkin reported. . . ."

As he spoke, the phone rang. Heath answered it, and after listening for several minutes, replaced the receiver on the hook.

"The suit-case is there, all right," he announced. "Snitkin picked it out at once—it was on the 'hurry' shelf. The bird at the window says a middle-aged, nervous guy checked it around six last night, saying he'd missed his train—and he was shaking so he could hardly lift the bag to the counter."

Vance nodded slowly.

"I was afraid of that—and yet I was hoping it wasn't so." He took out a cigarette and lighted it with slow and deliberate precision—a sign of his tense perturbation. "Markham, I don't like this situation; I don't at all like it. Something unforeseen has happened: unforeseen—and sinister. It wasn't on the cards. Brisbane Coe intended to go to Chicago last night—and *he didn't go*. Some terrible thing stopped him. . . . And something stopped Archer Coe before he could change his shoes. . . ." He leaned over the desk and looked straight at Markham. "Don't you see what I mean? Those shoes of Archer's—and that stick of Brisbane's. . . . *That stick!—in the front hall!* It shouldn't have been there. . . . Oh, my precious aunt! . . ." He threw his cigarette into a tray, and hurried toward the door.

"Come, Markham. . . . Come, Sergeant. There's something hideous in this house . . . and I don't want to go alone."

As he spoke, he ran down the stairs, Markham and Heath and I following. When he had reached the lower hall, he pulled the portières aside and opened the library door. He looked round him, and then passed into the dining-room.

After several minutes' search, he returned to the hall.

"Maybe the den," he said; and hurrying through the drawing-room, where Wrede and Grassi sat near the window, he went into the small room at the rear. But he came back at once, a bewildered look in his eyes.

"Not there." His tone was unnatural. "But he's somewhere—somewhere. . . ."

He came again into the front hall.

"He wouldn't be on the third floor, and he's not on the second floor." Vance stood staring at the ivory-headed stick which, for the first time, I noticed hanging over the back of a chair beside the library door. "There's his stick," he said; "but his hat and top-coat. . . . Oh, what a fool I've been!"

He brushed Gamble out of his way, and walked swiftly down the narrow corridor along the stairs until he came to the closet door at the rear of the hall.

"Your flashlight, Sergeant," he called over his shoulder, as he placed his hand on the door-knob.

He pulled the door open, revealing only a great rectangle of blackness. Almost simultaneously, the circle of yellow light from Heath's pocket flashlight penetrated the gloom.

Markham and I were behind him, straining our eyes into the closet. There were various overcoats and hats hanging from the hooks.

"Lower, Sergeant!" came Vance's dictatorial voice. "The floor—the floor! . . ."

The light descended; and then we saw the thing that Vance, through some process of obscure logic, had been searching for.

There, in a huddled heap, his glassy eyes staring up at us, lay the dead body of Brisbane Coe.

## 8. THE *TING YAO* VASE

(Thursday, October 11; 12.15 p.m.)

Though the sight was not altogether unexpected, in view of Vance's strange actions and even stranger comments, I received a tremendous shock as I gazed down into the closet. A large irregular pool of blood, perhaps a foot in diameter, had spread over the hardwood floor just beneath Coe's shoulder. It had dried and darkened, and looked sinisterly black against the yellow boarding.

Even to an amateur like myself the fact that Brisbane Coe was dead was apparent. The stiff, unnatural pose of the body, and the hideous fixity of his gaze, together with the drawn bloodless lips and the waxen pallor of his skin, attested to violent and unexpected death. I had rarely seen a corpse as lifeless as Coe's, as irremediably beyond all human possibility of resuscitation.

And as I looked at it, temporarily petrified by the horror of this new development, I could not help comparing the dead body of Brisbane with that of Archer. They were both tall and cadaverous; and, although Archer was the older by five years, they had a certain similarity of facial features. But whereas Archer had died with a peaceful expression on his face, and in a natural and comfortable position, Brisbane had a shocked, almost wild, look in his eyes, as if he had been startled and frightened at the moment of death.

The discovery of Brisbane Coe's body affected all of us strongly. Heath stared down with hunched shoulders. The blood seemed to have left his face, and he was like a man hypnotized. Markham's jaw was set, and his eyes were mere slits.

"Good God!" he breathed, in an awe-stricken voice, and looked vaguely at Vance who stood beside the Sergeant gazing down critically at the dead man.

Vance spoke, and his voice, usually so calm, sounded strained and unnatural.

"It's worse than I thought. . . . I had hoped he might still be alive—a prisoner perhaps. I didn't altogether expect this."

Heath's hand containing the flashlight dropped to his side, and he stepped back. Vance closed the closet door and turned.

"It's very strange," he murmured, looking at Markham yet past him. "He is without his hat and top-coat; and yet his stick is hanging here in the hall. And he is *dead in the closet*. Why not in his own room?—or the library?—or anywhere else but in there? . . . Nothing fits, Markham. The whole picture has been painted by a crazy man."

Markham stared at him; then he said in a dazed voice:

"I can't follow any of it. Why did Brisbane Coe return here last night? And who knew he was going to return?"

"If only I could answer those questions!"

Burke and Gamble were sitting on a hall bench near the drawing-room door. The butler's face was white and drawn. He had not seen the dead man in the closet, for our bodies had shielded him. But it was obvious that he suspected the truth.

Vance went to him.

"What kind of top-coat and hat did Mr. Brisbane wear when he went to the station last night?"

The man made a desperate effort to pull himself together.

"A—a tweed coat, sir," he replied huskily, "—black-and-white tweed. And a light gray fedora hat."

Vance returned to the closet, and presently emerged with a hat and coat.

"Are these the ones?"

Gamble swallowed hard and nodded his head.

"Yes, sir." His eyes stared abnormally at the two articles of attire.

Vance replaced the coat and hat in the closet, and commented to Markham:

"They were hanging up so neatly."

"Is it not possible," asked Markham, "that just as he had hung them up after returning to the house, he was killed?"

"Possible—yes." Vance nodded slowly. "But that would not explain the other things that went on here last night. It's more reasonable, I think, to assume that Brisbane was killed as he was preparing to leave the house. But then again, there's the time element. . . ."

Heath had already gone to the hall telephone and was dialing a number.

"I'll soon get the time element for you," he growled.

A moment later he was speaking to Doctor Doremus in his office in the Municipal Building.

"The doc's coming right away," he said, hanging up the receiver.

"In the meantime, Markham," suggested Vance, "I think we might have parlane with the Chinese cook. . . . Fetch him, will you, Gamble."

The butler hastened through the dining-room door at the rear, and Vance strolled into the library, the rest of us following.

The library was a fairly large room on the north front of the house, directly opposite to the drawing-room. Although there were perhaps a thousand volumes in a series of book-shelves occupying almost the entire south wall, the room did not have the general appearance of a library. It resembled far more a curio shop. There were various cabinets containing carved jade and jewelry and *objets d'art* of oriental design and workmanship; and on every available flat surface stood examples of Chinese ceramic art, ceremonial bronzes, ivory figures, and carved lacquer ornaments. Many of the pieces of furniture were of teak-wood and camphor-wood; and, wherever space permitted, large squares of brocaded and embroidered silk had been hung and draped. In the centre of the west wall was a rococo Louis-Quinze mantelpiece which seemed hideously out of place; and here and there were pieces of modern furniture—a large fumed-oak Mission library table, an overstuffed davenport, a steel commercial filing cabinet, and several pseudo-colonial mahogany straight chairs—all of which gave to the room a violent air of anachronistic chaos.

We had scarcely seated ourselves when a tall, slender, scholarly-looking Chinaman of about forty stepped softly into the room through the door between the library and the dining-room. He was dressed in an immaculate white duck suit, and wore black padded slippers. He stood beside the door with relaxed immobility, and, after one swift glance at us, lifted his eyes uneagerly above our heads.

Though he looked at nothing in particular, I felt that he saw everything.

Vance regarded the man curiously, and it was several moments before he spoke. Then he asked:

"What is your name?"

"Liang," came the soft and almost inaudible response.

"Your whole name, please."

There was a slight pause, and the man gave Vance a fleeting glance.

"Liang Tsung Wei."

"Ah! . . . And I understand you are the Coe cook."

The other nodded quickly.

"Me cook."

Vance sighed, and a faint smile overspread his face.

"Be so good as to forgo the pidgin-English, Mr. Liang. It will handicap our conversation terribly." He slowly lighted a cigarette. "And please take a chair."

The Chinaman, with a faint flicker in his eyes, moved his gaze till it rested on Vance's face. Then he bowed and sat down in an arm-chair between the door and the book-shelves.

"Thank you," he said in a finely modulated voice. "I suppose you desire to question me regarding the tragedy last night. I deeply regret I can throw no light upon it."

"How do you know there has been a tragedy?" Vance inspected the end of his cigarette.

"I was preparing the breakfast," Liang returned, "and I heard the butler impart the information over the telephone."

"Ah, yes—of course. . . . Have you been long in this country, Mr. Liang?"

"Two years only."

"Interested in the culin'ry art of America?"

"Not particularly—although I am a student of occidental customs. Western civilization is of great interest to certain of my countrymen."

"As are, also, I imagine," added Vance, "the rare ceremonial pieces of Chinese art that have been pilfered from your temples and graves."

"We of course regret their loss," the man answered mildly.

Vance nodded understandingly, and was silent for a moment. Then:

"Where were you educated, Mr. Liang?"

"At the Imperial University at Tientsin and at Oxford."

"You are a member, I presume of the Kuomin-tang."

The Chinaman inclined his head affirmatively.

"But no longer," he supplemented. "When I realized that Russian ideals were taking root in my countrymen's minds, and that the ideals of the Tang and the Sung were receding further and further, I joined the Ta Tao Huei.<sup>[9]</sup> Being a Laoist by temperament among confrères who were mostly Confucianists, I realized that my idealism was unfitted for eras of hysteria; and I soon withdrew from all active participation in politics. I still have faith, however, in the old cultural ideals of China, and I am waiting patiently for the day when the philosophic dicta of the Tao Teh King will re-establish the spiritual and intellectual equilibrium of my country."

Vance made no comment. He merely asked:

"How did you happen to seek employment with Mr. Coe?"

"I had heard of his collection of Chinese antiquities and of his great knowledge of oriental art, and I believed that the atmosphere might prove to be congenial."

"And have you found it congenial?"

"Not altogether. Mr. Coe was a very narrow and selfish man. His interest in art was purely personal. He wished to keep his treasures away from the world—not to share them with humanity."

"A typical collector," observed Vance. He raised himself slightly in his chair and yawned. "By the by, Mr. Liang; when did you leave the house yesterday?"

"About half-past two," came the low answer. The Chinaman's face was an inscrutable mask.

"And you returned at what time?"

"Shortly before midnight."

"You were not here at any time in the interim?"

"No. I was visiting friends on Long Island."

"Chinese friends?"

"Yes. They will be most happy to verify my statement."

Vance smiled.

"I've no doubt. . . . Did you return by the front or the rear door?"

"The rear door—through the tradesmen's entrance and the yard."

"Where do you sleep?"

"My quarters, such as they are, are connected with the kitchen."

"Did you go to bed immediately upon your return?"

There was a momentary hesitation on the man's part.

"Not immediately," he said. "I cleared away the remains of Mr. Coe's supper, and made myself some tea."

"Did you, by any chance, see Mr. Brisbane Coe after you returned last night?"

"Mr. Brisbane Coe?" The other repeated the name questioningly. "The butler told me this morning not to prepare breakfast for him as he had gone to Chicago. . . . Was he here last night?"

Vance ignored the question.

"Did you hear any sounds in the house before you retired?" he went on.

"Not until Miss Lake returned. She is always vigorous and noisy. And a quarter of an hour later Mr. Grassi came in. But aside from that I heard no sound whatever."

Vance, during this interrogation, had appeared casual; and his manner had been deferential. But now a perceptible change came over his attitude. His eyes hardened, and he leaned forward in his chair. When he spoke, his voice was cold and uncompromising.

"Mr. Liang," he said, "at what time did you first return to this house—*early last night?*"

There was a clouded, far-away look in the Chinaman's eyes; and his long thin fingers moved with silken smoothness along the arms of his chair.

"I did not return early last night," he answered, in a faintly sing-song voice. "I arrived at midnight."

Vance did not shift his steady gaze.

"Yes, you arrived at midnight—Gamble heard you come in. But I am speaking of your earlier visit—some time around eight o'clock, let us say."

"You are evidently laboring under a misapprehension," Liang returned, without change of intonation or expression.

Vance ignored the retort.

"And what did you see in this room at about eight o'clock?"

"How could I have seen anything, when I was not here?" came the calm, unruffled reply.

"Did you see Mr. Archer Coe?" persisted Vance.

"I assure you—"

"And was any one with him?"

"I was not here."

"Perhaps you visited Mr. Coe's bedroom upstairs," Vance went on with quiet but firm insistence. "And then, it may be, you thought it advisable to disappear from the house for several hours; and you went out, returning at midnight."

Again Liang's hands moved caressingly over the arms of his chair, and his eyes sought Vance's face. There was a mild look of wonder in them.

"I was not in this house"—he spoke with deliberation—"between half-past two yesterday afternoon and midnight." There was a finality in both his manner and his tone.

Vance sighed wearily, and, turning to the hall door, called Gamble.

"Where was Mr. Archer Coe sitting last night when you went out?" he asked, when the butler had appeared.

"On the davenport, sir," Gamble told him. "In that corner near the floor lamp. It was Mr. Archer's favorite seat."

Vance nodded and rose.

"That will be all for the present. Attend to your duties till we need you."

Gamble went out, and Vance walked to the davenport and looked down at it. There were three down-filled cushion-seats on it, and the one at the end nearest the lamp was depressed. Beside the lamp, and in front of the davenport, stood a low massive tabouret of teak-wood; and on the floor near the hearth lay a copy of Tchou Tö-y's "Les Bronzes antiques de la Chine."

Vance contemplated the tabouret and the book for a moment. Then, without turning, he said:

"Mr. Liang, did you find this tabouret upset when you returned to the house early last night?"

For the first time the Chinaman seemed to lose his cool ivory equanimity. His eyelids drooped noticeably, and he made a slight involuntary movement. Before he could answer, Vance added:

"And perhaps you set it aright. . . . But you overlooked the book that had fallen from it."

"I was not here," Liang repeated.

"It will be a simple matter," said Vance, "to go over the tabouret for finger-prints and to compare them with yours."

"It would be unnecessary, however," came the calm reply. "You would undoubtedly find my fingerprints on it. I often touch the furniture and objects in this room."

Vance smiled faintly and, I thought, admiringly.

"In that case, we sha'n't bother."

He moved round the lamp and stood for a moment beside a circular camphor-wood table just behind the davenport. There were various pieces of small carved ivory figures and at least two dozen snuff-bottles of jade, amber, quartz, crystal and modelled porcelain, scattered about the table's surface; and in the centre, on a slender teak-wood base, stood a white baluster-type vase about nine inches tall.

I had noticed Vance stop and glance at this vase when he had first entered the library; but now he studied it critically as if something about it puzzled him. We were all watching him; and not the least interested person in the room was Liang. His eyes were fixed on Vance's face, and there was a gentle surprise in them—a surprise which, unless my imagination was playing tricks on me, was mingled with apprehension.

"Extr'ordin'ry!" Vance murmured after several moments' contemplation of the vase. Then he lifted his eyes lethargically. "I say, Mr. Liang; was this bit of pottery on the table early last night?"

"How could I possibly know that?" Liang asked in a vague, mechanical voice.

Vance picked up the vase and inspected it closely.

"Not exactly a museum piece, is it, Mr. Liang?" he mused. "Rather inferior. I'm astonished that Mr. Coe would have given it a place in his collection. The shops along Fifth Avenue are full of them, at most reasonable prices. . . . I should say it was imitation *Ting yao* made under Tao Kuang." He flicked the vase with the nail of his middle finger. "Better material perhaps than the Sung ceramists used, but thicker. Inferior workmanship, too; and the glaze is lacking in the rich lustre of *Ting yao*, especially *Pai ting*. This piece would never have deceived a collector as shrewd as Archer Coe. . . . Do you not agree with me, Mr. Liang?"

"Mr. Coe knew much about Chinese ceramics," the Chinaman answered evasively, without taking his eyes from Vance.

"Tao Kuang, Markham," Vance elucidated, "was the most consistent imitator of all foregoing dynastic wares in the history of China. And he marked his imitations with no regard for veracity, although genuine *Pai ting yao* and *Nan ting yao* were never marked." He turned the vase over. "Ah! The Wan Li signature." He shook his head sadly. "No, Archer would never have been taken in by this specimen. . . . It's most confusin'."

He started to replace the vase on its stand, but suddenly withheld the movement of his hand, and set the vase to one side.

Leaning over, he pushed the little teak-wood pedestal out of the way, revealing a tiny triangle of thin white porcelain, about an inch wide, which had been lying hidden underneath. Carefully adjusting his monocle he picked up the bit of porcelain and held it between his thumb and forefinger to the light.

"Now, this is eminently different," he remarked, studying it closely. "Apparently a particle of genuine Sung *Ting yao*. Not *Nan ting*, either: it hasn't the rice-flower color, but is a dazzling white. A soft *paté*, like vellum . . . very thin and fragile . . . and opaque, despite its fineness. . . . Still, it might be Yuan *Shu fu yao* or *Yung lo*. . . . But that really doesn't matter, don't y' know. A vase of this delicate porcelain would do honor to any collection."

Gently he placed the little white triangle in his pocket, and addressed the Chinaman, who had sat immobile and unblinking during Vance's comments.

"Did not Mr. Coe possess a Sung *Ting yao* vase, Mr. Liang, about the size of this execrable Tao Kuang?"

"I believe he did," Liang spoke in a curiously repressed voice, without modulation or inflexion. "Although, as you suggested, it might have been *Shu fu yao* made in the Yuan dynasty. There is, as you know, little appreciable difference between them."

"And when did you see the *Ting yao* vase last?"

"I do not remember."

Vance kept his steady gaze on the man.

"When, Mr. Liang, did you last see this nineteenth-century imitation?" He pointed to the vase on the table.

Liang did not reply at once. He looked thoughtfully at the vase for a full half-minute; then his eyes returned to Vance.

"I have never seen it before," he said finally.

"Fancy that!" Vance returned his monocle to his waistcoat pocket. "And here it sits in a place of honor, crying out its spuriousness to any one who enters the room. . . . Most interestin'."

Markham, who had been chafing under Vance's apparent irrelevancies, now spoke.

"This art discussion may be interesting to you, Vance; but it certainly does not interest me. What possible connection can a vase have with the murder of Archer and Brisbane Coe?"

"That point," answered Vance dulcetly, "is what I am endeavorin' to ascertain. Y' see, Markham, Archer Coe would not have included this Tao Kuang vase in his collection. Why is it here? I haven't the groggiest notion.—On the other hand, that little broken piece of Sung porcelain is of a beautiful quality. I can imagine Coe waxing ecstatic over a vase of such ware."

"Well?" Markham retorted irritably. "I still can't see the significance. . . ."

"Nor can I," Vance became serious. "But it has significance—and a vital significance. It is another absurdly irrelevant factor in this hideous case."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because," replied Vance, "that little triangular bit of *Ting yao* porcelain was on the table just back of where Archer Coe sat last night. And it was hidden beneath a vase which Archer would not have tolerated in the same room with him. . . ."

He paused and looked up sombrely.

"Moreover, Markham, that broken fragment of porcelain has blood on it."



## 9. A THREAT OF ARREST

(Thursday, October 11; 12.45 p.m.)

Liang was dismissed with instructions to remain in the house until further notice.

While we were waiting for the Medical Examiner, there ensued a brief discussion concerning the blood on the piece of porcelain and Liang's possible relationship to the events preceding the double murder. But Vance was evidently as much in the dark as the rest of us; and there was little to be done until we had Doctor Doremus's report.

Heath had taken a violent dislike to Liang, and suggested to Vance that, if there was any possibility of Liang's having been in the house earlier than midnight on the day before, he would take the Chinaman to Headquarters and "let the boys shellack 'im."

Vance promptly discouraged the proposal.

"It would be a waste of time, Sergeant. You would learn nothing by such crude methods. Chinamen are not like Occidentals. When they make up their minds to remain silent, there is no known torture that can force them to speak. For centuries the Chinese have been impregnated with Buddhistic stoicism; and Liang would merely be indifferent to your most violent third-degree methods. We must approach this problem from a different angle."

"Still and all, you think the Chink was here early last night and that he knows something about what went on."

"Oh, undoubtedly," Vance admitted.

"Maybe it was him who put the bathrobe on the guy upstairs."

"That," replied Vance, "was one of the possibilities I was toying with."

It was at this point in the discussion that Burke came to the door and beckoned to Heath.

"Say, Sergeant," he reported from the corner of his mouth, "that Chink just went upstairs. Right with you?"

Heath looked sour, and shot Vance an angry look.

"Now, what's the idea?" he bawled.

Gamble entered the hall from the dining-room at this moment, and Vance addressed him.

"What is Liang doing upstairs?"

The butler seemed perturbed at Vance's tone, and replied with apologetic obsequiousness:

"I told him to fetch Miss Lake's tray, and tidy up her quarters. . . . Shouldn't I have done it, sir? You told me to proceed with my duties. . . ."

Vance scrutinized the man closely.

"When he returns keep him downstairs," he said. "And you'd better stay here yourself."

Gamble bowed and returned to the dining-room; and a moment later Doctor Doremus arrived. He was in execrable mood and, after a brusque nod, he glared at Heath angrily.

"First you ruin my breakfast, and now you interfere with my lunch," he protested. "Don't you ever eat?"

The Sergeant grinned: years of contact had taught him not to take the waspy Medical Examiner too seriously.

"Me, I'm dieting," he chuckled. . . . "Want to see the body?"

"What d'ye think I'm here for?" snapped Doremus.

"Well, follow the leader." And Heath went briskly out of the room and down the corridor to the closet.

We were close behind him when he opened the closet door. Doremus, straightway assuming a professional air, knelt down and touched Brisbane Coe's body.

"Dead," he announced. "But even a member of the Homicide Bureau could have guessed that."

Heath simulated astonishment.

"Honest, is he dead? And me thinking all the time he was playing 'possum!"

Doremus snorted.

"Take hold of his shoulders." And he and the Sergeant carried the body into the library and placed it on the davenport. For the second time that day Doremus went about his gruesome task, and once again I was forced to admire the man's deftness and competency.

"Could you tell us, doctor," Vance asked, "which of the two victims died first?"

Doremus, who had been testing the movability of the dead man's head and limbs, glanced at his watch.

"That's easy," he said. "The one upstairs. The advance of *rigor mortis* in the two bodies is practically the same. This one might be slightly further along; but it's been nearly four hours since I went over the other fellow. Therefore, I'd say that this one died anywhere from two to three hours later."

"How about nine o'clock last night?" put in Heath.

"Maybe." Doremus again bent over the corpse. "But I'd put it later. Say eight o'clock for the one upstairs and about ten o'clock for this one. . . . That's not certain, y'understand; but it's my guess."

He then proceeded with his examination. After a while he straightened up and frowned at Markham.

"You know what killed this guy?"

Markham shook his head.

"Not yet. What was it?"

"A stab in the back! . . . Same like the fellow upstairs. And almost in the same place."

"And the weapon?"

"The same. A sharp, narrow, four-cornered instrument. Only, in this case, the hemorrhage was external. A lot of blood lost."

"Died instantly, I take it," remarked Vance.

"Yep." The doctor nodded. "Must have fallen in his tracks."

Vance picked up the blood-stained coat and waistcoat of the dead man, and inspected them.

"And this time the stab was through the clothes he was wearing," he commented. "A minor point, but worth verifying. . . . I say, doctor; any indications of a struggle?"

"Nope." Doremus put on his hat at a rakish angle. "Not a sign. He got it in the back when he wasn't expecting it. Startled him for a split second probably—look at that expression!—and then he curled up and passed out. Doubt if he even saw the fellow that did him in. Quick, smooth business."

"Devilish business," emended Markham.

"Oh, well, I'm no moralist," Doremus confessed. "I'm a doctor. There're too many people in the world anyway." He began filling in a printed blank. "Here's your removal order, Sergeant. And I suppose you'll be wanting a *post-mortem* report today. . . . All right, ship him down to the morgue—and maybe you'll get the report today, and maybe you won't."

He started for the door, but turned and fixed Heath with a leering eye.

"Say, look here. Got any more corpses round the house? If you have, bring 'em out now. I can't be running up here all day. I got work to do."

"Running?" Heath retorted with good-natured sarcasm. "With that fancy limousine the city furnishes you? . . ."

"So long," said Doremus. "I want food." And in another moment he had slammed the front door behind him.

Heath went at once to the telephone and ordered the wagon from the Department of Public Welfare. Then he returned to the library.

"Now where do we stand?" he asked, spreading his hands hopelessly.

Vance gave him a commiserating smile.

"About the middle of the Gobi desert, I should say, Sergeant."

"And where might that be, Mr. Vance?"

"The Gobi desert," explained Vance, "—or, more correctly, simply the Gobi<sup>[10]</sup>—is an almost unexplored territory in Mongolia, extending from the Pamirs to the Khingan mountains, and from the Yablonoi mountains to Altyn-tagh and the Nan-shan—which are the northernmost ranges of the Kuenlun mountains. The Chinese call the Gobi desert Han-hal and Sha-mo. The Mongolians say Samak—"

"That's enough, sir," Heath interrupted. "I understand what you mean." He regarded Vance shrewdly. "And it's my opinion the Chink cook did it. If Mr. Markham would give me the word, I'd arrest him now."

"Why such haste, Sergeant?" sighed Vance. "You haven't a particle of evidence against him—and he knows it. That's why he will not admit that he was here earlier last night."

Heath started to say something but Markham made a gesture for silence.

"See here, Vance," he said, "how do you know Liang was here early last night?"

"By the fact that Gamble heard him come in at midnight. Gamble said he 'sneaked' in; but I assure you, Markham, if Liang had wanted to come in the back way without being heard, he would have done so with no difficulty whatever. Moreover, I imagine he always comes in silently—it's a Chinese characteristic. On general principles, the Chinese never want their movements, however innocent, to be known to foreigners. But last night Liang was heard returning—and Gamble had already retired to the fourth floor. A bit significant—eh, what? Liang probably saw Gamble's boudoir light ablaze, and let it be known, in a subtle way, that he was arriving from his afternoon and evening off. I can even imagine Liang leaving the kitchen door and windows open while he clattered Archer Coe's supper dishes and brewed himself a pot of tea. . . . Tea at midnight for a cultured Chinaman? No, no, Markham. Really, it's not done in the best oriental circles. And Liang had probably been flooding his system with *goak-fa* steepings most of the evening. He was merely signalling to Gamble that he had returned at midnight."

"I see what you mean." Markham nodded dubiously. "But, after all, your reasoning is purely speculative."

"Oh, quite," Vance admitted. "But the entire case is in a speculative stage just now, what? . . . Anyway, I have even more definite evidence that Liang was here early last night, and I'll present him with it later. . . . And that being the present state of affairs, what do you say to our having polite intercourse with Wrede and the Signor Grassi?"

Markham waved his hand in assent.

"And we'd better go upstairs," Vance suggested. "Brisbane is not a pretty sight."

Heath gave orders to Burke to remain at the library door and see that no one entered the room. Gamble was told to stay in the front hall and answer the door bell.

"Which one of the babies do you want first?" the Sergeant then asked.

"The Italian, by all means," said Vance. "He's frightfully upset, and therefore in an admirable state of mind for questioning. We'll keep Wrede till later,—he's teeming with possibilities."

Heath went toward the drawing-room door as Vance and Markham and I ascended the stairs to Archer Coe's room. Liang, with Miss Lake's breakfast tray, was descending from the third floor when we reached the upper landing, and he stood deferentially aside as we entered Coe's bedroom.

Grassi and the Sergeant joined us a few seconds later.

"Mr. Grassi," Vance began without preliminaries, "we should like to know exactly what your social and professional status is in this house. A very serious situation has developed here, and we are in need of all the information, however seemingly irrelevant, we can obtain. . . . We understand you have been a house guest of Mr. Coe's for a week."

The Italian now had himself well in hand. He walked to the easy chair in which Archer Coe's body had been found, and sat down in leisurely fashion.

"Yes—that is right," he returned, looking at Vance with calm disdain. "I came here at Mr. Coe's invitation a week ago yesterday. It was to have been a fortnight's visit."

"Had you any business with Mr. Coe?"

"Oh, yes. Business, one might say, was the basis of the invitation. . . . I am connected, in an official capacity, with a museum of

antiquities in Milan," he explained; "and I had hoped to be able to purchase from Mr. Coe certain specimens of Chinese ceramic art from his remarkable collection."

"His *Ting yao* vase, for example?"

Grassi's dark eyes became suddenly brilliant with astonishment; but almost at once a wary look came into them, and he smiled with cold politeness.

"I must admit I was interested in the vase," he said. "Such pieces are very rare. Perhaps you know that genuine *Ting yao* of the Sung dynasty—not the *Tu ting yao* with its inevitable crackle—is practically unprocurable today."

Vance was standing by the east windows regarding the other with apparent unconcern.

"Yes, I knew that. . . . And you are sure Mr. Coe's vase is not *Shu fu yao*?"

"Quite sure—though it really does not matter whether the vase is Imperial ware or not. It is a magnificent specimen, of the amphora shape. . . . Have you examined it?"

"No," Vance told him. "I've never seen it . . . but I think I've had a fragment of it in my hand."

Grassi stared.

"A fragment!"

"Yes, a small triangular piece," Vance nodded. Then he added: "I have grave fears, Mr. Grassi, that the *Ting yao* vase has been broken."

The Italian stiffened, and his eyes clouded with suspicious anger.

"It's impossible! I was inspecting the vase only yesterday afternoon. It was on the circular table in the library."

"There's only a Tao Kuang vase there now," Vance informed him.

"And where, may I be permitted to ask, did you find this fragment of *Ting yao*?" The man's tone was cold and sceptical.

"On the same table," Vance replied carelessly. "Beneath the Tao Kuang."

"Indeed?" There was a sneer in the inflexion of the word.

Vance appeared to ignore it. He made a slight gesture of the hand as if dismissing an unimportant matter, and came closer to the Italian.

"I understand from Gamble that you left the house at about four o'clock yesterday afternoon."

Grassi smiled courteously, but he was patently on his guard.

"That is correct. I had a business appointment for dinner and the evening."

"With whom?"

"Is that information necessary?"

"Oh, very." Vance met the other's smile with one equally arctic.

Grassi shrugged with elaborate resignation.

"Very well, then. . . . With one of the curators of the Metropolitan Museum of Art."

"And," continued Vance, without change of tone, "at what time last night did you meet Miss Lake?"

The Italian rose indignantly, his sombre eyes flashing.

"I resent that question, sir!" His voice, though dignified, was unsteady. "Even if I had met Miss Lake, I would not tell you."

"Really, Mr. Grassi," Vance smiled, "I would not have expected you to. Your conduct is quite correct. . . . I take it for granted you were aware that Miss Lake is engaged to Mr. Wrede."

Grassi calmed down quickly and resumed his seat.

"Yes; I knew there was some understanding. Mr. Archer Coe informed me of the fact. But he also stated—"

"Yes, yes. He also stated that he was opposed to the alliance. He enjoyed Mr. Wrede intellectually, but did not regard him favorably as a husband for his ward. . . . What is your opinion of the situation, Mr. Grassi?"

The Italian seemed surprised at Vance's question.

"You must forgive me, sir," he said after a pause, "if I plead my inability to express an opinion on the subject. I may say, however, that Mr. Brisbane Coe disagreed with his brother. He was very much in favor of the marriage, and stated his views most emphatically to Mr. Archer Coe."

"And now both of them are dead," Vance remarked.

Grassi's eyelids drooped, and he turned his head slightly.

"Both?" he repeated in a low voice. (The man's purely speculative attitude puzzled me greatly.)

"Mr. Brisbane was stabbed in the back shortly after Mr. Archer was killed," Vance informed him.

"Most unfortunate," the Italian murmured.

"Have you," asked Vance, "any suggestion as to who might desire to have these two gentlemen out of the way?"

Grassi suddenly became austere and aloof.

"I have no suggestion," he replied in a flat, diplomatic voice. "Mr. Archer Coe was the type of man who might inspire enmities; but Mr. Brisbane Coe was quite the opposite—genial, shrewd, kindly—"

"But he had undercurrents of passion and resentment," suggested Vance.

"Oh, yes," the other agreed. "Also great capabilities. But he was clever enough not to antagonize people."

"An excellent characterization," Vance complimented him. "And what are your impressions of Mr. Wrede? . . . I assure you any opinion you express will go no further."

Grassi appeared ill at ease. He did not answer at once but contemplated the wall before him for some time. Finally he spoke in the slow, precise manner of a man carefully choosing his words.

"I have not been particularly impressed by Mr. Wrede. On the surface he is most charming. He has a pleasing manner, and is an excellent conversationalist. He has delved into many things; but I have a feeling he is inclined toward superficiality. Withal, he is very clever. . . ."

"Cleverness is our national curse," Vance remarked.

Grassi gave him an appreciative glance.

"I have felt that, since being in this country. England, however, has neither cleverness nor profundity."

"Which," supplemented Vance, "gives her a great advantage. . . . But forgive my interruption. You were speaking of Mr. Wrede."

Grassi readjusted his thoughts.

"Mr. Wrede, as I have said, impresses me as being very clever. But I have sensed another side to him. He is capable, I should say, of unexpected things. I have a feeling he would stop at nothing to gain his own ends. Beneath his gracious exterior is a sublimated hardness—a cruelty such as the Aztecs—"

"Thank you!" Vance cut in on the other's remark with unwonted harshness. "I perfectly understand your feelings." He looked down at Grassi contemptuously. "And now, sir, we should like to know exactly what you did yesterday between four o'clock in the afternoon and one o'clock in the morning." His tone was almost menacing.

The Italian made a valiant effort to meet Vance's stern gaze.

"I have said all I intend to say," he announced.

Vance faced the man threateningly.

"In that case," he said, "I shall have to order your arrest on suspicion of having murdered Archer and Brisbane Coe!"

A look of abject fear came over Grassi's pallid face.

"No—you can't—do that," he stammered. "I didn't do it—I assure you I didn't do it!" His voice rose. "I'll tell you anything you want to know—anything at all. . . ."

"That's much better," Vance remarked coldly. "Explain where you were yesterday."

Grassi leaned forward, grasping the arms of the chair with frantic force.

"I went to Doctor Montrose's for tea," he began in a high-pitched, nervous voice. "We discussed ceramics; and I stayed to dinner. At eight o'clock I excused myself and went to the railway station to take the train for Mount Vernon—to the Crestview Country Club. . . ."

"Your appointment with Miss Lake was at what time?"

"Nine o'clock." The man looked appealingly at Vance. "There was to be a dance . . . but—but I took the wrong train,—I'm not familiar—"

"Quite—quite." Vance spoke encouragingly. "And what time was it when you arrived at the Club?"

"It was after eleven." Grassi fell back into the chair, as if exhausted. "I had to make several transportation changes," he continued in a forced tone. "It was most unfortunate. . . ."

"Yes, very." Vance studied the other icily. "Did the lady forgive your tardiness?"

"Yes! Miss Lake accepted my explanation," the man returned, with a show of heat. "The fact is, she did not arrive until several minutes after I did. She had motored to the Arrowhead Inn with friends for dinner, and had an accident of some kind on her return to the Club."

"Very distressing," murmured Vance. "Were her friends with her at the time of the accident?"

Grassi hesitated and moved uneasily.

"I do not believe they were," he answered. "Miss Lake told me she had motored back alone."

At this point Detective Burke stepped into the room.

"That Chink downstairs wants to speak to Mr. Vance," he said. "He's all hot and bothered."

Vance nodded to Heath.

"Send him up, Burke," the Sergeant ordered.

Burke turned and called down the stairs.

"Step on it, Wun Lung." He beckoned sweepingly with his whole arm.

Liang appeared at the door and waited till Vance came to him. He said something in a low voice which the rest of us in the room could not distinguish, and held out a crudely twisted paper parcel.

"Thank you, Mr. Liang," said Vance; and the Chinaman, with a bow, returned downstairs.

Vance took the parcel to the desk and began opening it.

"The cook," he said, speaking directly to the Italian, "has just found this package tucked away in the garbage-pail on the rear porch. It may interest you, Mr. Grassi."

As he spoke, he smoothed out the corners of the paper; and there were revealed to all of us many fragments of beautiful, delicate porcelain with a pure-white lustre.

"Here," he went on, still addressing the Italian, "are the remains of Mr. Coe's *Ting yao* vase. . . . And, if you will notice, several of these pieces of fragile Sung porcelain are stained with blood."

Grassi rose and stared at the fragments, stupefied.

## 10. "NEEDLES AND PINS"

(Thursday, October 11; 1.15 p.m.)

There was a long silence. Finally Grassi looked up.

"It's an outrage!" he exclaimed. "I don't comprehend it in the least. . . . And the blood! Do you think, sir, that this vase had anything to do with the death of Mr. Coe?"

"Without doubt." Vance was watching the Italian with a puzzled look. "But pray sit down again, Mr. Grassi. There are one or two more questions I should like to ask you."

The other resumed his seat reluctantly.

"If you were with Miss Lake at the Country Club late last night," Vance proceeded, "how did it happen that you and she returned to the house at different hours? I presume, of course, that you accompanied her back to the city."

Grassi appeared embarrassed.

"It was Miss Lake's suggestion," he said, "that we should not be heard entering the house at the same time. So I waited in Central Park for a quarter of an hour after she had gone in."

Vance nodded.

"I thought as much. It was the proximity of your two returns that made me conclude that possibly you had been together last night. And furthermore, business appointments with curators of the Metropolitan Museum are not apt to extend into the early hours of the morning. . . . But what reason did Miss Lake give for the deception?"

"No particular reason. Miss Lake merely said she thought it would be better if Mr. Brisbane Coe did not hear us coming in together."

"She specifically mentioned Mr. Brisbane Coe?"

"Yes."

"And she did not mention Mr. Archer Coe?"

"Not that I remember."

"That is quite understandable," Vance remarked. "Uncle Brisbane was her ally in her engagement to Mr. Wrede; and she may have feared that he would not have approved of her being out so late with another man. . . . The older generation, Mr. Grassi, is inclined to be strait-laced about these little matters. The modern girl is quite different."

The Italian was manifestly grateful for Vance's attitude, and bowed his appreciation.

Vance strolled to the window.

"By the by, Mr. Grassi, your quarters here are the suite of rooms at the front of the house on this floor, are they not?"

"Why, yes," the man replied, lifting his eyebrows. "They are directly over the drawing-room and den."

"When you came in last night—or rather, this morning—where did you hang your hat and coat?"

Again a cautious look came into the Italian's eyes.

"I did not wear an outer coat. But I carried my hat and stick to my own room."

"Why? There is a coat closet in the lower hall."

Grassi moved uneasily, and it could have sworn the pallor of his face increased.

"I did not care to make a noise opening and shutting the closet door," he explained.

Vance made no comment, and there was a short silence. Presently he turned from the window and walked back to the desk.

"That will be all for the present," he said pleasantly. "And thank you for your help. . . . Would you mind waiting in your room? We shall probably want to question you again before the afternoon is over. I shall see that Gamble serves you luncheon."

The man rose and started to say something. But, evidently thinking better of it, he merely bowed and went down the passageway of the hall toward the front of the house.

Markham was immediately on his feet.

"What about that broken vase?" he demanded, pointing at the parcel of porcelain fragments on the desk. "Was that the thing with which Archer Coe was struck over the head?"

"Oh, no." Vance picked up one of the larger pieces and snapped it easily between his fingers. "This delicate *Ting yao* china would crack under the least pressure. If a man were struck with such a vase he would hardly feel it. The vase would simply break into pieces."

"But the blood. . . ."

"There was no blood on Archer's head." Vance selected one of the fragments and held it up. "Moreover, please note that the blood is not on the outer glaze, *but on the inside of the vase*. The same is true of the little piece I found on the table downstairs."

Markham looked at Vance in amazement.

"How, in the name of Heaven, do you account for that?"

Vance shrugged.

"I'm not accounting for it at present—not altogether. And yet, it's a most fascinatin' point. The only noticeable blood in this affair is that which trickled from Brisbane's wound and from the Scottie's head. But I can't possibly connect this broken vase with Brisbane's death or with the Scottie."

"And how do you connect it with Archer's death?"

Vance became evasive.

"Wasn't it standing on the table directly behind the seat that Archer was occupying when Gamble left the house last night to indulge his taste for the art of the cinema?"

"What of it?" queried Markham, with no attempt to curb his exasperation.

Vance took out his cigarette-case and sighed.

"What of it, indeed? . . . Give me a little more time," he said. "I have a fairly definite idea about this broken vase with the bloodstains on the inside; but it's too fantastic—too incredible. I want to verify my suspicions. . . ." His voice trailed off, and he lighted his cigarette meditatively.

Markham regarded him a while and then said:

"The whole affair strikes me as fantastic and incredible."

Vance exhaled a blue ribbon of smoke.

"Suppose we talk to Wrede," he suggested. "We may know more when he has unburdened his heart to us. He has ideas—otherwise he would not have had Gamble phone direct to you."

Markham gave an order to Heath, but at that moment Burke announced the arrival of the wagon from the Department of Public Welfare. The Sergeant went into the hall and was half-way down the stairs when Vance turned quickly from his contemplation of a Ch'ien Lung gourd-shaped vase in *mille-fleur* pattern, and hastened after him.

"Just a moment, Sergeant!"

So impetuous was Vance's manner that Markham and I followed him into the hall.

"I could bear," Vance called down to Heath, "to snoop in the pockets of Brisbane's suit before it's taken away. . . . Would you mind?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Vance." Heath, for some reason, was in good humor. "Come along."

We all went to the library. The Sergeant closed the door.

"I had the same idea," he said. "I've been figuring right along that maybe that slick butler was lying to us about the ticket to Chicago."

It took but a short time to empty the pockets of Brisbane Coe's suit to the library table. But there was nothing of interest among the contents, only the usual items to be found in a man's pockets—a wallet, handkerchiefs, keys, a fountain-pen, a watch, and the like. There were, however, the ticket and berth reservations to Chicago, and also the parcel-room check for the suit-case.

Heath was crestfallen, and expressed himself in violent terms.

"The ticket's here all right," he added; "so I guess he intended to go, after all."

Vance, too, was disappointed.

"Oh, yes, Sergeant, he intended to go. But it was not the ticket that was worrying me. I was hoping to find something else."

"What?" asked Markham.

Vance gave him a vague look.

"Really, don't y' know, I haven't the slightest idea." He would say no more.

Heath summoned the two men waiting in the hall with their basket, and the body of Brisbane Coe was taken away to join that of his brother at the mortuary.

As the men went out to the car, Snitkin came in with the dead man's suit-case.

"I had a hell of a time getting it," he complained apologetically. "Those crabs at the station wouldn't turn it over, and I had to go to Headquarters and get an order from the Inspector."

"There wasn't any hurry." The Sergeant tried to smooth the detective's ruffled feelings.

Then, at Vance's suggestion, he opened the suitcase and examined the contents. They consisted merely of the items which would ordinarily be taken by a man making a short trip.

"Here, you." Heath jerked his head at Gamble. "Look in here and see if these are the things you packed."

Gamble obeyed fearfully. After a moment's inspection he nodded with obvious relief.

"Yes, sir. There's nothing there except what I put in."

Vance nodded to Heath, and the Sergeant ordered Gamble to put the bag away.

"And you, Snitkin," he added, "wait upstairs."

Both men disappeared, and the Sergeant went to the drawing-room doors and pulled them apart.

"Mr. Wrede," he called. "You're wanted."

Wrede came into the library with a haggard, questioning look in his eyes.

"Have you learned anything, Mr. Markham?" His voice seemed to quaver slightly, and as he spoke, his eyes roved over the room. "Where's Mr. Grassi?"

"Mr. Grassi's upstairs." Markham motioned to a chair. "And I'm sorry to say that thus far we have learned very little. . . . We are hoping that you may be able to help us out of our quandary."

"Good Lord! I wish I could." Wrede was like a man on the verge of collapse. "It's horrible!"

Vance had been watching him from under half-closed eyelids.

"It's more horrible than you perhaps realize," he said. "Brisbane Coe has also been murdered."

Wrede looked around him in a dazed way and sank heavily into the nearest chair.

"Brisbane?" His voice seemed to come from afar. "But why—why. . . ?"

"Why, indeed?" Vance spoke harshly: there was none of the detached suavity in his manner that had been so noticeable during his interrogation of Grassi. "Nevertheless, he's dead. He, too, was stabbed in the back with a curiously shaped instrument."

Wrede stared straight ahead. His lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"Tell us what you know about this double murder, Mr. Wrede," Vance went on with grim relentlessness.

A shiver ran over Wrede's body.

"I know nothing about it," he replied after a painful pause. "Gamble told me this morning that Brisbane was in Chicago."

"He started for the station yesterday afternoon, but returned here last night—to meet his death."

"Why—should he return?" stammered Wrede.

"Have *you* any ideas on the subject?"

"I?" The man's eyes opened wide. "Not the slightest idea."

"What do you know of the conditions here at the Coe house yesterday? I would like as full a description as you can give; and I

would also like a detailed account of your own movements yesterday."

"Why *my* movements?" Wrede's tone was weak and frightened.

"If you don't care to explain them . . ." began Vance pointedly, and stopped.

"I have no reason for secrecy," the other answered quickly. "I was here talking to Archer Coe from ten to twelve yesterday morning —"

"About ceramics—or Miss Lake?"

Wrede caught his breath.

"Both," he answered weakly. "The fact is, Archer and I had a somewhat bitter session regarding my coming marriage with Miss Lake. But it was nothing unusual. He was, as you may know, violently opposed to the marriage. Brisbane took part in the discussion, and called Archer some rather harsh names. . . ."

"And after twelve?"

"I lunched in my apartment. Then I went to an auction at the American Art Galleries. But there was nothing there that interested me particularly; and, besides, I had a bad headache. So I came home around three, and lay down. I did not leave my apartment again until this morning, when Gamble phoned me."

"You live next door, do you not?"

"The first house to the east, across the double vacant lot. It's an old residence that has been converted into an apartment house. I occupy the second floor."

"Who owns the vacant lot?"

"It is part of the Coe estate. Archer put it to lawn, and erected the iron fence on the street. He said he wanted the light and space, and refused to sell."

Vance nodded indifferently.

"So I understood. . . . And you remained in your apartment from three o'clock yesterday afternoon until this morning?"

"That's right. I had a beastly headache. . . ."

"Did you see Miss Lake yesterday?"

"Yes, in the morning, when I was here. The fact is, I made an appointment with her for last night—at the Country Club. But when I got home yesterday afternoon, I called her by phone and excused myself. I was in no condition for dancing."

"Mr. Grassi substituted for you," said Vance.

Wrede's eyes clouded, and he set his jaws.

"So she told me this morning." (I could not determine whether the man was telling the truth or merely being gallant.)

"When Gamble phoned you this morning," Vance asked, "what was your mental reaction to the news?"

Wrede frowned, and it was a considerable time before he answered.

"That would be difficult to analyze. . . . I was not overfond of Archer," he admitted; "and I was not personally distressed by the report of his death. But I was extremely puzzled. It was not like Archer to take his own life; and—frankly—I had very grave doubts. That is why I hastened over here,—I wanted to see for myself. Even when I had looked through the keyhole I could scarcely believe the evidence of my vision, knowing Archer as well as I did. For that reason I advised Gamble to get in immediate touch with Mr. Markham."

Vance's stony contemplation of Wrede did not relax.

"You acted wisely," he observed, with a tinge of sarcasm. "But if you did not believe that Archer Coe had committed suicide, there must have been in your mind another possibility—to wit: that of murder.—Who, Mr. Wrede, do you think would have had sufficient motive to commit the crime?"

Wrede did not answer at once. He appeared sorely troubled and ran his fingers several times through his hair.

"That is a question I have been trying to answer all morning," he replied without looking at Vance. "One may speculate, of course, but it would not be fair to voice those speculations without definite evidence of some kind. . . ."

"Mr. Grassi?"

Again a black cloud passed over Wrede's face.

"I—I—really, Mr. Vance, I'm not well acquainted with the man. He was after Coe's collection of Chinese ceramics; but that would hardly constitute a motive for murder."

"No-o." Vance smiled frigidly. "What about Miss Lake?"

Wrede almost leaped from his seat.

"That suggestion is outrageous!" he cried, glowering at Vance. "How dare you—?"

"Spare me the drama," Vance cut in, with a contemptuous smile. "I'm deuced difficult to impress. . . . We're merely discussing possibilities, and we can do far better without a display of histrionic talent, however noteworthy."

Wrede sat back, with a mumbled remark which we could not make out.

"What do you think of Liang, the cook?" Vance asked next.

The man glanced up with a swift, shrewd look.

"Liang, eh? That's quite different. There's something secretive and underhand about that Chinaman. I've never wholly understood his being here. He's certainly not a cook by profession; and from my apartment window I've often seen him sitting on the rear porch writing for hours. My impression is he's a spy of some kind. And he knows Chinese art. Several times I've caught him in this very room inspecting the vases, and studying the signatures on their bases, and running the tips of his yellow fingers over their glazes with the air of a connoisseur. . . . And I've never liked his manner round this house,—he's sly and over-polite. I distrusted him from the first." Wrede nodded his head sagely. "If you knew more of what was back of his presence here, you might know more of Archer Coe's death. . . . At least," he hastened to add, "that is my impression."

Vance stifled a mild yawn.

"The oriental temperament is full of mystic potentialities," he commented. "And my own impression is that Liang knows something

about what happened here last night. But, as you suggest, a motive in that direction is still lacking." He leaned against the mantel and let his gaze drift into space. "On the other hand, you yourself had abundant motive for doing away with Archer Coe."

Wrede, to my surprise, did not appear to be offended by this remark.

"Archer was admittedly opposed to your marriage with his niece," Vance went on. "He might even have brought sufficient influence to bear to stop it altogether. And until he died Miss Lake was limited to a small allowance. She would have received her patrimony at Archer's decease. Thus, if you had successfully put Archer out of the way, you would have at once gained a fairly wealthy bride—with no obstacles. Is it not so, Mr. Wrede?"

The man gave a harsh laugh.

"Yes, I suppose so. As you point out, I had ample motive for murdering Archer. But, on the other hand, I would have had no reason whatever for murdering Brisbane."

"Ah, yes—Brisbane. Quite—quite. That second corpse complicates the whole matter."

"Where was Brisbane's body found, may I ask?"

"In the coat closet at the end of the lower hall. . . . You didn't, perchance, open the coat closet this morning?"

"No!" Wrede shuddered. "But I came very near it. Instead, I threw my hat on a chair in the drawing-room."

Vance shook his head in satirical sadness.

"My word! How consistently every one seems to have avoided that closet since Brisbane's occupation of it!"

"Perhaps," suggested Wrede significantly, "Liang was not ignorant of its contents."

"Who knows?" sighed Vance. "And Liang certainly would not tell us. Sad . . . sad. . . ."

Wrede lapsed into introspection. Presently he spoke.

"What I can't understand is that bolted door upstairs."

"Neither can we," said Vance, in a matter-of-fact tone. "It's most confusin'. But don't let that point disturb your slumbers tonight, Mr. Wrede. I'm thoroughly convinced *you* didn't bolt it."

The man jerked his head up in a queer way.

"Oh, thanks." His attempt at pleasantry was unsuccessful. "Have you found the weapon?" he asked lamely. "That might give you a clue."

"I'm sure it would," agreed Vance.

Heath, who had been standing by the front windows, stepped forward.

"That reminds me." He gave Vance a disgruntled look: obviously he did not like the other's method of interviewing Wrede. "The boys and I are going to give this house a swell looking-over. . . . All right with you, Mr. Markham?"

Markham nodded.

"Go to it, Sergeant. The sooner the better."

Heath went from the room, and Vance resumed his interrogation.

"By the by, Mr. Wrede, are you interested in Chinese ceramics?"

"Not particularly." The man was obviously puzzled by the question. "I have a few pieces, but I'm no expert. However, I couldn't help learning something about the subject during my long association with Archer."

Vance walked to the circular teak-wood table behind the davenport, and pointed at the Tao Kuang vase.

"What's your opinion of this *Ting yao*?"

Wrede rose and came forward.

"*Ting yao*?" There was a perplexed look in his eyes. "That's not a *Ting yao*, is it?"

"I don't believe it is." Vance pretended to study it. "But I was under the impression Archer Coe kept a *Ting yao* vase of the same shape on this table."

Wrede stood, his hands behind him, looking down at the vase. Suddenly he said:

"By Gad, he did, Mr. Vance! But this isn't the vase."

"When did you last see the original vase?"

"I couldn't say. I was in this room yesterday morning—but I didn't notice. There were other things on my mind." He looked at Vance questioningly. "Has this vase anything to do with—with—?"

"It's difficult to say," Vance replied. "It merely struck me as peculiar that Archer would have a vase like this in his collection."

"It *is* peculiar." Wrede turned his attention again to the table. "This vase might have been substituted for the other."

"It was," said Vance laconically.

"Aha!" Wrede, for some reason I could not understand, seemed pleased; and I asked myself if he were thinking of Grassi.

Vance apparently had not noticed his exclamation. He glanced at his watch.

"That will be all, Mr. Wrede. You'd better run along and get some lunch. But we may want you tomorrow. Will you be at your apartment?"

"Yes, all day." He hesitated. "May I see Miss Lake before I go?"

"By all means. And you might break the news to her of Brisbane's death."

Wrede went out, and we could hear him mounting the stairs.

Markham rose nervously.

"What do you make of the fellow?" he asked.

Vance smoked a moment thoughtfully.

"Peculiar character—far from appealin'. I wouldn't choose him for a boon companion."

"You certainly didn't handle him with gloves."

"He's too clever a talker to be allowed any advantage. My only hope of learning what he might possibly know was to upset his equanimity."

"It occurred to me," said Markham, "that he might have opened the hall closet this morning, and, because of what he saw, told



Gamble to phone me."

"It's possible," Vance nodded. "The same thought flitted through my mind. But if that were so, why shouldn't he have told us the moment we arrived?"

"Anyway, it's safe to conclude he doesn't care a great deal for Grassi. It struck me he was jealous of the Italian."

"Oh, quite. And it was news to him that Grassi and Miss Lake were together last night. Curious situation, that." Vance frowned musingly. "But Wrede's real passion of hatred is directed toward the cook. He has sized up Liang pretty accurately. . . . It's strange that Archer, with his Sinological knowledge, didn't suspect Liang's true status."

"Maybe he did," Markham suggested, without interest.

Vance looked up quickly and took his cigarette from his lips.

"My aunt! Maybe he did! . . ."

There came a pounding of heavy footsteps on the hall stairs, and the next moment Heath was standing in the door, beaming triumphantly. He held something in his hand, and, crossing to the table, he threw the object down for our inspection.

It was one of the most beautiful and interesting Chinese daggers I have ever seen.<sup>[11]</sup> The blade, which was square with concave sides, was of steel, delicately and minutely incised and perhaps six inches long. It tapered from a thickness of about half an inch at the guard to a stiletto-like point, and was partly encrusted with dried blood. The guard was oval-shaped, of polished gold, and engraved with the original owner's seal. The cylindrical handle was wound with vermilion silk, with the usual row of knots running down one side; and it was surmounted by a tiny figure of Kuan Ti, the Chinese God of War, carved in brown jade. That this dagger was the murder weapon was obvious at one glance.

"Good work, Sergeant," said Vance. "Where did you find it?"

"Under the cushion-seat of the easy chair where we found the dead guy this morning."

"Oh, I say! Really? In Archer Coe's bedroom?" Vance seemed astonished at Heath's announcement. "Most amazin'. . . ."

He went swiftly to the dining-room door and called Liang. When the Chinaman appeared Vance beckoned him to the table and pointed at the dagger.

"Ever see that before, Mr. Liang?"

The man regarded the weapon with a look devoid of all expression.

"Yes, I have seen it many times," he responded in a flat voice. "It was always kept in that cabinet near the window, with other similar weapons of my country."

Vance dismissed him, and walked up and down the room several times. Something disturbing was on his mind.

Heath watched him a moment and then looked back at the dagger.

"And not a chance to pick up a finger-print," he complained with disgust. "A silk handle." He chewed viciously on his burnt-out cigar.

"No—no finger-prints," murmured Vance without lifting his eyes from the floor. "But that isn't the chief difficulty, Sergeant. Brisbane Coe was stabbed hours after Archer Coe was stabbed. And yet the dagger is found in Archer Coe's chair upstairs. The whole thing is mad. . . ."

He continued pacing in a brown study. Suddenly he drew up short.

"Sergeant! Bring me Brisbane Coe's top-coat—the black-and-white tweed one—from the hall closet." His voice held a tinge of excitement.

Heath left the room and returned shortly with the garment.

Vance began turning the pockets inside out. A gray silk handkerchief and a pair of gloves fell to the table. Then from the left-hand outside pocket Vance drew forth two pieces of fine, waxed linen string about four feet long. He was about to throw these to one side, when he suddenly bent forward and inspected them. One end of each piece of string was tied securely to a large bent pin.

Heath was looking on with rapt fascination.

"And what might that be, Mr. Vance?" he asked.

Vance did not answer, but put his hand again into the left-hand pocket of the top-coat. When he withdrew it he was holding a long slender piece of steel.

"Ah!" he exclaimed with satisfaction.

We all looked down at it wonderingly. It was perhaps the last thing in the world we expected to see.

The object which Vance had taken from the pocket of Brisbane Coe's coat was a darning-needle!

## 11. MORE BLOODSTAINS

(Thursday, October 11; 1.45 p.m.)

Markham looked from the needle back to the little pile of string, and then at Vance.

"Well, what does that mean—if anything?" he asked.

Vance slowly picked up the needle and the two pieces of string and put them in his own coat pocket.

"It means deviltry, Markham. And it means that we are dealing with a shrewd, subtle, and tricky brain. The technique of this crime had been thought out to several decimal points—and then everything went wrong. The murderer was forced to add complications to his plot in order to cover himself. And he has confused the issue out of all recognizability. . . ."

"But what about the string and that darning-needle?" interrupted Markham.

"That was where the plot went wrong—"

"But who used this string and needle? And for what purpose?"

Vance looked up gravely.

"If I knew who used them, I'd have an important key to the entire situation. The fact that they were in Brisbane's top-coat means little. That is the logical place that any one would have put them after having used them. It's always safe, don't y' know, to throw suspicion on a dead man."

Markham stiffened and his eyes became hard. "You think there's a possibility that Brisbane killed Archer?"

"My word, no!" Vance spoke wearily but with emphasis. "I doubt if Brisbane even returned to the house until Archer was dead."

"You believe the same person killed both Brisbane and Archer?"

Vance nodded, but the puzzled frown did not leave his face.

"Undoubtedly. The technique of both murders was the same; and the same weapon was used in both killings."

"But," argued Markham, "the dagger was found in Archer's bolted bedroom."

"That's another incredible complication," Vance returned. "Really, y' know, the dagger shouldn't have been there. It should have been here in the library."

"Here?" Markham uttered the word with astonishment. "But why in the library? Neither man was killed here."

"I wonder. . . ." Vance leaned over the table, deep in thought. "It would have been the logical place . . . and yet neither body was found here. . . ."

"Why was this room the logical place?" Markham asked sharply.

"Because of this substituted Tao Kuang vase and the broken piece of *Ting yao* porcelain with the blood on it—" He stopped abruptly and his eyes drifted into space. "That blood-stained *Ting yao*! . . . Ah! What happened after that Sung vase was broken?—what would the stabber have done then? Would he have gone out, taking the blood with him? . . . No! He wouldn't have dared—it wouldn't have fitted in with his sinister purpose. He would have been afraid. He was hiding something, Markham. . . ." Vance looked about the room. "That's it: *he was hiding something!* . . . Twice he hid it . . . and then something unexpected happened—something startling and upsetting. The corpse should have been here in the library, d'ye see; and therefore the dagger had to be here."

"Will you get down to something definite?" snapped Markham. "If you have a workable theory, state it in comprehensible terms."

"I have a theory, Markham," Vance replied quietly, "—a theory to account for certain contradictory phases of this case—but I wouldn't dare express it—yet. It's too outlandish. And moreover, it doesn't fit two-thirds of the facts. . . . But give me a few minutes. Let me see if I can verify one important item in my theory. If I'm able to find what I'm looking for, we'll be a little farther along."

He walked to the mantelpiece and stood before a large blue-green vase.

"A beautiful example of *Tsui se*," he said, running his fingers over the glaze. "Turquoise blue, as we would say, but the Chinese designated it by the color of the kingfisher's feathers. Its manufacture began some time in the Ming dynasty and continued till the Chia Ch'ing era. And there is no crackle in this piece; and there are phoenixes incised in the *paté*. . . ." He put his finger in the neck. "Too small," he commented, and moved to another vase—a bottle-shaped, dark-red specimen—at the further end of the mantel.

"One of the most perfect examples of *Lang yao* I've ever seen,—ox-blood, or *sang de bœuf*, as we call it. It's as fine as the one in the Schiller collection." He lifted it up, and looked at it closely inside and out. "Watered-green crackle on the base, and signed by the empty double ring in blue, identifying it as K'ang Hsi." He set it back on its standard, and strolled to a cabinet against the west wall. On it stood a vase of brilliant black.

"Mirror-black, Markham," he said, touching it delicately. "And one of the rarest varieties,—note the golden speckles floating in the glaze. For pure beauty, however, I prefer the earlier examples of this ware—the *Chien yao*, for instance, with its green iridescence. *Chien yao* was not made after the Yuan dynasty. The Ming dynasty did not know it; but it came in favor again during the K'ang Hsi era."

As he talked, he fingered the vase lovingly and held its lips toward the light.

"My own mirror-black is K'ang Hsi, with brown reflections; and it's considerably larger than the one in the Allen collection."<sup>[12]</sup>

Markham and Heath were watching Vance closely. Both of them knew that he was not talking at random, but that, beneath his apparently aimless chatter about Chinese ceramics, there lurked some definite and serious purpose.

Vance set the K'ang Hsi mirror-black vase back on the cabinet, and let his eyes run over the other ceramic specimens in the room. There was a vase of dead-white glassy porcelain painted in enamel colors in the style of Ku Yüeh-hsüan; a pair of rouleau-form vases decorated with *famille-vert* enamels, with panel designs in a ground of floral brocade; a Lung-ch'üan celadon, copied from an ancient bronze with designs in relief, on fine white ware with a red-brown base; a Sung flower-pot of gray porcelainous ware with a purple, opalescent glaze; a bluish vase of "soft *chun*" with red markings; a Ju-type vase, pale blue, with carved floral designs; an early Ming turquoise wine-jar incised and bordered; a K'ang Hsi "apple green" vase with a lustrous, transparent glaze; several beautifully incised

Kuan Yins of *blanc-de-chine*, or Fukien, ware; and various ginger-jars, ewers, bottles, water pots, bulb-bowls, plates, libation cups, incense tripods, goblets, wine-jars, Shon Lao figures, fish-bowls, beakers, cups, and the like, ranging from the Han dynasty to the Ch'ing.

But Vance did not linger over any one of them. He gave them merely a casual inspection. He seemed to be searching for some particular type of vase, for he would hesitate here and there, shake his head as if in rejection, and pass on to other pieces. At last he completed his rounds and halted. There was a distinct look of disappointment on his face as he turned back to us.

"I'm afraid my theory is a mere broken reed," he sighed.

"I certainly haven't been leaning on it," retorted Markham. He was annoyed at Vance's secretive manner.

"Neither have I, for that matter," said Vance a little sadly. "But it furnished a starting-point to reason from—provided, of course, I could verify it."

He came back slowly toward the centre of the room where we were grouped about the davenport and the circular table. As he reached the end of the library table, he halted and looked down at a small low teak-wood stand on which stood a cornucopia-shaped white vase. The stand was directly behind the end of the davenport farthest from the lamp and against the end of the library table. A set of books piled high on the end of the table almost obscured the vase. Vance approached it.

"That's dashed interestin'," he murmured. "A piece of later *Ting yao*—from the Yung Ch'eng era, I should say. During the Ming dynasty, y' know, Markham, and the K'ang Hsi, Yung Cheng, and Ch'ien Lung eras of the Ch'ing dynasty, the Chinese ceramists made many facsimiles of Sung *Ting yao*, in every way as beautiful as the earlier pieces. In fact, the Ming and Ch'ing artificers developed and improved on the Sung."

He picked up the vase and began inspecting it.

"A rather thick biscuit, and decorated in relief: copied from an ancient bronze. . . . Angular crackling in the glaze, which is brittle and glossy. . . . A very beautiful and perfect specimen."

As he talked, he moved toward the window and held the vase to the light in such a manner that he could look inside it. He peered closely into its broad volute mouth. He then adjusted his monocle and looked again into the interior of the vase.

"I believe there is something here," he said. Moistening his finger on his tongue, he put his hand deep into the vase. When he withdrew it there was a red smear on the end of his finger.

"Yes, quite so," he said, looking closely at his finger.

"What have you found?" demanded Markham.

Vance held out his finger.

"Blood!" he said.

He replaced the vase on its stand and rubbed off the stain on his finger with his handkerchief. Then he fixed a grim gaze upon Markham, who was waiting for some explanation of this new discovery.

"And that vase was also near the davenport, only a few feet from where the Sung *Ting yao* stood. Both vases were used in this devilish plot. . . . A subtle conception—but the plan fell to pieces—"

"See here, Vance,"—Markham spoke quietly, trying to curb his annoyance—"just how were those vases used? And where did the blood on them come from?"

"As I see it, Markham, those two *Ting yao* vases were used to divert suspicion from the real murderer and to focus it on another person; and they were employed as symbols in order to create a false motive. That is to say, the first delicate *Ting yao*—the one which originally stood on that circular table, and which has been supplanted by that execrable Tao Kuang—was to have been the signature of the crime, and to have put ideas in our heads. But it broke, and therefore made the selection of the second Vase necessary—"

"You mean we were to regard the crime as being connected with Archer's collection of Chinese ceramics?"

Vance nodded.

"I feel sure of it. But in just what way I don't know. It would probably have been perfectly clear if there had not been a gross miscalculation on the murderer's part."

"We were, you think, supposed to find the blood in the vase?"

Vance frowned.

"No—not the blood exactly. That is where the plot went awry."

"Just a minute, Vance!" Markham's voice was commanding. "Where did that blood come from?"

"From Archer Coe's body!" Vance's answer sent a chill up my spine.

"But there was no external bleeding," Markham reminded him.

"True." Vance leaned against the back of the davenport and lighted a cigarette. "But there was blood on the dagger when it was withdrawn from between Archer's ribs. . . ."

"The dagger?"

"Exactly. . . . As I see it, Markham, the bloody dagger that killed Archer was thrown into the fragile *Ting yao* vase that was on the table there, in order to indicate—by a subtle and devious symbolism—the motive for the crime. But the steel and gold of the dagger broke the vase—it was of almost eggshell delicacy—and so the dagger was then placed in this other *Ting yao*. In clearing up the broken pieces of the first vase, the murderer overlooked one small fragment."

"But why the substituted vase?"

"In order that no attention would be attracted by the glaring absence of the original one. If a valuable *Ting yao* were missing, it might indicate another motive for the crime, and that motive would have confused the issue and diverted attention from the person the murderer wanted us to think was behind the crime. The substitution of the Tao Kuang vase was in the nature of a precaution."

"That's all very well, perhaps," Markham returned dubiously; "but we did not find the dagger in the other vase—"

"It was taken out and used to kill Brisbane."

"By the murderer of Archer?"

"Unquestionably. No one else would have known where the dagger was."

"But, Vance, that theory doesn't fit the facts. The Sergeant found the dagger upstairs in Archer's room—with the door bolted on the inside. And Archer died hours before Brisbane was stabbed. Why, if the same person killed both of them, didn't he replace the dagger in this vase? Archer was already dead, and Brisbane was killed downstairs. Why should the dagger have been in Archer's bedroom chair?"

Vance smoked unhappily for some time before replying.

"That's what I can't make out," he admitted.

"I got it!" exclaimed Heath. "The guy croaked Archer downstairs and put the dagger in the vase. Just then Brisbane came back from the station and caught him. So he grabbed the dagger and did Brisbane in to protect himself. After that he dragged Archer upstairs, still carrying the dagger, got excited, and left it in the chair where he'd put Archer."

Vance smiled ruefully and shook his head. "There are too many loopholes in that theory, Sergeant. Brisbane was not stabbed until hours after Archer. The murderer could have been in Philadelphia by the time Brisbane was stabbed. He certainly wouldn't have tarried here for several hours after disposing of Archer—"

"But, Mr. Vance, you yourself said the same person croaked both guys."

"And I still believe it," returned Vance. "The only explanation I have is that the murderer, after killing Archer and placing the dagger in the vase, returned to the house and killed Brisbane, too."

"Then, I ask you,"—the Sergeant became petulant—"how did the dagger get in the bolted room?—and who put the bullet through Archer's head, and why?"

"If I could answer those questions, Sergeant," Vance told him, "I could solve this whole insane problem."

At this moment Wrede came down the stairs and walked past the library to the front door.

"Oh, I say, Mr. Wrede," Vance called out. "Could we speak to you a moment before you go?" The man turned and came into the library. His face was flushed, and there was a sullen, angry look in his eyes—a look almost murderous. He stood just inside the door, his hands tightly flexed at his sides, looking at Vance with defiant anger.

"Here I am," he announced curtly through set jaws.

"So I observe," Vance murmured mildly. "And you seem rather upset, don't y' know."

Wrede's tense attitude did not relax; and he said nothing.

"You saw Miss Lake?" Vance asked pleasantly.

The man gave a jerky nod.

"And since speaking to her," Vance pursued languidly, "do you still feel that you have no suggestion to make as to a possible perpetrator of this double crime?"

A shrewd light came into the other's eyes, and he hesitated for several seconds. Then he said:

"Not at the moment. But it might be well if you temporarily concentrated your investigation on Mr. Grassi. I have just learned that Archer Coe had agreed to sell him a considerable section of his collection."

"Indeed?" Vance's eyebrows went up. "Did Miss Lake inform you of the fact?"

Again Wrede hesitated. "Miss Lake and I discussed other matters," he returned at length. Then he added: "It may interest you to know, Mr. Vance, that my engagement to Miss Lake has been broken."

"Most distressin'." Vance gave his attention to his cigarette. "But what could Archer's willingness to dispose of part of his collection have to do with his death?"

"I couldn't say." Wrede had become uneasy. "But it strikes me as very peculiar that Archer should consent to sell."

"I'll admit," agreed Vance, "that it doesn't sound altogether reasonable. Maybe, however, he took a great fancy to Mr. Grassi."

Wrede narrowed his eyes, but made no reply, and Vance continued:

"But even had Archer consented to dispose of certain pieces in the hope, let us say, of acquiring others, I still can't see what Mr. Grassi would have gained by his death."

"Archer may have regretted his decision after he had committed himself. . . ."

"I see your point, Mr. Wrede," Vance interrupted coldly. "But what of Brisbane?"

"Could not Brisbane's death have been an accident?"

"Yes—quite." Vance smiled thoughtfully. "I'm sure it was an accident—a most unfortunate accident. Last night was filled with the most amazin' accidents. . . . But I sha'n't keep you from your lunch any longer. I merely wanted to ask you how you felt about the matter after having spoken to Miss Lake; and you have answered me quite frankly."

Wrede bowed stiffly.

"I'll be in my apartment all day tomorrow, in case you care to see me again," he said.

He had no sooner closed the front door behind him than Vance called Gamble from the hall.

"Run upstairs," he said, "and, not saying anything, find out where Mr. Grassi is."

The butler left the room, returning shortly.

"Mr. Grassi, sir," he reported, "is in conversation with Miss Lake in her sitting-room on the third floor."

Vance gave a faint satisfied smile.

"And now, Gamble, will you ask Mr. Grassi to come here."

Gamble went out, and Vance turned to Markham.

"I suspected from Wrede's manner that he had found his Latin rival with the young woman. There was probably a most painful scene, and poor Wrede was given his *cong  *. It's very sad. He doesn't like Grassi—he doesn't at all like him. But I doubt if he really suspects him of killing Archer—though I'm sure Wrede doesn't put it beyond him—"

"Then why the insinuations?"

"More subtlety, Markham. Wrede is no fool—he's deuced clever, in fact. And he thinks that, if we turn our attention to Grassi, we will push past the straw man, so to speak, and find somebody else."

"Whom, in the name of Heaven?"

"Miss Lake, of course." Before Markham could answer, Vance went on. "Wrede has become vindictive and bitter. My asking him about Miss Lake as a possible suspect put ideas in his head,—he knows of the acute antagonism that has always existed between her and Archer, and he knows, too, that she is a capable, strong-minded woman. Therefore, when he was humiliated a moment ago in front of Grassi, he turned her over to us, as it were, with Grassi as a smoke-screen."

Grassi entered the library a moment later.

"I understand, sir," Vance addressed him, "that Mr. Archer Coe had consented to sell you certain items from his collection."

The Italian was nervous, and declined the chair Vance offered him.

"Yes," he replied; "that is true. I informed Mr. Wrede of the fact a moment ago. My reason for so doing was that Mr. Wrede practically ordered me out of the house—on the strength of his engagement to Miss Lake, I presume—and I informed him that my business here was not completed inasmuch as a considerable part of Mr. Coe's collection belonged technically to me. It was necessary for me to remain to arrange for packing and shipment."

"And what did Miss Lake say?"

The Italian seemed loath to answer, but at length he said:

"Miss Lake broke off her engagement with Mr. Wrede. And then she asked him to leave the house and remain away."

"Most impulsive!" Vance sighed. "Was she violent about it?"

"She was not over-polite," Grassi admitted; and there was a faint timbre of satisfaction in his tone.

"I say, Mr. Grassi";—Vance spoke suddenly—"do you think that Miss Lake killed her uncle?"

The Italian took a deep, audible breath and stared at Vance.

"I—I—really, sir, I—"

"Thanks awfully for the effort," Vance remarked. "I can quite understand your feelings. We'll let the matter drop. But I should like to know why you didn't tell us before of Mr. Archer Coe's agreement to dispose of some of his collection to you."

Grassi had recovered from his apparent shock at Vance's question concerning the possibility of Hilda Lake's guilt.

"It did not occur to me that the matter was relevant to the present unfortunate situation."

"Was the agreement written or verbal?" Vance asked.

"Written." The man reached in his pocket and handed Vance a folded paper. "At my request Mr. Coe wrote that letter to me yesterday," he explained. "I wished to cable the news to Milan."

Vance unfolded the letter and read it, with Markham, Heath and me looking over his shoulder. It was a holograph letter on personal note-paper, and ran:

Signor Eduàrdo Grassi.

Dear Sir,

In confirmation of our recent conversation, I hereby agree to sell to you, as a representative of the Museum of Antiquities at Milan, the following pieces in my private collection: . . .

Then came a detailed list of forty or fifty items, including many of Archer Coe's most famous and valuable specimens of Chinese art. The price of these items, which followed in a separate paragraph, caused Heath to suck in his breath; and I must admit that even I was astonished at the high figure. At the end of the letter was Archer Coe's sprawling signature. The date at the head of the document was October 10.

Vance refolded the letter and put it in his pocket.

"We shall keep this for the present," he told Grassi. "It will be perfectly safe, and it will be returned to you anon. It may have some bearing on the case, and the authorities may wish to refer to it."

I had expected Grassi to protest, but instead he bowed in polite acquiescence.

"And now," Vance concluded, "I shall again ask you to wait in your own quarters until we send for you."

Grassi went out, with obvious relief.

"Sergeant," Vance said, "could you get me a sheet of that note-paper on Archer Coe's desk? And his fountain-pen?"

The Sergeant went upstairs and returned shortly with the paper and the pen.

Vance compared the paper with the letter he had taken from Grassi, and made several marks on the paper with Archer Coe's pen. After an inspection of both he said:

"It is certainly Coe's note-paper; and Archer's pen wrote the letter. . . . Most significant."

He returned Grassi's letter to his pocket, and ordered Gamble to take lunch to Miss Lake and Grassi.

"And now, Markham," he said, "we have chivied all the inmates. What do you say to emulating the voracious Doremus and seeking food? Eggs *Bénédict* are in order, with an asparagus-tip salad, and a *soufflé au Cacao*. I know a French restaurant in the neighborhood —"

Heath, with a grimace, interrupted him.

"I'm sticking here," he announced. "I got work to do, and the reporters'll be swarming around like flies before long. I'll get my victuals later."

Markham had risen.

"I'll either be back or phone you later," he told the Sergeant.

Vance went toward the front door.

"Cheer up, old dear," he exhorted Markham. "It's not nearly so black as it seems. The clouds are beginning to disperse. We have all the data now, and it's simply a matter of arranging them and interpreting them correctly."

"I wish I could feel so optimistic," grumbled Markham, following Vance into the vestibule.

Vance halted and, turning, regarded the perplexed Heath.

"Oh, by the by, Sergeant," he said; "one or two little favors,—there's a good fellow. Will you check up at once—this afternoon, if

possible—on the—shall I say alibis?—of Miss Lake and Signor Grassi. Grassi says he dined last night with Doctor Montrose of the Metropolitan Museum, took a wrong train, and ended at the Crestview Country Club at eleven.—Miss Lake, according to her tale as reported by Grassi, dined at Arrowhead Inn with friends, drove to the Country Club alone, had an accident, and arrived shortly after the lost Signor had found his missin' trail."

"That's easy," snorted Heath. "Two good men can check all that in a few hours. . . ."

"And," added Vance, "you might give this house another search. I'm dashed interested in a blunt instrument that might have been used for striking Archer and the wee Scottie."

Heath screwed up his face shrewdly.

"Anything definite in mind, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, yes—quite. I noticed that in the fire set in the living-room everything was intact in the rack but the poker."

Heath nodded. "I get you, sir. If there's a poker in this house, I'll lay hands on it."

"Stout fella!" Vance continued toward the front door.

"And speaking of dogs, sir," Heath added, "that guy Wrede told me he was very fond of the animals. Owned one before he moved."

"Ah!" Vance paused. "Did he mention the breed?"

"He did. But it wasn't any dog I'd ever heard of."

"It was a Doberman Pinscher," Markham informed him.

"Now that's deuced interesting y' know," Vance murmured.

"Anything else, Mr. Vance?" Heath asked.

"Well, yes," Vance drawled, turning at the door. "Be so good, Sergeant, as to have the bolt on Archer's bedroom door fixed while we're lunching. I'll want it in perfect working order when I return."

The Sergeant grinned broadly.

"So that's on your mind, is it? . . . Sure, I'll have it fixed."

## 12. THE CHINESE CHEST

(Thursday, October 11; 2.15 p.m.)

We walked through the invigorating autumn air to a small French restaurant in West 72nd Street near the Drive. Vance, who knew the *patron*, ordered our lunch. We had a glass of Dubonnet, a young Chambertin with our eggs, and a few sips of Grand Marnier after our coffee. Vance talked of dogs in general and of Scottish terriers in particular. He told us of the famous blood lines—the Ems, Barlae, Abertay, Laidon, Albourne, Laurieston, Merlewood, Taybank, Ornsay, and Heather—and described their characteristics. He went into the obscure origin of the Scottie, the West Highland and the Cairn; and discussed the status of the Scottie in Great Britain and America. He described the type of dog he preferred, and criticised the tendency among certain Scottish terrier breeders to produce "freaks."

"Proportion in all things," he said. "One must approach a Scottie as one approaches a work of art. The fundamental principles are the same. A dog, like a painting or a piece of sculpture, must have free movement in three dimensions, balance, organization, rhythm—a perfect plastic ensemble. If the head is too long and the body too short, both balance and proportion are lost. Some of our breeders, with no appreciation of co-ordinated ensemble, are ruining the conformation and workability of the Scottie by faddish distortions. They are endeavoring to make clowns of a breed of dogs that are fundamentally serious and dignified. The Scottie is at heart a gentleman—deep-natured, reserved, honorable, patient, tolerant, and courageous. He never whines or complains: he meets life as he finds it, with an instinctive philosophy of stoical intrepidity, and a mellow understanding. He is calm and firm—and stubborn. He minds his own business—and minds it well. He is independent, and incapable of an underhand act. He is loyal—and he remembers. He's a Spartan and can suffer pain without whimpering. He will attack a lion or a tiger if his rights are invaded. And he may die in the struggle; but he never shows the white feather or runs away. He is the grandest and most admirable of all sports—forthright and brave. You know exactly where you stand with a Scottie; and if you are a friend, he is gentle and loving and protective. . . . And this is the dog, Markham, that certain breeders would turn into a grotesque zany—a butt for humor, an object for snickering—by taking away his beautiful proportions, lengthening his foreface, shortening his body and tail, and making of him a monstrosity fit only for gibes. . . ."

Vance paused, sipped his Chambertin, and went on.

"Then there's the question of size. A tendency has developed among a class of breeders and judges recently to give preference to large, coarse dogs. But there is no reason whatever for Scotties to be large. They are terriers—ground dogs (the very name comes from the Low Latin *terrarius*)—and they are supposed to go to earth for foxes, otters, and other burrowing vermin. Obviously size is a handicap—unless, of course, we desire to turn the breed into freak show dogs. There have, of course, been many heavy champions of undeniable merit; but why any one should favor heavy Scotties in general is a mystery. McCandlish, one of the greatest breeders of Scottish terriers and a man who knows the breed as few others now living, puts the correct weight at sixteen to eighteen pounds for bitches, and eighteen to twenty pounds for dogs. And he is perfectly right. Even the Standard of Points, as adopted by the Scottish Terrier Club of England, says specifically that specimens of over twenty pounds should be discouraged. . . . But does this deter the breeders of 'freaks'? Alas, no! They want baby elephants. And if they are called on to judge a show, they'll put down a small dog that meets the Standard, and elevate large, overweight huskies that couldn't get down a fox-hole. . . ."[13]

Again Vance sipped his wine.

"There is alas! a tendency here and there to breed show dogs rather than natural terriers. Some breeders, by their intensification of certain ring traits, have robbed Scotties of their natural heritage. With the recent mania in certain quarters for lowness and short legs, many of the breed can't move as freely as they should—they lack mobility and speed and agility—and it is impossible for them to defend themselves adequately against their enemies. I think it is this loss of terrier power and its resultant loss of confidence that accounts for the increasing number of shy Scotties today. A real Scottie, in his natural state and bred for workability rather than ribbons, possesses an indefinable character of derring-do. This true Scottie character combines keenness and eagerness, a desire to be busy all the time, a readiness to play or fight or raise what-for at any hour of the day: it has in it a deep-seated inquisitiveness, an instinct to investigate whatever turns up—a complete and eager responsiveness to any manifestation, however trivial, of the world about it—a *seeking* quality which keeps the dog's mind and muscles constantly on the *qui vive*. . . . That is the real terrier character; and there are no keener terriers than Scotties. It's a quality hard to analyze, as are all colorful personalities; and I suppose the best way to describe it is to call it an ever-blazing internal fire, both physical and temperamental, that shines forth from the dog's eyes, vitalizes his expression, invigorates his body, and animates his every activity. . . ."

Vance smiled waggishly at Markham.

"I know I'm boring you. But you've been thinking much too strenuously all the forenoon. Your brain needs a little relaxation,—and what could be more soporific than my cackle about dogs? . . . And while I'm on the subject, I want to tell you, Markham, that the little wounded Scottie Gamble discovered behind the library portières is a beautiful specimen of what a Scottie should be. She has her faults—every dog has—but she's the type I'd like to have in my own kennels. She's small, compact, beautifully balanced—and doesn't weigh an ounce over seventeen pounds. . . . Poor little devil. She can probably never be shown now, even if she recovers. There'll be a bad scar over her eye. She certainly didn't deserve that wound, and I hope she'll have her revenge by helping us find the murderer."

He got up.

"I think I'll phone and see how she's getting along."

He went out and returned shortly to the table. He looked more cheerful.

"The doctor says she's not as badly hurt as he thought at first. A simple fracture, and he had to take only three stitches in her scalp. She's eating. No fever. Had an intravenous injection of calcium-gluconate, and, aside from being bandaged, she'll be pretty normal by tomorrow."

He took another sip of wine.

"And that means that I'll be pretty busy tomorrow. I'll have to visit the American Kennel Club and perhaps interview a few Scottie

judges."

"I can't see the connection—" Markham began.

"But there is a connection," insisted Vance. "It is no coincidence that a wounded dog is in a strange hostile house at the exact time of a murder. And it's reasonable to assume that it was admitted to the house by the murderer, either accidentally or for a purpose. In either case it will be a definite clue. The ownership of the dog—and especially the address of the owner—will give us something pretty definite to work from. The migrations of the dog last night will throw much light on the movements of the person who came to the Coe house. . . . And there is another point to be considered. Neither Brisbane nor Archer saw the dog, for either one of them—with their dislike for dogs—would have put her out of the house immediately."

"But where does that deduction lead us?"

"Not far, I'll admit. But it helps considerably. From the dog's presence in the house last night we may argue several very interesting and illuminating possibilities. First, that the dog did not arrive before the murderer, because Archer would have thrown her out—"

"But Archer might have been the person who injured her."

"Oh, I wouldn't put it past him; but if he had kicked her or struck her, he would not have left her behind the curtain beside the library door: he would have thrown her down the front steps to the street. . . ."

"But Brisbane?"

"Ah! That's just the point I'm coming to. If it had been Brisbane, then the dog was already in the house, or else she followed him in. If she was in the house and it was he who injured her, he was killed at almost the same instant; for if he had been able, he, like Archer, would have put the dog outside. Therefore, in case the dog was there and Brisbane injured her, then it follows that the murderer didn't see her or left her there with some definite purpose in mind. As for the dog having followed Brisbane in, I think it highly unlikely. He would have noticed her coming in the front door, and she wouldn't have got further than the vestibule. Moreover, dogs do not sneak in front doors between strangers' legs—"

"But she followed some one in, obviously," Markham argued, "—unless, of course, she was deliberately brought there."

"That is true," Vance admitted, "and that is a point that puzzles me. She might have followed some one—even a stranger—into the house, provided he had left the door open; but the murderer would scarcely have left the front door open,—in fact, I imagine he would have taken pains to shut it securely. And Brisbane would certainly not have left the door open. And both of them—if they had shut the front door immediately—would have noticed the dog and pushed her back. . . . On the other hand, the vicious injury given the dog seems to indicate that her presence in the house was not deliberate—that, in fact, the person who found her was surprised and, perhaps, frightened. Being afraid he would be seen if he turned her out, he acted impulsively and sought to kill her lest she should start barking and attract attention. In that event, we might conclude that the murderer struck the dog as a sort of self-protective measure; and the second and most important conclusion is that the dog's presence was not discovered until after the murder."

"Your reasoning is clear enough," Markham told him, "but I don't see in what way it is helpful to us."

"Oh, but it *is* helpful," Vance returned cheerfully.

"It eliminates certain possibilities: it narrows down certain movements of the murderer; and it leads to a specific interpretation of the two crimes—the murder of Archer and the murder of Brisbane."

"Forgive me if, as a mere lawyer unversed in logic, I cannot follow your esoteric ratiocinations."

"Perpend, Markham." Vance was genially patient. "It is highly unlikely—not to say impossible—that the dog could have followed any one in the front door without being seen. Remember, there is a double door and a vestibule; and the murderer would not have left the front door open behind him. Moreover, if the dog had been deliberately admitted, she would probably not have been injured and left behind the portières. Therefore, in view of the various factors of the situation, I believe the dog entered the house through an open door. And as the murderer would not have left the front door open, we may, as a hypothesis, assume that he entered by the rear door. And this would be in keeping with the nature of the crime. He could have entered the tradesmen's gate with far less danger of being seen than if he had mounted the front steps; and he would have had the advantage of taking his victim unawares by an approach from the rear of the house. Furthermore, it is not at all unlikely that he would have left both the gate and the rear door open so that he could make his escape without unnecessary noise. In that case the dog could easily have followed him in through the open gate and door, without being seen or heard. And the place where the dog was found—just outside the library door—was a logical spot, for the dog would have come in through the kitchen and dining-room and into the library."

Markham nodded slowly.

"Yes. All that is quite reasonable. But, after all, we now merely have the plausible supposition that the murderer entered by the rear door. It doesn't get us any nearer our victim."

"You're so discouraging," sighed Vance. "It's not impossible, don't you know, that this one bit of knowledge—or, shall I say conjecture?—may go a long way toward identifying the culprit."

"Any one could have come in the rear door."

"Provided he knew the lie of the land, was familiar with all the domestic arrangements—and could have obtained a key. Also, provided he knew that all the servants would be away that night."

Vance looked up thoughtfully.

"Yes, Markham, already that little Scottie has narrowed down our investigation. Unwittingly she has pointed out several valuable clues to us. She has helped us, no end. And I have a feeling she's going to tell us a lot more."

It was about half-past three when we returned to the Coe house. The Sergeant was bustling about, giving orders; and as we entered Gamble was descending from the second floor with a small tool-box, accompanied by Burke.

"All set?" demanded Heath, planting himself in front of Burke.

"Right, Sergeant," the detective replied proudly. "That door and lock are as good as they ever were."

Heath turned to Vance.

"And I've got something for you, sir." He swaggered a little as he led us into the library and pointed to the large centre-table. "There's the poker—and it's got blood on it."



Vance went up to it and examined it closely. He picked something from it between his thumb and forefinger, and went to the window.

"Yes, there's dried blood on it—and also a coarse brindle hair." He turned and nodded. "It was this poker, Markham, which wounded the Scottie. And undoubtedly, too, Archer Coe was struck with this poker. The shape of its blunt end coincides perfectly with the wound on Archer's head."

He frowned and looked at the vase in which he had found the bloodstains.

"And, Markham, that poker belongs in this room—in that rack beside the fireplace, just in front of the place on this divan where Archer Coe was sitting when Gamble went out last night. More evidence that something sinister and horrible preceded the crime upstairs. *And it took place in this room.*"

"The poker mighta been carried upstairs, sir," suggested Heath.

"Oh, quite, Sergeant," Vance agreed. "But the broken Sung *Ting yao* vase on the table here, with the blood on it; and that other Yung Cheng *Ting yao* vase with the smear of blood inside; and the wounded Scottie outside the door—what of them? They were not all carried upstairs. . . . No. It seems as if every sign-post were pointing toward this library."

"And yet," argued Markham doggedly, "Archer Coe's body was found upstairs, with his clothes changed, and the lights on, and the door bolted on the inside."

"Yeah," supplemented Heath, "and with a gun in his hand and a bullet in his head."

Vance nodded despondently.

"I know all that, Sergeant. That's the terrible and baffling thing about the crime. The Sign-posts of death all indicate this library, yet death itself was elsewhere. And there's no clear road leading between the two places."

He shrugged as if trying to shake off an unpleasant thought.

"By the by, Sergeant, where did you find the poker?"

Heath cocked an eye at Vance and gave a one-sided grin.

"That's one on you, sir. You looked at it this morning and didn't see it."

"What's that!" Markham ejaculated.

"Sure, Chief. Mr. Vance opened that Chinese chest in the bedroom and looked inside."

Vance stiffened.

"Well, what of it, Sergeant?"

"Nothing, sir," the other returned, "except that I found the poker in that chest—"

"The teak-wood chest beneath the east windows?"

"It's the only chest in the bedroom, ain't it, Mr. Vance?"

"You found the poker in that chest?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you."

Vance sat down and drew deeply on his cigarette.

"Who has been in the bedroom, Sergeant, since we went to lunch?" he asked presently.

"No one, sir!" Heath was emphatic. "Burke's guarded it every minute while you've been away. The butler helped him fix the door, but didn't get three feet in the room. And it was me, and no one else, that searched the room."

Markham came forward.

"What's the idea, Vance? Why should the Sergeant's finding the poker upstairs bother you?"

Vance exhaled a long ribbon of smoke, and looked directly at Markham.

"Because, old dear, that chest was empty when I looked in it this morning!"

### 13. THE SCENTED LIP-STICK

(Thursday, October 11; 3.30 p.m.)

Vance's declaration left us both perturbed and mystified. A new and more intimate element seemed to have entered into the case, although, for the life of me, I could not have analyzed the syllogism leading to such a conclusion. Markham was the first to speak.

"Are you certain, Vance?" he asked, in a rather dazed tone. "Maybe you overlooked—"

"Oh, no." Vance made a gesture of finality. "It wasn't there—oh, quite. Some one put it there after I'd examined the chest."

"But who, in Heaven's name?"

"Come, come, Markham." Vance smiled grimly. "One doesn't know, y' know. A bit mysterious and disconcertin'—eh, what? But I'd say it was the same person who tucked the dagger under the cushion of the chair in which Archer passed away."

"The dagger?"

"Yes, yes—the dagger. That mystery is at least cleared up—the poker explained that incongruity. The dagger didn't belong in Archer's boudoir. Quite the contr'ry. Its presence there confused me abominably. Both the poker and the dagger belonged in the library here. And they weren't here, d' ye see—they were where they shouldn't have been, where they couldn't possibly have been. . . . A gap—a mishap—a bit of superficial thinkin' on some one's part. Panic? Yes, that's what it was. Movin' things from one place to another. Silly idea. People always think that by movin' things they can confuse an issue. More often they merely clarify it."

"I'm glad you see some clarity in this damnable situation," Markham grumbled. "I'm getting more bogged every minute."

"Oh, but I'm not blinded by any dazzlin' illumination yet." Vance stretched himself comfortably in his chair. "I wonder. . . ."

The practical Sergeant projected himself irascibly into the discussion.

"If some one did cache the dagger and the poker upstairs, who'd have had the opportunity? That's what I'd like to figure out."

"Almost any one might have done it, Sergeant," returned Vance lazily. "Both Wrede and Grassi have passed back and forth before the room while we were downstairs."

Heath thought a moment.

"That's right. And then do you remember how that Miss Lake rushed to the chair when she first came in the room and put her arm back of the corpse? She coulda stuck the dagger under the seat with all of us looking at her."

"Oh, quite. And she could also have come downstairs from the third floor, while we were in the library here, and hidden the dagger when we were *not* looking at her."

Heath nodded.

"Yeah, I guess they all coulda done it. . . . And that cagy butler, he coulda done it."

"And don't overlook the Chinaman. Gamble sent him to fetch Miss Lake's breakfast tray while we were all downstairs."

Heath grasped at this remark.

"That's the guy!" he declared.

"Just a minute, Sergeant!" Markham suppressed him with a gesture, and turned to Vance. "If, as you believe, the dagger and poker were taken from this room and hidden in Coe's bedroom this morning, the inevitable conclusion is that the murderer is one of the persons who have been in the house this morning."

"Not necessarily." Vance shook his head mildly. "Even if the poker and dagger were secretly transferred upstairs, it doesn't follow that the murderer made the transfer. Some one may have done it to shield another, or to divert suspicion from himself. It might have been an act of fear, or even chivalry, by an innocent person."

"Even so," pursued Markham, "the transfer of the weapons would indicate that some one in the house knows more than he has told us."

"There are several persons here who know more than they've admitted. . . . No, no, it was a stupid act. The murderer couldn't have done it. It was some one else—*some one who didn't know all the facts*." Vance stood up and walked the length of the room and back. "Yes, Markham, the murderer was too clever to do a foolish thing like that—to hide weapons where they never could have been. . . . The murderer wanted the weapons found in this library. That's why he tried to hide the dagger twice—once in the egg-shell *Ting yao* vase, and the second time in that Yung Cheng *Ting yao*. And he wanted the poker to be found on the hearth—with the bloodstains on it. He wanted the weapons *in this room* where Archer Coe was sitting when Gamble left the house last night. He figured on this library being the murder room. And then something went wrong,—the murder room shifted. Something strange and diabolical happened. The corpse, with a bullet wound in his head and a revolver in his hand, decided on the bedroom upstairs. And when the murderer came back, it was too late to re-arrange the setting—"

"Came back? Too late?" repeated Markham. "What do you mean?"

"Just that." Vance halted and looked down at the District Attorney. "Oh, he came back—he had to come back. Brisbane was killed hours after Archer.—And the reason he was too late to transfer the scene of the crime was that Archer's door was bolted on the inside. The scene of his murder had shifted—and he, the murderer, was locked out. He knew last night that neither the dagger nor the poker could be found in the bedroom. Therefore it was not the murderer who placed them there this morning. . . ."

At this moment Gamble appeared at the door leading to the butler's pantry. He was worried and apologetic.

"Give us the tidings, Gamble," said Vance encouragingly, as the man hesitated. "I'm sure you have a tale to unfold."

"I'm very sorry, sir, to interrupt," the butler began, "but an item—if you know what I mean—has just occurred to me. Ordinarily I would have thought little or nothing of it, but in view—"

"What's the item?" Markham snapped.

"It—it's this little gadget, sir," Gamble stuttered, laying a small cylindrical metal lip-stick holder on the table. "I found it in the waste-paper basket in this room this morning before I discovered the masters body upstairs, and I threw it out. But a few minutes ago I

began thinking about this terrible affair—"

Vance glanced at the lip-stick holder.

"What else did you find in the basket, Gamble?" he interrupted.

"That was all, sir—except the evening paper."

"What evening paper?"

"The one that is delivered here regularly. I placed it on the table here for Mr. Coe before I went out yesterday."

Vance picked up the holder and removed the top.

"Practically empty," he mused. "Not a gold case—therefore thrown away." He smeared a little of the rouge on his finger and smelled it. "Duplaix's Carmine. Made for blondes. . . . Most interestin'." He looked again at Gamble.

"Just where in the basket did you find this?—under the paper or on top of it?"

"On top of it, sir," the man answered with mild surprise. "The paper was crumpled in the bottom of the basket. Mr. Coe always threw the paper there when he had finished reading it. No one else in the house ever read the evening paper, sir."

"And what time does the paper arrive?"

"At half-past five always."

Vance nodded. "And you left the house when?"

"Between half-past five and six, sir. I couldn't say exactly."

"And you are quite sure Mr. Archer Coe had no visitor at the time?"

"Oh, quite, sir." Gamble was again becoming worried. "As I told you—"

"Yes, yes. So you told me." Vance was watching the man from under lazy eyelids. "But a lady seems to have been here. . . . Do you know of any appointment Mr. Coe may have had with the possible owner of that lip-stick?"

"An appointment with a lady?" The butler, for some reason, seemed shocked. "Oh, no, sir. I'm sure Mr. Coe had no such appointment. He was—if you understand me, sir—a most abstemious man."

Vance dismissed him brusquely.

"That will be all, Gamble."

When the man had gone, Vance looked waggishly at Markham.

"I fear, old dear, despite Gamble's assurances, that Archer did entertain a lady yesterday afternoon between, let us say, six o'clock and eight—which is probably about the time he was killed."

Markham hesitated and pursed his lips.

"Isn't that leaping at conclusions? Archer may have thrown the lip-stick there himself. Miss Lake may have left it here. . . ."

"My dear fellow—oh, my dear fellow! Really, now. Miss Lake, I'm sure, doesn't use a lip-stick; and even if she did it wouldn't be this highly scented and gaudily colored variety. . . ." Heath was again growing impatient.

"I can't see that it makes any difference anyway. Suppose the old boy did have a dame in for a visit—that's not explaining the cock-eyed things that happened here last night." He thrust an unlighted cigar in his mouth, and gave Vance a curious and rather aggressive look. "What about that bolted door upstairs? You had something in mind, Mr. Vance, when you asked me to get that bolt fixed, didn't you?"

"My notion was a bit vague, Sergeant." Vance crushed out his cigarette. "Of course, people don't get murdered in bolted rooms except in detective novels; and something Miss Lake said to me suggested that I might find a solution to that peculiar and illogical circumstance."

"What was that?" Markham curtly demanded.

"When she was talkin' about Brisbane, don't y' know. You remember she mentioned that he was interested in criminology and was sufficiently clever to cover his tracks if he'd decided to go in for murder. A significant remark, Markham."

"But I don't see the connection." Markham was puzzled. "Brisbane was the victim—not the murderer."

"Oh, I wasn't regardin' him as the culprit. I was thinkin' of Miss Lake's comment in terms of tangents."

"It occurs to me you're always thinking in terms of tangents," Markham growled. "Suppose you elucidate—if possible."

"I live in 'opes," Vance grinned. "Let me question Miss Lake a bit further. I could bear a bit of amplification as to Brisbane's delvings into criminological lore." He sobered and went toward the door. "What do you say to using Archer's bedroom as the scene of the interrogation?"

Markham gave a resigned sigh, and we went upstairs. Heath sent Gamble to ask Miss Lake to join us there; and a few minutes later she came in, swaggering but chilly and, I thought, suspicious.

"Haven't you found the dastard yet?" she asked with a half sneer. "What a pity!"

Vance pushed a chair forward for her, ignoring her taunt.

"We wanted to ask you, Miss Lake," he began gravely, "just what you meant when you spoke of your Uncle Brisbane's having 'dabbled in criminology'—I believe that was your phrase."

"Oh, that!" Her tone was symptomatic of relief. "He was always interested in the subject, along with other fads. Intricate problems worried him immensely. He'd have made an excellent chess player, if he'd had the time and patience. . . ."

"What form did his interest in criminology take?" Vance spoke casually.

"Only reading." The woman made a slight outward gesture of the hands. "To my knowledge he never practised the criminal arts. At heart he was quite respectable, though inclined at times toward fanaticism."

"What did he read mostly?" Vance's tone was even and unearg.

"Criminal cases, court records, detective stories—the usual thing. There are hundreds of volumes in his room. Why not look at them? They'll tell you the whole sad story."

"I'm inclined to follow your suggestion." Vance bowed. "Were you, too, interested in your Uncle Brisbane's books?"

"Oh, yes. There's nothing else interesting in the house. I certainly wouldn't read those dry tomes on ceramics in the library."

"Then you, too, have 'dabbled in criminology'?"

She shot Vance a quick look and gave a forced laugh.

"You might call it that."

"Ah! Then perhaps you can help us." Vance's air became jocular. "We crave to know how this door could have been bolted on the inside. Obviously Archer couldn't have done it with a bullet in his head."

"Or a dagger through his lungs," she supplemented, and became suddenly serious. "But he might have done it before the bullet entered his head."

"But he was dead at that time." Vance, too, had become serious and was watching the woman closely.

"Have you never heard of cadaveric spasm, or *rigor mortis*?" she asked contemptuously. "Men, with revolvers in their hands at death, have been known to fire them hours after they were dead, as a result of muscular contraction."

Vance nodded, without changing his expression or shifting his gaze.

"Quite true. There was the famous case in Prague of the suicide who later shot the police inspector.[14] And there was a more recent case in Pennsylvania.[15] . . . But I hardly think that condition applies here. Archer, d' ye see, died of a stab in the back. And the position of his hand holding the revolver was not such as would indicate that he himself pulled the trigger."

"Perhaps you're right." I was surprised at her ready acceptance of Vance's dismissal of her suggestion. "Some one else must have bolted the door." She spoke with cynical lightness. "It's quite a problem, isn't it?"

"Are you sure you can't help us?" Vance gazed at her steadily.

"You're trying to flatter me." She gave Vance a hard, straight-lipped smile. "I, of course, know all the usual methods. The string under the door, for instance, tied to a nail thrust through the bow of the key.[16] But then, there's not a bit of space under this door—it scrapes the sill, in fact—and there's no key—hasn't been one for years.—Then there's the old turn-bolt system which any child can operate with a hairpin and a piece of thread.[17] But, alas! there's no turn-bolt.—And naturally I know of the melted candle method of bolting a door from the outside;[18] but this bolt isn't a drop-bolt.—And the piece of ice that will melt and let the bolt fall down.[19] But that's out, too, for this bolt is the kind that slips over into a groove and turns down."

She quickly became thoughtful: a curious change came over her, and she looked at Vance with a questioning steady stare.

"I've been thinking about that door for several hours," she said tensely; "and I can't find an answer to it. Uncle Brisbane and Mr. Wrede and I often talked about these tricky criminal devices. We worked out various ways and means of doing seemingly impossible things; but bolting this door from the outside was something we never could figure out."

Vance took his cigarette from his mouth with slow deliberation.

"You mean to tell me that you and Brisbane and Mr. Wrede actually discussed the possibilities of bolting this particular door from the outside?"

"Oh, yes." She appeared quite frank. "Many times. But we decided it couldn't be successfully done."

Vance hesitated, and a strange kind of chill ran over me. I felt as if we were approaching something particularly pertinent and, at the same time, sinister.

"Did any one else"—Vance's cool voice brought me back to reality—"ever hear these discussions?"

"No one but Uncle Archer." Hilda Lake had become frigid and indifferent again. "He always ridiculed our speculations."

"What of Liang?" Vance asked casually.

"The cook? Oh, I suppose he heard our idle chatter. I believe we talked over our dire plots at dinner occasionally."

"And now the problem that troubled all of you has been solved." Vance rose and strolled meditatively toward the door. "Very sad. . . ." He opened the door and held it ajar. "Thank you, Miss Lake. We'll try not to disturb you more than is absolutely necessary. I say, you won't mind remaining in your room till dinner time, will you?"

"If I did mind, it wouldn't do me any good, I suppose." She spoke with obvious resentment as she walked toward Vance. When she reached the threshold she swung half-way round and asked aggressively: "May I be permitted to get a book from Uncle Brisbane's room to while away my hours of detention?" Her eyes were narrowed, and her lip curled in an ugly arc.

Vance's calm gaze did not alter.

"I'm dashed sorry, and all that sort of thing," he said politely, "but I'll send you up any book you'd like—later. I've a bit of browsing to do first."

The woman turned on her heel and walked away without a word.

Vance waited until he heard her door close with a bang; then he turned and came back into the room.

"Not a sweet, Victorian clinging vine," he lamented; "but a lady of parts, none the less. . . . Curious, her telling us of her discussions with Brisbane about the possibilities of bolting this door from the outside. There was something back of that, Markham. The young woman had ideas. Now, why should she have tried to be so helpful? And that suggestion about *rigor mortis* and the revolver. . . . Amazin'."

"If you want my candid opinion," Markham commented, "she knows, or suspects, more than she's telling; and she's trying to throw us off the track."

Vance considered this for a time.

"Yes—it's possible," he agreed at length. "On the other hand . . ."

Markham was patently puzzled.

"Any suggestion?" he asked. "What's our next move?"

"Oh, that's indicated." Vance sighed deeply. "Painful as it may prove, I simply must run my eye over Brisbane's books."

Markham also sighed deeply, and rose.

## 14. VANCE EXPERIMENTS

(Thursday, October 11; 4 p.m.)

We went into Brisbane Coe's room, which was at the front of the house on the west side. It was a long narrow room, somewhat the shape of Archer's, with a large bay window on the street. It was simply furnished, but a series of large oak cabinets about the walls gave it an overcrowded, massive appearance. On the north wall beside the window was a series of simple built-in book-shelves extending to the ceiling. There were, I estimated, between three and four hundred volumes on them, all neatly and meticulously arranged.

Vance went to the window and threw up the shades. Then he drew a chair to the book-shelves, mounted it, and began running his eye systematically over the volumes. I stood behind him and glanced over the titles. Markham and Heath sat down on a long davenport before the fireplace and watched Vance with an air of boredom.

For so small a number of criminological volumes Brisbane Coe's collection was unusually complete. He had Hargrave L. Adam's complete "Police Encyclopædia" of Scotland Yard; the Complete Newgate Calendar; the Notable British Trials Series; Doctor Hans Gross's great handbook for examining magistrates; Dumas' "Celebrated Crimes"; Gayot de Pitaval's "Causes Célèbres et Intéressantes, avec les Jugemens qui les ont décidées"; Maurice Méjan's "Recueil des Causes Célèbres"; and many works in German including Kurt Langenscheidt's "Encyklopädie der Kriminalistik," a set of Der Wiener Pitaval, Friedlaender's "Kriminal-Prozesse," a set of Doctor Ludwig Altmann's "Aus dem Archiv des Grauen Hauses," and Leonhard's library of "Aussenseiter der Gesellschaft." In addition, there were various miscellaneous volumes dealing with criminals and their methods, but very little on the psychology of crime or its medico-legal aspects.

In surveying the titles one got the impression that, had Brisbane gone in for crime, he would have been highly practical rather than subtle. The three lower shelves were devoted almost entirely to the classics of detective fiction, from Gaboriau and Poe to A. Conan Doyle and Austin Freeman.

Vance glanced over the books rapidly but carefully. There were but few that were not in his own library, and he was familiar not only with their titles but with their appearance. He gave little attention, however, to the fiction. Just what he was looking for none of us knew; but we did know that he had some definite object in mind, and we suspected, from what he had said to us, that the object of his search related to the bolted door of Archer's bedroom.

After scanning the backs of the books for perhaps fifteen minutes, he sat down and slowly lighted one of his *Régies*.

"It should be here, y' know," he murmured, as if to himself, "—unless it's been taken away. . . ."

He got up leisurely, and again standing on the chair, began to check the volume numbers of the various sets of books. When he came to the red-and-gold set of the "Aussenseiter der Gesellschaft" he gave a nod and stepped down to the floor.

"A volume missing," he announced. He scanned the upper book-shelves carefully. "I wonder. . . ." Then he dropped on his knees and began going more thoroughly over the section of fiction.

When he had come to the lowest shelf he reached forward and took out a thin red-and-gold volume. He glanced at it and leant forward again to inspect the books on either side of the space from which he had extracted the missing volume of the "Aussenseiter der Gesellschaft" series.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed. "That's deuced interestin'." He pulled out a small red book. "'The Clue of the New Pin,' by Edgar Wallace," he read aloud.<sup>[20]</sup> "Only, we have two pins and a darning-needle—eh, what? . . . Still, Markham, it's significant that the missing volume of the 'Aussenseiter der Gesellschaft' should be found cheek by jowl with a book dealing with a pin."

Markham took his cigar from his mouth, stood up, and faced Vance with a serious face.

"I see what you mean," he said. "You think that Brisbane, by the help of these books on criminology, worked out some way of bolting Archer's door from the outside, by the use of those pins and string."

Vance gave an affirmative nod.

"Either Brisbane or some one else. It was quite a technical operation." He picked up the "Aussenseiter der Gesellschaft" volume and glanced at the title page. "'Der Merkwürdige Fall Konrad,'" he read. "By Kurt Bernstein. . . . That doesn't tell us much. I wonder who Konrad might have been and what subtleties he engaged in. . . . I think I'll do a bit of prying into Konrad's criminal past. And I'll glance through Wallace—if you could bear to wait for me a short while."

Markham made a gesture of acquiescence.

"The Sergeant and I will wait downstairs—I've some telephoning to do."

The three of us left Vance alone in Brisbane's room, and as I closed the door I saw Vance stretch himself out on the davenport with the two books.

An hour later he came to the head of the stairs and called down to us. We joined him in Archer's bedroom. He had both books with him, and I noticed that there were pages marked in each.

"I think I've found a solution to one phase of our problem," he announced seriously, when we were seated. "But it may take a bit of working out." He opened the novel. "Wallace has a clever idea here—I found the passage without too long a search. The tale, as I gather at a hasty reading, relates of a dead man found locked in a vault with the key to the door on the table before him. The vault door was locked from the outside, of course. . . . Here's the explanat'ry passage: '*No other word he spoke, but took something from his pocket: it was a reel of stout cotton. Then from his waistcoat he produced a new pin, and with great care and solemnity tied the thread to the end of the pin, Tab watching him intently. And all the time he was working, Rex Lander was humming a little tune, as though he were engaged in the most innocent occupation. Presently he stuck the point of the pin in the centre of the table, and pulled at it by the thread he had fastened. Apparently he was satisfied. He unwound a further length of cotton, and when he had sufficient he threaded the key upon it, carrying it well outside the door. The end he brought back into the vault, and then pushed it out again from the inside*'"

*through one of the air-holes. Then he closed the door carefully. He had left plenty of slack for his purpose and Tab heard the click of the lock as it was fastened, and his heart sank. He watched the door fascinated, and saw that Lander was pulling the slack of the cotton through the air-hole. Presently the key came in sight under the door. Higher and higher came the sagging line of cotton and the key rose until it was at the table's level, slid down the taut cotton, and came to rest on the table. Tighter drew the strain of the thread, and presently the pin came out, passed through the hole in the key, leaving it in the exact centre of the table. Tab watched the bright pin as it was pulled across the floor and through the ventilator.'*[21] . . . That's the way Wallace worked his locked door."

"But," objected Markham. "There was an open ventilator in the door, and space beneath the door. Those conditions are not true here."

"Yes—of course," Vance returned. "But don't overlook the fact that there was a string and a bent pin. At least they are common integers in the two problems. . . . Now, let's see if we can combine those integers with certain common integers of the Konrad case." He opened the other book. "Konrad," Vance explained, "was a truck-driver in Berlin nearly fifty years ago. His wife and five children were found dead in their cellar room; and the door—a ponderous affair without even a keyhole or space around the moulding—was securely bolted on the inside. The case was at once pronounced one of murder and suicide on the part of the mother; and Konrad would have been free to marry his *inamorata* (whom he had in the offing) had it not been for an examining magistrate of the criminal court, named Hollmann. Hollmann, for no tangible reason, did not believe in the suicide theory, and set to work to figure out how Konrad could have bolted the door from without. . . . Here's the revelat'ry passage—if you'll forgive my rather sketchy sight translation of the German: '*Hollmann, urged on by his conviction that Frau Konrad had not murdered her children and committed suicide, determined, as a last resort, to give the entire door, both inside and outside, a microscopic examination. But there was not the slightest aperture anywhere, and the door fitted so tightly around the frame that a piece of paper could not have been passed through any crevice. Hollmann examined the door minutely with a powerful lens. It required hours of labor, but in the end he was rewarded. Just above the bolt he found on the inside, close to the edge of the door, a very small hole which was barely discernible. Opening the door he inspected the outside surface directly opposite to the hole on the inside. But there was no corresponding hole visible. Hollmann did find on the outside of the door, however, a small spot on which the paint seemed fresher than that on the rest of the door. The spot was solid, but this did not deter Hollmann's investigation. He borrowed a hatpin from one of the tenants in the building, and heating it, ran it through the hole on the inside. With but little pressure the heated hatpin penetrated the door, coming out on the outside exactly in the centre of the newly painted spot. Moreover, when Hollmann withdrew the hatpin a piece of tough horsehair adhered to the pin; and on the pin was also discernible a slight film of wax. . . . It was obvious then how Konrad had bolted the door from without. He had first bored a tiny hole through the door above the bolt, looped a piece of horsehair over the bolt's knob, and slipped the two ends through the hole. He had then pulled the bolt-knob upward until the horsehair loop was disengaged, withdrawing the horsehair through the hole. A piece of the horsehair had, however, caught in the hole and remained there. Konrad had then filled up the hole with wax and painted it on the outside, thereby eliminating practically every trace of his criminal device. He was later convicted of the murder of his family, sentenced to death, and hanged.'*"[22]

Heath, as Vance finished reading, leapt to his feet.

"That's a new one on me." He went swiftly to the door and bent over.

Vance smiled.

"There's no hole in the door above the bolt, Sergeant," he said. "No need, don't y' know. There's a keyhole."

Heath squared off and looked at the door.

"Still and all, the keyhole's only half-way over the bolt, and eight inches below it. No string fastened to the bolt and run through that keyhole would lock the room from the outside."

"True, Sergeant," Vance nodded. "But that's where the modification of the trick comes in. The person who planned bolting this door carried the idea to a few more decimal points. Don't forget we have *two* pieces of string and *two* pins."

"Well, I don't get it." Heath still stood scowling at the door. "The cases in those two books are easy enough to understand, but neither of 'em will work here."

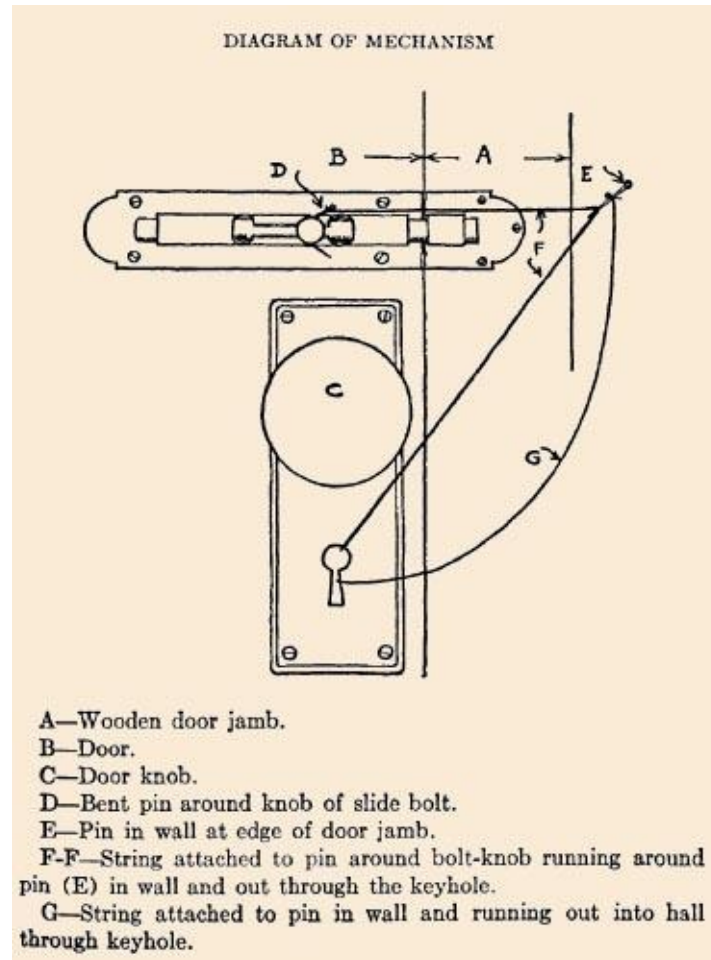
"Maybe the two together will work," suggested Vance. "Look at the wall just to the right of the jamb and opposite to the bolt. Do you see anything?"

Heath looked closely, using his pocket magnifying glass and his flashlight.

"I don't see much," he grumbled. "Right in the crack of the jamb and wall there's what might be a pinhole."

"That's it, Sergeant!" Vance rose and went to the door; and Markham and I followed him. "I think I'll try the experiment I have in mind."





We all watched him with fascinated interest. First he reached in his pocket and drew forth the two pieces of string and bent pins and the darning-needle he had found in the pocket of Brisbane Coe's overcoat. By means of his pocket knife he straightened one of the pins and inserted it in the hole Heath had found in the wall at the edge of the jamb, giving it several taps with the handle of his knife to drive it in rather securely. He then threaded the other end of the string in the darning-needle and passed it through the keyhole into the hall, removing the needle and letting the string fall to the hall floor. After this operation, he bent the other pin securely round the upright knob of the bolt, passed the string over the pin he had driven into the wall, and, threading this second string into the darning-needle, passed it also through the keyhole to the hall. He then opened the door about eighteen inches, drawing the two strings partly back through the keyhole in a loop to permit the door to swing inward without disturbing his mechanism.

"Let us see if the device works," he said, with an undercurrent of suppressed excitement. "You stay in the room while I go outside and manipulate the strings."

He bent down and passed under the two strings into the hall. Then he closed the door gently, while we remained inside, our eyes riveted to the two strings and the two pins.

Presently we saw the string which was attached to the bolt-knob go taut, as Vance drew it slowly through the keyhole. Passing over the pin in the wall, which acted as a pulley, the string described a sharp angle, with the pin in the wall as the apex. Slowly Vance drew the string from outside, and the bolt, getting a straight pull around the pin, began to move into its socket on the jamb. The door was bolted!

The next thing we saw was the tightening of the other string—the one attached to the head of the pin in the wall. There came several jerks on the string—the pin in the wall resisted several times and bent toward the source of the pull. Finally, it was disengaged from the wall; and it was then drawn upward from its depending position, disappearing through the keyhole.

The other string, still hooked about the bolt-knob, was then drawn taut through the keyhole, describing a straight line from the bolt-knob to the keyhole which was almost directly below it. Another slight pull by Vance on the string, and the knob fell downward into its groove. Another pull, and the bent pin was disengaged from the knob and pulled through the keyhole into the hall.

Markham, Heath, and I had been bolted in the room from the hall as neatly as if we ourselves had shot the bolt and locked it. And there was no evidence of any kind—save the indiscernible pin-point hole in the crack of the wall—to show that it had not actually been bolted from the inside!

Vance's demonstration had been fascinating and, at the same time, sinister; for it had brought up vague and unplumbed possibilities and revealed to us that we were battling against a shrewd and resourceful antagonist.

The Sergeant, after a moment's stupefaction, threw back the bolt and opened the door.

"It worked?" asked Vance, coming into the room.

"It worked," mumbled Heath laconically, lighting the cigar he had been chewing on viciously for the past half-hour.



## 15. THE DAGGER STRIKES

(Thursday, October 11; 5.30 p.m.)

Markham sat for several minutes in a brown study.

"As you say, Vance," he remarked without looking up, "the technique of the bolting of the door from the hall explains one phase of the problem, but I can't see that we're any further along toward a solution of the double murder. Brisbane, after all, was a victim. Why should he have been interested in bolting Archer in this room?"

"Really, I couldn't say." Vance appeared as puzzled as Markham. "It might not have been Brisbane at all. The fact that the pins and the string were in his overcoat pocket means little . . . and yet . . ."

"If you want my opinion," put in Heath, "it was that Chink. Chinamen are full of tricks. Look at the puzzles those yellow babies think up."

At this moment the front door opened and slammed, and Burke called to the Sergeant from the lower hall. One of the detectives that had been sent out earlier that afternoon to check Miss Lake's and Grassi's alibis had returned to report. He was Emery, from the Homicide Bureau, who had worked on several other cases in which Vance had been interested.<sup>[23]</sup> He had been assigned to the Grassi alibi; and his report was brief and efficient.

"I interviewed Doctor Montrose at the Metropolitan. This fellow Grassi arrived there a little after four, and then the two of 'em went to the doc's apartment in East 86th Street. Grassi stayed there for dinner and went out at eight, saying he had an appointment in Mount Vernon at nine. He asked the doc directions for getting to Grand Central station."

Emery took out his note-book and opened it.

"I then hopped out to the Crestview Country Club and talked to the steward. He was for being cagy, but he finally came through and dug up the head waiter and the porter. They both remembered the Italian—on account of Miss Lake, I guess—and as far as they recollected he didn't show up till late—round eleven. Miss Lake had a table reserved for the dance, but didn't get there till after Grassi did. The party broke up about twelve-thirty.—And that's all I got."

Heath made a grimace at Markham.

"That checks with his story. But what I wanta know is where he was between eight and eleven. And there's no way of finding out unless we get a freak break."

"He was shuttingtling to and fro over our complicated transportation system—according to his tale," smiled Vance. Then he turned to Emery. "I say, did Doctor Montrose give you any titbits of gossip regarding Grassi's call aside from his request for information regarding Grand Central station?"

"Nothing, sir." Emery shook his head with ponderous discouragement. "Except that the Italian was called up on the phone during dinner."

When the detective had gone Vance went to the telephone and called Doctor Montrose at his home. After a few minutes' conversation he hung up the receiver and paced up and down.

"That phone call to Grassi," he murmured, "—very strange. Doctor Montrose says it upset Grassi terribly. Hardly finished his dinner, and seemed in a hurry to get away. The phone was in the hall just outside the dining-room door and Montrose couldn't help hearing some of Grassi's end of the conversation. Montrose says he protested bitterly against the message he received—called it an outrage, and intimated strongly that he would take steps. . . . Steps—now what could that mean? And who could have called him and upset him? Who knew he was going to Montrose's for dinner? . . . It couldn't have been Miss Lake—he wouldn't have threatened her and then joined her at a country-club dance. And Wrede could have had no dealings with him. . . . Perhaps Brisbane . . . or Archer. . . ."

It was growing dark and Vance switched on the electric lights. Then he sat down and inhaled deeply on his cigarette.

"Archer—yes, it could have been. . . . Sergeant, suppose you fetch the signor."

Heath went from the room, and Vance said to Markham:

"Ceramics, I opine. Nothing would be so likely to stir up Grassi as a disappointment along that line. . . ."

The Italian was ushered in by the Sergeant; and Vance went straight to the point.

"Who telephoned to you, Mr. Grassi, at Doctor Montrose's yesterday during dinner?"

Grassi gave a slight start; then looked defiantly at Vance.

"It was a personal matter—my own affair."

Vance sighed and with slow deliberation drew from his pocket the agreement that Archer Coe had written to Grassi regarding the sale of his collection. As Vance opened the letter and laid it on his knee, he watched Grassi. I, too, was watching the man, and I saw a peculiar change come over him. His eyes widened and stared; his face became almost blanched; and he stood with breathless rigidity as if suddenly transfixed by hypnosis.

"It was Mr. Archer Coe who phoned you, was it not, Mr. Grassi?" came Vance's flat and unemotional voice.

Grassi neither moved nor spoke.

"Perhaps he regretted the bargain he had made with you for the sale of so many of his beloved pieces," Vance continued. "Perhaps he decided to call the deal off, after thinking it over alone with his treasures. . . . Perhaps he thought it best to inform you immediately of his decision so you would not talk of the transaction to Doctor Montrose. . . ."

Still Grassi did not move, but the inevitable impression he gave was that Vance had guessed the import of the telephone call he had received at the Curator's home the night before.

"I can well imagine how you felt, Mr. Grassi," Vance went on, without alteration of tone. "After all, the bargain had been made and you held Mr. Coe's letter of confirmation. But really, y' know, you shouldn't have threatened him—"

Suddenly the Italian's pent-up emotion broke forth.

"I had every right to threaten him!" he burst forth, the blood rushing back to his face. "For a week I have been negotiating—meeting his constantly increasing prices. Finally, yesterday, we reach an understanding. He puts it in writing, and I cable to Italy announcing my success. Then he rejects the agreement; he tells me he will not sell—that he has changed his mind. He insults me over the telephone: he says I have swindled him. He dares me to do anything about it! He even says to me that he will swear I forced him to sign that letter by pointing a revolver at him. . . ." Grassi raised his clenched hands in a gesture of outrage. "What could I do?" he almost shouted. "I threatened him as he had threatened me. I told him I would use any means at my disposal to hold him to his agreement. I was justified!"

"Oh, doubtless—in such circumstances." Vance nodded vaguely. "What did Mr. Coe say then?"

"What did he say?" Grassi took a step toward Vance and bent forward. He spoke in a curious, hushed tone. "He said he would break every vase he owned before he would let me have them."

Vance gave a mirthless smile.

"No wonder you were a bit disconcerted at the sight of those *Ting yao* fragments! . . . But Mr. Coe didn't smash the vase, Mr. Grassi. That desecration was achieved—inadvertently—by the person who killed him. Most unfortunate, what?"

Vance got to his feet wearily, folded Archer Coe's letter, and held it out to Grassi.

"If this document will comfort you, you may have it back. I believe I've finished with it. . . . That will be all for the present."

Grassi hesitated. He studied Vance suspiciously for a moment. Then he took the letter, made a low bow, and left the room.

Markham, who had been following the interview intently, addressed Vance as soon as Grassi was out of hearing.

"A curious and ominous situation. Grassi is refused the collection, on which he has obviously set his heart and staked his honor; and he threatens Coe. Then he disappears for three hours, saying he took the wrong train; and this morning Coe is found dead, with all the superficial indications of suicide."

"Exactly."

"And what's more," added Heath aggressively, "Coe was stabbed in the back with a dagger. These Italians are mighty handy with the stiletto."

"But why should he also stab Brisbane?" Vance asked dispiritedly. "And why the revolver? And why the bolted door? And especially why the Scottie? . . . We now have nearly all the parts of the puzzle, but none of them seems to fit."

"You were counting a great deal on the dog this morning," Markham observed.

"Yes, yes—the dog." Vance lapsed into silence for a while, his eyes gazing out of the east window into the gathering dusk of the October twilight. "And no one here liked dogs—no one but Wrede. Funny he should give his pet away. . . ." Vance's voice was scarcely audible: it was as though he were thinking out loud. "A Doberman Pinscher . . . too big, of course, to keep in a small apartment. And I wouldn't take Wrede for a dog lover. Too unsympathetic. . . . I think I'll have converse with him. . . ."

He stepped to the telephone. A moment later he was talking with Wrede. The conversation was very brief, but during it Vance jotted down some notes on the phone pad. When he had replaced the receiver Markham gave an exasperated grunt.

"Why should you be concerned with Wrede's former pets?" he asked.

"I'm sure I don't know," Vance admitted frankly. "Some vague association perhaps. The unknown Scottie was found downstairs; and the only other dog that has been mentioned in this case is Wrede's. I'll confess the connection is far-fetched. But Wrede and dogs don't go together—the combination is almost as incongruous as was the presence of the wounded Scottie in the hall. And I hate incongruities."

Markham strove to control his irritation.

"Well, what did you learn about Wrede's dog?"

"Nothing staggerin'. He had the Doberman only a few months—bought him at a show in Westchester. Then when he moved from his house in Greenwich Village to his present apartment he gave the dog to some friends of his." He pointed to the phone pad. "I have their name—they live on Central Park West, in the eighties. . . . I think I'll drop by and see them. Y' know, Markham, I'm dashed interested in Doberman Pinschers. They're beautiful dogs. And they were the original police dogs in Germany. 'Police dog' is a misnomer, however, when applied to any one breed. Almost any dog may be a police dog. We have the erroneous idea in this country that the German shepherd dog is the only police dog—in fact, he is called a Police Dog, as if the two names were synonymous. In England he is known as an Alsatian. The Doberman Pinscher is a cross between a shepherd dog and a Pinscher—the name given Continental terriers. He's a comparatively new breed, but has become very popular, for, aside from his beautiful conformation, he is strong, muscular, vigorous, intelligent, extremely alert, and, when incensed, vicious and savage. He's an excellent dog for police work, for, once fully trained, he retains his knowledge better than any other dog. . . ."

Markham got up and yawned.

"Thanks awfully. Your dissertation is most edifying. But I hardly think I'll call in a Doberman to solve the present case. It might make the Sergeant jealous."

Heath grinned good-naturedly.

"I'm for anything that'll solve this case, Chief. But I'm thinking that Mr. Vance may have something in his mind."

"Sergeant," said Vance, going toward the door, "you flatter me abominably."

It was decided to discontinue the investigation for the day. We were all tired and confused, and there were no leads to follow. The case was teeming with possibilities, but the contradictions of the various details made logical speculation well-nigh impossible. Vance suggested a complete cessation until he could make an inquiry into the ownership of the wounded Scottie. His sanguine attitude toward the presence of the dog in the house struck me as extravagant; and I knew Markham felt the same way about it. But since there was little more that could be done at the moment, he gave in hopefully to Vance's suggestions.

"It's quite safe," Vance told him, when he had reached the lower hall, "to let the various members of the household go about their business. Only, they should be on hand tomorrow for interrogation. I can assure you, Markham, no one will run away."

A short conference in the drawing-room settled the matter. Gamble was told to proceed with his duties, as usual; and Miss Lake and Grassi were informed that they were free to go and come as they chose, provided they were available for questioning.

"Keep a man in Coe's bedroom, however," Vance admonished the Sergeant; "and it would also be well to have a man outside to check on any one entering or leaving the house."

As we approached the front door Guilfoyle, the detective from the Homicide Bureau whom the Sergeant had sent to check Hilda Lake's alibi, came in and reported. But he had unearthed nothing helpful. Miss Lake had dined at Arrowhead Inn with friends, and had departed alone by motor, arriving at the Crestview Country Club about eleven o'clock. Guilfoyle had been unable to verify the motor accident which ostensibly had delayed her arrival at the Club.

Vance, Markham and I went out into the chill air. It had been a day of horror, and the cool breeze from the park was invigorating. When we were entering the District Attorney's car, Markham asked: "Were you serious, Vance, about seeing those people to whom Wrede gave the Doberman Pinscher?"

"Oh, quite. . . . It will take only a few minutes."

The name of the people was Enright; and they lived in a penthouse in one of the new apartment buildings on Central Park West, almost opposite the reservoir. The butler informed us that Mrs. Enright was out of the city, and that Mr. Enright was at that moment walking the dog in the park. He suggested that we might find him on the circular path around the reservoir.

Entering the park at 85th Street, we traversed the gardens on the west, crossed the main motor road, and cut across the lawn to the reservoir path. Few people were in the park at this hour and the figures about the reservoir were not many. We sat down on a bench by the path entrance and waited. Presently there appeared round the Fifth Avenue turn a very large man with a dog on a leash.

"That will be Enright," said Vance. "Suppose we stroll toward him."

Enright proved to be a genial, easy-going type of man of great bulk. (I learned later that he was an importer of food-stuffs from out-of-the-way places in the South Seas.) Vance introduced himself and presented Markham and me. Enright was cordial and talkative; and when Vance mentioned Wrede's name he became voluble regarding his long friendship with the man. As he chatted I had a good look at the dog. I was not familiar with the breed, but I was nevertheless struck with his qualities. He was lean and muscular, with beautiful lines, his coat a shiny black with rust-red, sharply defined markings. The dominating impression he gave was that of compact, muscular power, combined with great speed and intelligence—a dog that would make a loyal and protective friend and a dangerous enemy.

"Oh, yes," Enright said, in answer to a question from Vance. "Wrede gave me and the missus Ruprecht last spring. Said he couldn't keep him in a small apartment. We've got a penthouse—plenty of roof for the fellow to run around. But I always take him out at night and give 'im a to-and-fro in the park. Good for him. Dogs get fed up with tiles and brickwork—need to feel the sod under their paws and to get their noses in the good earth now and then. Like human beings. I take a trip to the country every year—into the wilderness. —Rough it—get back to nature—"

"Oh, quite," agreed Vance pleasantly. "But one does miss the conveniences when in the wilderness—doesn't one?"

He went toward the Doberman and bent over, making a friendly clicking sound with his tongue and calling the dog gently by name. He extended the back of his hand slowly toward the dog's muzzle and ran his hand over his occiput and down his slightly arched neck. But the dog would not respond. He shrank back, gave a frightened whine, and crouched down on his haunches, trembling.

"That don't mean he don't like you, Mr. Vance," Enright explained, patting the dog on the head. "He's shy as the devil. Distrustful of strangers. Gad! You should have seen him when I first got him. He crawled under a big settee in the den and wouldn't come out for two days—not even to eat. Had to drag him out twice a day and put him on the roof. Then back he'd go under the settee. . . . Queer ideas dogs get. Neither me nor the missus are formidable, and we love dogs. Wouldn't be without one. But Ruprecht is lots better now than he used to be. Getting a little confidence. He's pretty near all right when he's alone with me."

"He'll probably get over it," Vance told him encouragingly. "The right treatment, don't y' know. . . . He's a beautiful specimen—not a Sieger Kanzler von Sigalsburg,<sup>[24]</sup> but he has a clean head, no lippiness, a long arched neck, a deep chest, muscular body and sloping back; and he's correct size—around seventy pounds, I'd say. . . . Ever show him?"

"Oh, I entered him once—Cornwall. But he wouldn't show. Lay down in the ring and whimpered. Damn shame, too, for the two fellows that went over him lacked quality,—one had a loose shoulder, and the other was cow-hocked and had prominent light eyes."

"It's all in the game," Vance murmured sympathetically.

We walked with the garrulous Enright back to his apartment house and took leave of him. When we were in the District Attorney's car, headed down-town, Vance spoke, and his voice was troubled.

"Something queer about that dog, Markham—something deuced queer. Why should he be timid? Why should he distrust and fear strangers? It's not like a Doberman to act that way. By nature they are alert and shrewd and fearless, with energetic natures. They're among the best watch dogs of all the larger breeds. . . . Shy—lying down in the ring. . . . Yes, something has happened to him. He's had a blighting experience of some kind. . . ."

Markham beat an annoyed tattoo on the window ledge of the car.

"Yes, yes; it's very sad, I suppose. But what possible connection can there be between a shy Doberman in Central Park West and the murder of Archer Coe?"

"I haven't the vaguest notion," Vance returned cheerfully. "But there are only two dogs in this case, and one of them is browbeaten and timid, and the other is viciously wounded."

"Pretty far-fetched," Markham grumbled.

Vance sighed.

"I dare say. But so are the circumstances surrounding the murders themselves." He lighted a fresh cigarette and glanced at his watch. "It's drawing on toward dinner time. Currie has promised me filet of sole *Marguéry* and *Chatouillard* potatoes, and hot-house strawberries *Parisienne*. Does that tempt you? . . . And I'll open a bottle of that '95 Château-Yquem you're so fond of."

"You cheer me, old man." Markham gave an order to the chauffeur. "But first I'll take two double ponies of your *Napoléon* brandy. I'm in vile humor."

"Ah, a bit of forgetfulness—eh, what? Quite right you are. There'll be nothing to irk us till tomorrow."

But Vance was mistaken. That night the Coe case entered a new and more sinister phase. Markham dined with us and remained until

nearly eleven chatting about various subjects from the drawings of George Grosz to Griffith Taylor's new theory of the migration and status of races. He departed with the understanding that he was to pick us up at ten the next day.

It was exactly half-past two in the morning when Vance's private phone rang. It woke me from a deep sleep, and it was several minutes before I could answer it. Markham's voice came over the wire demanding Vance. I carried the portable phone set to his room and handed it to him in bed. He listened a brief minute; then he set the instrument on the floor, yawned, stretched, and threw back the bedclothes.

"Dash it all, Van!" he complained, as he rang for Currie. "Grassi has been stabbed!"

## 16. THE DEN WINDOW

(Friday, October 12; 3 a.m.)

When Vance and I arrived at the Coe house, Markham and Sergeant Heath were already there. There was a detective from the Homicide Bureau sitting glumly on the front steps. He gave one look at us and turned his head away—we seemed to spell trouble for him. I did not understand his attitude until later.

Gamble, white and trembling, in bedroom slippers and a long flannel robe, opened the door for us and led the way upstairs. We went to the second floor, walked back toward the front of the house, and entered Grassi's quarters. The curtains were drawn and all the lights were on.

Heath and Markham stood at the foot of Grassi's bed, looking at the prostrate figure lying there. Sitting in a straight chair, on the opposite side of the bed, was a capable-looking man of about forty, short and slightly bald, who reminded me somewhat of Doctor Alexis Carrel.

"This is Doctor Lobsenz," Markham informed Vance. "He has his office in 71st Street, near here, and Gamble called him in."

Doctor Lobsenz looked up, nodded, and went on about his work with swift efficiency.<sup>[25]</sup>

Grassi lay on his back, clad in white silk pajamas. He was ghastly pale, and the arm nearest us moved restlessly on the sheets, like that of a person under the influence of hyoscin. There was an area of blood, perhaps twelve inches in diameter, on the sheet at his left side nearest the doctor. His pajama coat was also stained with blood.

Grassi's eyes were closed, but his lips were moving incoherently. The left sleeve of his pajama coat had been ripped up to the shoulder, and there was a pad and a close-fitting dressing around the elbow of his left arm. A stain of blood could be seen through the dressing where the hemorrhage was still oozing. Presently the doctor rose.

"I think that's all I can do for him at the minute, Mr. Markham," he said. "I'll send for the ambulance immediately."

Markham nodded. "Thank you, doctor." Then he turned to Vance.

"Grassi was stabbed through the left arm. Doctor Lobsenz says it is not a dangerous wound."

Vance's eyes were on Grassi's face. Without looking up he spoke. "Just what is the nature of the wound, doctor?"

"He was stabbed at the outer border of the biceps tendon, where it crosses the dimple of the anti-cubital fossa. The thrust punctured the median basilic vein and caused a profuse hemorrhage. But it luckily missed the basilic artery."

"What shaped weapon would you say was used?" asked Vance.

The doctor hesitated.

"The wound was a bit ragged, and of a rather peculiar conformation; it was not made with a knife, but with some instrument like a very thick awl."

"Could it have been a small dagger with a diamond-shaped blade?"

"Yes, very easily. The wound was jagged and there was too much bleeding to determine exactly the contours; but I can let you know later, when I've washed and sterilized it."

Vance nodded. "You needn't bother." Then he added: "You're taking him to the hospital?"

"Yes; immediately," the doctor told him. "I have merely put on a temporary dressing—a gauze compress held by a bandage. I'll have to have him in the hospital in order to enlarge and disinfect the wound and to tie up the severed ends of the bleeding vessel. He should be all right by tomorrow."

"Have you given him any medication?"

"He was pretty nervous and upset, and I gave him three grains of sodium-amytal by mouth. It'll quiet him tonight and he'll be able to return here tomorrow. His arm will be in a sling for a few days, but unless there is an infection there's no danger."

Vance still had his eyes on Grassi.

"Is he in shape to be questioned for a while before you take him to the hospital?" he asked.

The doctor bent over Grassi, felt his pulse, and looked at his pupils.

"Oh, yes." He walked toward the door. "The ambulance won't be here for half an hour." He went into the hall where Gamble was standing.

"Where's the phone?" we heard him ask the butler.

Doctor Lobsenz was no sooner out of the room than Grassi opened his eyes and looked up at us, shifting in the bed and trying to assume a more upright position. Vance arranged the pillows under his shoulders and drew up the sheet. Grassi stared from one to the other of us as if he were surprised to see us there.

"Thank God you've come!" he said, his eyes resting on Vance. "After all that has occurred today—then to have this happen. It's terrible! I hope I never see this house again." He gave a shudder and his eyes closed. "It's an outrage!" he went on. "An unspeakable outrage! I have heard many strange tales of American lawlessness, but this surpasses anything I could have imagined."

"Well, anyway, you weren't killed," Vance murmured.

He was now walking round the room. He seemed suddenly to have forgotten the presence of the man on the bed and to have taken an interest in the various objects on the floor and about the walls. He looked carefully at the door, tried the knob; studied the arrangement of Grassi's shoes near the foot of the bed; opened the closet door and looked inside; moved to the east window, opened the shade and drew it again; took the lid off a small ivory clothes hamper, scrutinized the contents and replaced the lid; studied the arrangement of the furniture; and finally switched the lights off and on again.

Grassi's lids were half-closed, but I could see that his eyes followed every move Vance made. When Vance had switched the lights back on, Grassi lifted himself on one elbow.

"What are you searching for?" he demanded. "What right have you to come in here and take advantage of my helplessness? If you

will inform me of what you want I will tell you where to find it—if that is the usual police procedure in this barbarous country."

Despite the venomous sarcasm in his voice there was a marked undercurrent of excitement.

Vance sat down in a chair beside the bed and calmly took out a cigarette, lighting it with leisurely deliberation.

"Is it not," he asked, "the custom in your country also, Mr. Grassi, to glance over a room in which a crime—or an attempted crime—has been committed?"

"Well, what did you find?" demanded the man on the bed.

"Nothing really excitin'," Vance replied. "Suppose you tell us what happened."

"That will not take long." Grassi turned to Markham. "But I want justice. I want revenge."

"You'll have it," Markham assured him. "But we'll want your help and co-operation. Do you feel equal to going into this matter now?"

Grassi settled back on the pillows.

"Certainly.—I went to bed early. I was fatigued—the excitement today . . . I am sure you will understand. It was before eleven o'clock—and I went to sleep immediately. I was exhausted—"

"You turned out the lights?" Vance asked casually.

"Naturally. And I also drew down the shades. The street lights are often annoying. . . . I was awakened by some slight noise—I cannot say exactly what it was. But I lay quiet for a moment, listening, and hearing nothing further, started to doze off again when I suddenly became aware—I do not know exactly how to explain it—of the presence of somebody in the room. There was no noise or movement—I had a sort of sixth sense. . . ."

"Perhaps you are psychic," suggested Vance, with a slight yawn.

"It may be," Grassi agreed. "At any rate, I kept perfectly still and let my eyes move about the room. But it was very dark—there was only a faint nimbus of light filtering through the drawn shades. But as I looked at the window I saw a vague shape pass in front of me, and I instinctively threw my left arm across my breast, as if to ward off something which I felt was endangering me, but which I did not understand. Almost simultaneously I felt a sharp stinging pain in my left arm, just above the elbow—and a curious sort of pressure. Whether it was the pain or whether it was from being startled and frightened I do not know, but I lost consciousness for a moment. I probably fainted. . . ."

"When I regained consciousness I felt a warm, sticky wetness under my left side, and the pain in my arm had increased and was throbbing."

Grassi looked at Markham appealingly. Then his eyes moved to Heath, and finally to Vance. Both Markham and the Sergeant were standing close to the bed, listening intently; but Vance had settled down in his chair lethargically and was placidly smoking, as if the man's recital had little or no interest for him. But I knew Vance well enough to realize that he was at this moment intensely absorbed in the recital.

"What did you do then?" Vance asked.

Grassi took a deep breath and again closed his eyes.

"I called out several times and waited; but as no one answered, I arose and pressed the electric switch by the door—"

"On which side of the bed did you arise?" Vance interrupted.

"On the side on which you are sitting," Grassi informed him. "And as soon as I had turned on the lights, I opened the door—"

Vance's eyebrows went up.

"Ah, the door was closed?"

"Not quite. It was, as you say, unlatched. . . . Then I called again—into the hall; and the butler—upstairs—answered me. I sat down on the edge of the bed and waited until he arrived. . . ."

"Did any one else answer your summons?"

"No. The butler went immediately to the telephone in the hall, downstairs, and I could hear him summoning medical assistance."

"He called me also," Markham put in. "That's why we happen to be here."

"And I am most grateful," said Grassi graciously.

Vance rose slowly and walked to a beautiful old Boule cabinet between the two east windows, and ran his fingers over the inlay.

"I say, Mr. Grassi"—he spoke without turning round—"what about that blood-stained bath towel in the hamper?"

Grassi glanced up with more alertness than he had shown at any time during the conversation.

"There was a bath towel on this little stand beside the bed," he explained. "You see, I have no private bath and the butler always leaves me my bath towel at night. When I arose I wrapped it around my arm—"

"Ah, yes—quite so." Vance turned from the Boule cabinet and walked toward the door. "That accounts for the fact that there are no bloodstains on the floor."

Vance was now inspecting the lock of the door.

"How did it happen, Mr. Grassi," he asked in an offhand manner, "that you didn't lock your door before you said your prayers and went to bed last night?"

"The lock does not work," Grassi returned in a tone of injured defiance.

Gamble stepped up to the threshold at this moment.

"That's quite true, sir," he said. "I owe Mr. Grassi an apology. I should have had it mended long ago, but it escaped my memory."

Vance waved the butler away.

"That's quite all right, Gamble. You've explained matters perfectly."

At this moment a siren was heard in the street, and Vance went to the front window and looked out.

"The ambulance is here," he announced. "We hope, Mr. Grassi, that you have a quiet night, and that we will see you tomorrow feeling quite yourself again."

Doctor Lobsenz appeared at the door with Gamble.

"Through with my patient?" he asked. "If so, I'll get some clothes on him and take him along."

Vance nodded.

"Thank you, doctor, and good luck. . . . And now, Markham, suppose we go downstairs to the library and do a bit of thinking—although it's a beastly hour for mentation. . . ."

After Grassi, accompanied by Doctor Lobsenz, had departed, Vance closed the library doors and walked to the large centre table.

"There it is, Markham, old dear," he said with a grim smile, pointing to the Chinese dagger before him.

The dagger lay on the library table in almost exactly the same spot where we had left it the afternoon before; but now there was undried blood upon it and its condition told us, only too plainly, that it was the weapon which had been used to strike through Grassi's arm.

"But why," asked Markham with a puzzled frown, "should the man who attempted to kill Grassi bring the weapon back here to the library?"

"Probably," replied Vance, "for the same reason that the person who stabbed Archer and Brisbane Coe put the dagger in the vase in this same room."

"I don't understand it."

"Neither do I—altogether. But at least there's a certain consistency in the actions of our stabber."

"You think," asked Markham, "that the same person who stabbed the Coes attempted Grassi's life also?"

"Why leap at conclusions?" sighed Vance. "There are so many other things to be ascertained before we can reach any intelligent conclusion."

"For instance?"

Vance arranged himself comfortably in a large chair.

"Well," he said, inhaling deeply on his *Régie*, "I could endure to hear the various persons inside and outside the house chant their runes as to what they know of tonight's happenings. . . . And there are other things which might bear casual scrutiny—to wit: Why did Grassi's call for help not arouse Miss Lake on the third floor ere it penetrated to Gamble's ears? And what hath yon Cerberus on the front stone steps to say about those who may have come and gone tonight? And where, and doing what, was the subtle Mr. Liang during the upheaval? And also what of the doughty guard which I asked to have stationed in Archer Coe's bedroom tonight?"

Heath, who during the entire time we had been at the Coe house had been in a state of silent but aggressive indecision, stood up and squared his shoulders.

"Well, Mr. Vance, we'll get all of your questions answered pronto."

He went resolutely to the front door. Before he opened it he turned back to the library.

"And I'm telling the world I'd like to get the answers to those questions myself. I asked that detective out front who'd been in here tonight, and he said nobody. But we'll ask him again."

He threw the door open.

"Come here, Sullivan," he bawled; and the dejected figure we had passed on the front steps came into the library.

"A guy's been stabbed here," Heath blustered. "You told me no one had come in or gone out the front door. But this is serious business, and we want you to rack your brain, if any, and tell us what you know."

Detective Sullivan was both abashed and defiant.

"I told you, Sergeant," he insisted, "that I've been sitting on those steps since seven o'clock tonight and nothing or nobody, so much as a cockroach, has passed me, goin' or comin'."

"Maybe you went to sleep and just dreamed it all," the Sergeant suggested sarcastically.

Detective Sullivan became indignant.

"Me sleep? Honest, Sergeant, there's enough noise in this two-way traffic street to wake up a dead man, let alone allow anybody to pound his ear."

"That's enough, Sergeant," said Vance mildly. "I think Sullivan is telling the truth. I have a feeling that no one came in the front door tonight."

Sullivan was sent back to the front steps and Heath went into the hall.

"I'll find out about Burke in Coe's room," he offered.

We could hear him going up the steps two at a time and opening Archer's bedroom door. A moment later he appeared with Detective Burke in tow.

"Tell Mr. Markham and Mr. Vance," he ordered gruffly, "what you've been doing all night."

"I been sleeping," Burke admitted frankly. "I pulled up a chair against the door and forgot my troubles. Was there anything the matter with that, Sergeant?"

Heath hesitated.

"Well, I guess not. You been working all day—and I didn't tell you to keep awake. But a guy's been stabbed right down the hall from you, and he called for help—and now you know nothin' about it." The Sergeant shook his head with disgust. "Well, go on back and see if you can keep awake for a while."

Burke went out.

"My fault," the Sergeant explained. "After all, you can't blame him, Mr. Vance."

"Burke wouldn't have been able to help us anyway, I'm afraid," Vance consoled him. . . . "Suppose we commune with Gamble."

The butler was brought in. He was a pitiful figure as he stood before us in questioning fear.

"How do you account for the fact," Vance asked him, "that you could hear Mr. Grassi's call from the second floor and that his appeal for help should entirely have missed the ears of Miss Lake who is on the floor between Mr. Grassi's room and yours?"

Gamble swallowed twice and braced himself against the door.

"That is quite simple, sir," he said. "Miss Lake's boudoir is at the rear of the house and there's a large parlor between her boudoir and the door leading into the hall. I, sir, leave my door open on the fourth floor, in case the front door bell should ring or I should be called."

When Gamble had been sent back to the upper hall, Vance sighed and crushed out his cigarette.

"Well, that explains that. . . . Really, y' know, Markham, we don't seem to be moving with what might be called precipitate rapidity."

He lit a fresh cigarette and stood up.

"I think I'll take a look at the rear of the house. Would you care to stagger along?"

The Sergeant nodded sagely.

"You think the guy that stabbed the Italian got in the back way, do you, Mr. Vance?"

"I have come to the conclusion, Sergeant," Vance returned sadly, as he went toward the door leading into the dining-room, "that thinking at this hour of the morning is a frightful waste of effort."

Vance switched on the dining-room lights, and we followed him toward the kitchen. As he opened the door leading into the butler's pantry I was surprised to see a rectangular line of light around the kitchen door.

Vance halted momentarily.

"I wonder . . ." he murmured, as if to himself. And then: "No, no; Gamble wouldn't have dared come near the rear of the house—he's in a blue funk."

He proceeded across the pantry and pushed open the swinging door into the kitchen.

Under the central light, seated at a large kitchen table of white pine, was Liang, fully dressed, and with a green eye-shade pulled down to the bridge of his nose. Before him on the table were a pile of books and many sheets of scattered paper. As we entered he rose and faced us, removing his eye-shade. He did not seem at all astonished at seeing us there at such an unusual hour; he smiled pleasantly and made a stiff bow.

"Good evening, Mr. Liang," Vance greeted him amiably. "You're working rather late."

"I had many things to do tonight—my work had accumulated. My monthly report to the Ta Tao Huei is overdue. . . . I trust I have not discommoded the household."

"You have been working all night—here in the kitchen?" Vance asked, going to the porch door and trying it. (It was locked.)

"Since eight o'clock," the Chinaman returned. "May I be of any service to you?"

"Oh, no end." Vance sauntered back and perched himself on a high stool. "Have you been aware of anything unusual in the house tonight, Mr. Liang?"

The man looked mildly surprised.

"Quite the contrary. It seemed very peaceful after the excitement today."

"Restful—eh, what? Astonishin'! And yet, Mr. Liang, while you were engaged in your liter'ry labors, Signor Grassi was stabbed."

There was no change of expression on the Chinaman's face as he answered: "That is most unfortunate."

"Yes, yes, quite." Vance's tone was slightly irritable. "But did you, by any chance, hear any one or see any one enter the rear door this evening?"

Liang shook his head slightly in a slow and indifferent negative.

"No," he said. "No one, to my knowledge, entered by the rear door. . . . Perhaps the front door—"

"Many thanks for the suggestion," Vance interrupted with a shrug; "but there's been some one guarding it."

"Ah!" The Chinaman moved his eyes a little until they rested on a point somewhere above Vance's head. "That is indeed interesting. . . . Perhaps the den window—"

"An excellent suggestion!" Vance stepped down from the stool. "The den window, eh, Mr. Liang?"

"It would be a logical choice," the man answered. "It cannot be seen either from the street or from the house, and there is a cement walk immediately beneath it, so that there would be no footprints."

"Our gratitude, and all that, Mr. Liang," Vance murmured. "I'll have a look at the window. . . . Pray continue with your work." And he led the way back through the dining-room into the library.

"Well, what about it?" grumbled Heath. "A swell lot you learned from that Chink."

"Still, Sergeant," Vance returned, "it was kind of Mr. Liang to suggest the den window. Why not take a peep at it?"

Heath hesitated, squinted, and then went swiftly across the hall into the drawing-room. We could hear him open the den door and walk heavily across the small room. A few moments later he returned to the library.

"There's something damn queer about this," he announced. "Maybe the Chink was right, after all. The den window was open—and the sofa that was in front of it was pulled out at a cock-eyed angle." He glanced at Markham helplessly. "Maybe somebody did get in and out of that window, Chief. . . . Anyhow, where do we go from here?"

"Home and to bed, my dear Pepys," said Vance. "This is no hour for respectable people to be up. There's nothing more to be done here."



## 17. THE SIX JUDGES

(Friday, October 12; 9 a.m.)

Vance rose early that morning. I myself was around at nine o'clock and was surprised to find him in street clothes and on the point of leaving the house.

"I'll be back in half an hour, Van," he said, as he went out, but gave no further explanation.

Fifteen minutes later Markham arrived, and he had waited but ten minutes when Vance came in. He was carrying the Scottish terrier bitch in his arms. There was a dressing on her head held in place by adhesive tape, but otherwise she seemed alert and well.

"Morning, Markham," Vance greeted the District Attorney. "Really, y' know, I didn't expect you so early. I've just toddled over to Doctor Blamey's to see how the little Scotch lassie was getting along—and here she is."

He put the dog down and rang for Currie. When the man came he ordered Melba toast and a dish of warm milk.

"A little breakfast for the lass," he explained. "I've a feelin' she's going to do a bit of travellin' to-day."

Markham looked at him sceptically.

"You still think you can trace the person we want through that dog?"

"It's about our only hope," Vance told him seriously. "The case is far too complicated as it stands—there are too many contradictions. I am sure that you, as a prosecuting attorney, could pin the various crimes on any one of three or four people. But until I have traced the ownership and peregrinations of this Scottie, I sha'n't be satisfied."

Markham frowned. "Just how do you intend to go about it?"

Vance studied the terrier for a few moments as he crumbled the Melba toast into the dish of milk. He ran his hands over her contours; he looked at her teeth; he felt her coat; put his fist under her brisket; and took one of her forelegs in his hand.

"As I told you, Markham, this little bitch is in perfect show condition. She's been trimmed and conditioned by an expert, and it seems pretty certain that she's been entered in some show recently. She's a show dog, and her stripping is that of a professional handler; it is no pet-shop or hospital assistant's job; and owners of dogs do not go to the professional type of trimmer unless they have the ring in mind. My guess is, from her condition, that she's been shown within the last month. And it's simple enough to find what shows have been held within a reasonable radius of New York during that period."

"But why couldn't she have been shown before?" Markham asked.

"Because," explained Vance, "her coat wouldn't have been ready. She's just in full coat now—it's only beginning to go 'bye.' Over a month ago her coat would have been too short. . . . But never mind the technicalities."

He went into the library and returned with his file of *Popular Dogs*. Sitting down in his easy chair he placed the file across his knees and began running his finger down the calendar of official dog shows.

"Now, let's see," he murmured. "During the past month there has been held around New York the show at Syracuse—make a note of these, will you, Van? Then came the Cornwall show; and after that, Tuxedo. And a week later was the Camden show, which was followed by Westbury, and also the Englewood show. . . . That brings us pretty well up to date, and they are all possibilities. Moreover, if she was on exhibition at any of these shows, she was in either the puppy or the novice class—and perhaps in the American-bred, although I doubt it."

"And how do you figure that?" Markham was still sceptical.

"That's not so difficult," Vance elucidated. "She's about a year old, I should say—perhaps a month or two either way. . . ."

"You mean to tell me," asked Markham, "that you can look at a dog and tell how old it is?"

"Approximately—yes. But one looks at the teeth for one's information. Both the temporary and the permanent teeth of a dog appear at certain ages. The third molar, for instance, appears when the dog is between six and nine months old. And as this Scottie's molars are well formed, I know she is at least nine or ten months old. But that is not the real test. Age is judged largely by the appearance of the incisors and the wearing-away of the cusps. The incisors are crowned with three lobes—a central and two lateral—resembling a *fleur-de-lis*. During the first year these three cusps are all present and show very little wear; but during the second year the middle cusp begins to wear level with the laterals, and the *fleur-de-lis* disappears from the central incisors of the lower jaw. . . . Now, if we assume that this Scottie has had a normal diet, has not had too many bones to gnaw, and has not come in contact with stones, it may fairly accurately be deduced, from the condition of her teeth, that she is about a year old—perhaps just entering her second year. . . ."

"Very well," Markham was becoming bored. "Go on from there."

"Up to twelve months," Vance continued, "dogs are eligible for the puppy class. Moreover, any dog which hasn't won a blue ribbon, except in the puppy class, is eligible for the novice class. This dog is too young to have won any important blue ribbons, and therefore my guess would be that her entries would have been in the puppy and novice classes. . . . It's not an important matter, although it limits and facilitates my investigation somewhat."

"It sounds like shooting into the dark," Markham was far from convinced.

"You're right, to a certain extent," Vance agreed. "But there's a simpler way of determining the dog's ownership—and I shall try that first."

Vance stood looking down at the bandaged Scottie as she ate her milk and toast.

"The more I see of her, Markham, the more I'm convinced that there are only about five men in this part of the country who could have done such a perfect job of trimming. It takes a profound knowledge of the Scottish terrier and long years of experience to produce a contour and a balance of coat like this one. William Prentice could have done it; and George Wimberly, and Jimmy McNab, and Ellery Burke, and Steve Parton."

Vance walked round the dog several times, studying her.

"Wimberly is in Boston, so we may eliminate him on the grounds of distance. McNab is working in a private capacity for a kennel

on Long Island, and I hardly think he would qualify. Both Burke and Parton are fairly distant from New York, although they are certainly possibilities."

He knelt down and ran his hand over the contour of the dog's neck and lifted the hair along the spine. Then he stood up.

"William Prentice! That's the chap. That outline of the neck and the back has been achieved by a master hand, and there's no greater master at that in this country than Prentice. Furthermore, he's only a short distance from New York. . . . I think I'll try him first. If he did trim this dog he may be able to give us some information as to her ownership."

As soon as Markham had left us that morning, we drove to Mr. Prentice's famous Barlae Kennels at Haworth, New Jersey. Mr. Prentice, a middle-aged Scotsman with a dour demeanor but a twinkle in his blue eyes, stepped out of the main kennel as we alighted from the car. He took one look at the dog in Vance's arms.

"How d' ye do, Mr. Vance," was his greeting. (Vance had known him for years: Prentice had handled many of his dogs in the ring.) "A good one, yon bitch."

"You know her then?" asked Vance eagerly.

"Ay."

"And you trimmed her?"

"Ay."

"And about how long ago might that be?"

"I couldna say exactly, but it was after the first of September."

"Whose bitch is it?"

"That I couldna say. A lady and a gentleman drove up one afternoon and asked me if I could trim the dog at once. I said 'ay,' and I trimmed it."

Vance seemed disappointed.

"Was anything else said?" he asked.

"The gentleman said he wanted the bitch put in show condition."

"Ah! And have you seen her at any of the shows since then?"

Prentice shook his head thoughtfully. "I've been showing mostly Cairns this fall."

"What sort of man brought the dog to you? Could you describe him?"

"Ay. He was a large man, around fifty, and he had little enough to say."

"And the woman?"

"She was young and not difficult to look at."

"A blonde?"

"Ay."

"His daughter, perhaps?"

A shrewd twinkle came into the Scotsman's eyes.

"I hae me doots," was all he vouchsafed. Vance remained at the Barlae Kennels for perhaps half an hour, discussing dogs. On the way home he seemed in better spirits.

"In any event, Van," he said, "we can now go ahead with a certain assurance of success. If only Prentice had taken the owner's name and address, how simple everything would have been."

Returning to his apartment, he telephoned to the American Kennel Club and obtained the names of the Scottish terrier judges in the six shows he had selected as the most likely ones where the bitch might have been exhibited.

The six judges turned out to be Marguerite Kirmse, Karl B. Smith, Edwin Megargee, William MacBain, Morgan Stinemetz, and Robert D. Hartshorne.

Vance glanced down the list of names he had made. "Now, let us see. . . . I can probably find most of these judges in the city. Mr. Hartshorne and Mr. Smith may be at their offices, although it is Columbus Day. And at this time of year Mrs. Cole is generally in New York.<sup>[26]</sup> I may find Mr. Megargee in his studio. Mr. MacBain is somewhere in Wall Street, I believe; and Mr. Stinemetz surely must have an office in New York. . . . Let's see what we can find out."

He turned to the telephone and kept it busy for the best part of half an hour. Then he rose and took the dog in his arms.

"Come, Van, our itiner'ry begins."

A few minutes later we were in Vance's car, headed for the financial district.

We had to wait some time before Mr. Hartshorne returned to his office from the floor of the Exchange. He showed a keen interest in the dog and went over her carefully. But he could not remember having judged her in the show at which he had officiated. He said he would have been sure to have remembered her because of her outstanding qualities; but he was unable to give us any help.

Mr. MacBain was not in his office that day, because of the holiday. But we found Mr. Karl Smith at the New Cosmopolite Club. Mr. Smith, however, was unable to help us. He was quite sure that the dog had not been shown under him; so we went south again to Union Square to call on Mr. Megargee.

Mr. Megargee was in his studio, working on a large canvas of twelve of the famous Tapscot Cairn champions. But here again we met with disappointment, for he was not able to identify the dog as having been entered in the show at which he judged.

"Although there was a good entry," Mr. Megargee explained to Vance, "I know practically every dog and bitch that got in the ribbons that day, and this one was certainly not among them, or she would have taken the blue in either the puppy or the novice class."

Things began to appear discouraging, and Vance was not in the best humor as we drove to the east-side winter studio of Mrs. Marguerite Kirmse Cole.

Mr. and Mrs. Cole, owners of the Tobermory Kennels, greeted us graciously and did everything they could to help Vance out of his quandary. But to no avail. Mrs. Cole was positive the dog had not been an entry under her judgeship.

We stayed for a short time, looking at her lovely paintings and etchings of dogs,<sup>[27]</sup> and then returned to Vance's apartment for a belated luncheon.

It was past four in the afternoon when we arrived at Mr. William MacBain's Diehard Kennels in Closter, New Jersey. Mr. MacBain, who was then vice-president of the Scottish Terrier Club of America, was busily engaged with some of his young stock. He was most gracious when Vance asked for his assistance. He showed an intense interest in the dog that Vance had brought to him, but was unable to identify her.

"But there's unquestionably Ornsay blood in her," he said, running his hand over her skull.

Mr. MacBain was too old a breeder in the Scottish terrier fancy not to have remembered the dog at once if he had judged her, and when he shook his head in answer to Vance's query there was no doubt whatever that Vance had drawn another blank in his investigation of the wounded dog's ownership.

Vance had succeeded in locating the New York office of Mr. Stinemetz, but, on phoning, learned that he was not in the city that day but could undoubtedly be found at his country home.

Mr. Stinemetz's estate in Orangeburg was only a few miles from the Diehard Kennels and we headed for it somewhat despondently. The sun was setting over the Jersey hills and a cool breeze came up from the southwest.

"This is almost our last chance," Vance observed dejectedly, "—unless the dog has been shown in New England or the south. But if that were the case, why is she here in New York now?"

Vance was downcast: I realized for the first time how much he had counted on this stray Scottish terrier to help him in the solution of the crime which was perplexing him. But it was just at the moment when things seemed darkest that a ray of light was introduced into the situation. It was Mr. Stinemetz—the last of the judges we consulted—who gave Vance the information he was seeking.

Mr. Stinemetz was in his kennel, feeding his dogs, when we arrived. Vance showed him the little lost bitch and asked him if he had ever judged her. Mr. Stinemetz looked at her closely for a moment, took her in his arms and stood her on the show table in his main kennel.

"Yes," he said slowly, after a minute's inspection; "I not only judged her, but I put her up, three weeks ago at Englewood. She won the puppy bitch class, and I would have given her a first instead of a second in the novice class, if she had shown properly. For she has the quality, and if correctly handled should go over the top. But, as I remember, some young woman with little or no experience brought her into the ring. Naturally, she could get no response from the dog. I tried to help her out, but it was hopeless; and I had to give the blue to a bitch that had the style and the ring manners, but who wasn't this one's equal in anatomy. . . . There was one slight fault in the mouth, however."

Mr. Stinemetz held back the dog's lips, exposing her teeth.

"You see this upper incisor: it's out of place. But it's not a serious fault. There's many a champion with a much worse mouth."

Vance thanked him for his help and added: "Do you happen to know what bitch this is, or who owns her?"

Mr. Stinemetz shook his head.

"No, I never saw her before—she must be a newcomer. I didn't see a catalogue of the show and there were no *post mortems* at the judge's table after the show." [28]

Vance left Mr. Stinemetz's Quince Hill Kennels in a much happier frame of mind.

"Tomorrow," he said, as we drove home through the gathering dusk, "we will know the owner's name."

Immediately upon our arrival in New York, Vance telephoned to Markham at his home, and learned that there had been no developments in the case during the day. Grassi had returned to the Coe house at eleven o'clock that morning, evidently very little the worse for his experience of the previous night. He had wished to go to a hotel, but Markham had prevailed upon him to remain at the Coe residence until some light had filtered into the case, and Grassi had reluctantly agreed to do so.

Wrede had remained indoors all day and had telephoned to Markham twice and offered to give whatever assistance he could.

Hilda Lake had gone out about ten o'clock in the morning, dressed in sport clothes. When Heath had asked her where she was going, she had told him nonchalantly that she was going to take a drive in the country.

Sergeant Heath had remained on duty most of the day, but his labors had consisted in the main of answering phone calls and trying to pacify a small army of reporters with news of purely imaginary "developments." The den window-sill had been gone over carefully for finger-prints, but without results. A general routine investigation had been put in operation by the Sergeant, but, aside from this, nothing had been done.

"The case has me bogged," Markham complained sadly at dinner that night. (We had joined him, at his request, at the Stuyvesant Club.) "I see no way out of the situation. Even if we knew who committed the crimes, we couldn't show how they were accomplished—unless the guilty person himself chose to tell us. . . . And that attack on Grassi: instead of helping us, it has only put us deeper into the well. And there's nothing to take hold of. All the ordinary avenues of investigation are closed. Heaven knows there are enough people who might have done it—and there are enough motives for a dozen murders."

"Sad . . . sad," sighed Vance. "My heart bleeds for you, don't y' know. Still, there's some simple explanation. It's a deucedly complicated puzzle—a cryptogram with apparently meaningless words. But once we have the key letter, the rest of it will fall into place. And the key letter may be the Scottie. I'm hopin' for the best."

He applied himself for a moment to his salad.

"A bit of Beluga caviar," he drawled, "would improve this Russian dressing."

"Shall I report the oversight to the Club's board of governors, Monsieur Brillat-Savarin?"

"Oh, don't bother," Vance returned dulcetly. "They'd probably add salted caviar and ruin the dressing completely. . . . You might, however, confide in me the exact condition of the Coe domicile tonight."

"There's little to confide," Markham told him acerbiously. "Heath has done the usual things and gone home. However, he's left two men on guard, one in the street and one at the rear of the house. Grassi has remained in his room all day,—Heath's last report to me was that the gentleman had gone to bed. The lock on his door, by the way, has been fixed; so he'll probably live the night through. Miss Lake came in just as the Sergeant was going. . . . By the way, she took the news of Grassi's stabbing rather hard—"

Vance looked up quickly.

"I say, that's most interestin'."

"The Chinaman did not leave the house," Markham continued, "and told Heath he preferred to remain until the guilty person had been brought to justice."

"I do hope he hasn't too long to wait," Vance sighed. "But it's just as well if Liang stays with us. I feel that he's going to be most helpful to us anon. . . . And you, Markham, old dear: what have you been doing? Milk investigations, I suppose—and committees of eminent citizens who wish to uplift the drama—and interviews with aldermen."

"That's about all," Markham confessed. "What would you have suggested?"

"Really, Markham, I hadn't a suggestion today." Vance leaned back in his chair. "But tomorrow—"

"You're so helpful and satisfying," Markham snapped. "*Morgen, morgen, nur nicht heute; sagen immer träge Leute.*"

"Markham—my very dear Markham!" Vance protested reprovingly. "Really, don't y' know, I'm not lazy. I give you Cicero: '*Aliquod crastinus dies ad cogitandum dabit.*'"

## 18. THE SCOTTIE'S TRAIL

(Saturday, October 13; 9 a.m.)

At nine o'clock the following morning Vance called at the offices of the American Kennel Club, at 221 Fourth Avenue, and explained to the genial and accommodating secretary, Mr. Perry B. Rice, the nature of the information he sought. Mr. Rice was sympathetic and offered to do everything he could to help with the investigation.

"The officially marked catalogue of the Englewood show would give you what data you desire," he said.

He led us down the corridor and into a large room, and introduced us to Mrs. Del Campo, the head of the show department. The room was over forty feet long, with windows across the entire west wall. Great rows of steel filing cabinets lined the side walls, and near the windows was an enormous bookcase with glass doors, lined with red morocco-bound catalogues of all the official shows during nearly half a century. Beside the door was a large tier of open shelves holding all of the judges' books and entry blanks.<sup>[29]</sup> Near these open shelves was a series of filing cabinets containing the cards of every registered dog of every breed, showing all the wins each dog had made. A score of silent and efficient girls were at work in this room, filing cards, adding to the records, and checking the innumerable items that arise after every official show. About the walls were framed pictures of famous dogs of the various breeds.

Mrs. Del Campo, when Mr. Rice explained to her what Vance wanted, found the marked Englewood catalogue on which one of the girls was working. Turning to the Scottish terrier section, she ran her finger down the list of Puppy Bitch entries until she came to the winner of the class. The owner's name was given as Julius Higginbottom, and the name of the dog itself as Miss MacTavish. Then followed the A.K.C. Stud Book number and the date of birth—November 20 of the preceding year. The sire of the bitch was given as Champion Ormsay Autocrat, and the dam as Laurieston Lovelace. The breeder was Henry D. Bixby.

Vance made a note of these data, and while he was jotting them down, Mrs. Del Campo said:

"This catalogue hasn't yet been checked with the judges' book. . . . Just a minute and I'll compare them."

She procured the Scottish terrier judges' book from one of the desks and, opening it to the page headed Puppy Bitches, looked beside the printed numeral 1. There was a pencilled numeral—258. She compared this with the printed numeral in the catalogue in front of Miss MacTavish's name; and it was the same.

"And that's final?" asked Vance.

"No, not final," Mr. Rice told him. "Those data in the catalogue should be checked with the official pedigree card." And he made a note of the A.K.C. number which appeared after Miss MacTavish's name in the catalogue.

He then took us into the room next door—a room similar to the one we had just left. In this room there was also a great series of steel filing cases filled with cards bearing the official pedigrees and all information concerning every dog registered with the A.K.C., as well as a complete file of nearly five thousand registered kennel names.

Miss Dora Makin, the head of the registration department, took the number that Mr. Rice gave her and, going to a large steel cabinet at the left of the door, pulled out a drawer containing a double row of small cards. These cards were arranged in numerical order under each of the separate breeds. There were white cards for dogs and salmon-colored cards for bitches.

After a moment's search, Miss Makin drew forth Miss MacTavish's card. At the top of it appeared the bitch's name and breed and A.K.C. number. Then came the names of her sire and dam, the date she was whelped, the name of the breeder, and the name and address of the owner. All this information tallied accurately with the data contained in the official catalogue; but there was one added item, namely, the address of Julius Higginbottom, which was Mount Vernon, New York.

"Now, that's final, Mr. Vance," Mr. Rice said. "You may rest assured that the information is correct. We go through that process with every entry in every show. Dog people don't realize the enormous amount of detail work which goes on at the A.K.C. in order to keep the hundreds of thousands of records correct and to insure every one in the dog game an almost absolute protection."

After dropping into an office across the hall to pay his respects to Mr. Louis de Casanova, the editor of *The American Kennel Gazette*, Vance took his departure, and instructed his chauffeur to drive immediately to the Criminal Courts Building on the corner of Franklin and Centre Streets.

On our way downtown Vance expressed his admiration for the A.K.C. system.

"It's amazin', Van. An entire institution based on the ideal of accuracy. It has no commodity to sell: it's purely managerial in essence. It sells only accuracy and protection to the many thousands of sportsmen and dog lovers throughout the country. A unique and astonishin' institution."

When we arrived at the District Attorney's office on the fourth floor of the Criminal Courts Building, Markham was in conference with Sergeant Heath. Swacker, the District Attorney's secretary, ushered us immediately into Markham's private office.

"Things are moving." Vance sat down and took out his cigarette case. "I have just come from the American Kennel Club and have discovered a bit of most interestin' information. The wounded Scottie, Markham, belongs to none other than Julius Higginbottom."

"And who might he be, Vance? And why does the fact interest you?"

Vance lighted his cigarette leisurely.

"I have met Higginbottom. He's a member of the Crestview Country Club, and he has a large country estate at Mount Vernon, where he spends his entire time living what he imagines to be the life of a country gentleman—"

Heath sat forward in his chair.

"It was the Crestview Country Club at Mount Vernon," he interjected, "where Miss Lake and Grassi went to a dance Wednesday night."

"And that's not all, Sergeant." Vance sprawled luxuriously in his chair and took a deep inhalation on his *Régie*. "Higginbottom knew Archer Coe pretty well. Several years ago Higginbottom inherited, from an aunt, a very fine collection of early Chinese paintings,

many of which Coe bought from him at a preposterously low price. Higginbottom is something of a gay bird—the sporting type of man—and knew nothing of the value of the paintings. After he had sold them to Coe he learned from a dealer that they were very valuable, and there was consequent talk, in certain New York art circles, to the effect that Coe had put over a shrewd and somewhat unethical deal on Higginbottom. Higginbottom, as I know, took the matter up with Coe, but without any success, and there has been a certain amount of bad blood between them ever since. Higginbottom was a major in the World War and is a hot-headed sort of a chap."

Markham beat a nervous tattoo on the desk.

"Well, where does that get us?" he asked. "Are you implying that Higginbottom came down from Mount Vernon with his dog and murdered Coe?"

"Good Lord, no!" Vance made a slight gesture of annoyance. "I'm not implyin' anything. I am merely reportin' my findings. But I must confess that I find the relationship between the Scottie and Major Higginbottom and Archer Coe a bit satisfyin'."

"It appears to me," grumbled Markham, "that it merely adds a new and more complicated angle to the situation."

"Don't be discouragin'," sighed Vance. "At least there's food for thought in the combination."

"My mind is already glutted." Markham rose irritably and walked to the window overlooking the Tombs. "What do you propose to do now?"

Vance also rose.

"I'm taking a bit of a jaunt into the country. I am motoring immediately to Mount Vernon, where I hope to have polite and serious—and, I trust, illuminatin'—intercourse with the major concerning Miss MacTavish. . . . Would you care to hear the result of my social endeavors?"

Markham turned from the window and sank heavily into his chair.

"I'll be here all afternoon," he answered glumly.

It was a pleasant drive to Mount Vernon, in the brisk October air. We had little difficulty in finding the Higginbottom estate, and we were lucky enough to find the major sitting on the big colonial front porch.

He was a rotund man of medium height, with a partly bald head and a florid complexion. There was a look of dissipation about his small, beady gray eyes, which no amount of outdoor country living could disguise. But there was a likable joviality about him.

He welcomed Vance effusively and invited us to sit down and have a highball.

"To what do I owe the honor of this call, sir?" He spoke with hospitable good-nature. "I am really delighted. You should come oftener."

"I'd be charmed." Vance sat down beside a small glass table. "But today, Major, d' ye see, I hopped out here on a little matter of business. . . . The truth is, I'm dashed interested in a Scottie bitch belonging to you—Miss MacTavish—who was shown at Englewood. . . ."

At the mention of the dog's name Higginbottom gave a loud cough, pushed his chair back with a scraping sound, and glanced over his shoulder to the open window leading into the house. The man seemed deeply perturbed, and his tone of voice and his manner, when he answered, struck me as most peculiar.

"Yes, yes; of course," he blustered, rising and walking toward the front steps. "I rarely go to dog shows any more. By the way, Mr. Vance, I want to show you my roses. . . ." And he walked down the stairs toward a small rose garden at the right.

Vance lifted his eyebrows in mild astonishment and followed his host. When we were out of hearing of the house, the major placed his hand on Vance's shoulder and spoke confidentially:

"By gad, sir! I hope my wife didn't hear that question of yours. She's generally in the drawing-room during the mornings, and the windows were open." He appeared troubled. "Yes, sir, it would be most annoying if she heard it. I didn't mean to be impolite, sir—no, sir, by gad!—but you startled me for a moment. . . . A most trying and delicate situation." He put his head a little closer to Vance. "Where did you hear of that little bitch of mine?—were you at the Englewood show?—and why should you be interested?" He glanced again over his shoulder toward the porch. "George! I hope your question didn't reach my wife's ears."

Vance looked at the man quizzically.

"Come, come, Major," he said pleasantly. "It really can't be so serious. I was not at Englewood, and I never saw Miss MacTavish till the day before yesterday. The fact of the matter is, Major, your little bitch is now in my apartment in New York."

"You don't say!—In your apartment?" Higginbottom seemed vastly astonished. "How did she get there?—I don't understand at all. This is most peculiar, Mr. Vance. Pray enlighten me."

"But she *is* your dog, is she not, Major?" Vance asked quietly.

"Well . . . well—the fact is—that is to say—"

Higginbottom was spluttering with embarrassment. "Yes—yes, I suppose you would say that I am the technical owner of her. But I haven't had her at my kennels here for over six months. . . . You see, Mr. Vance, it's this way—I gave Miss MacTavish away to a friend of mine—a very dear friend, y' understand—in New York."

"Ah," breathed Vance, looking up at the cerulean sky. "And who, Major, might this friend be?"

Higginbottom began to splutter again, with an added show of indignation.

"By gad, Mr. Vance! I can't see—really, I can't see—what possible concern that is of any one but myself—and, of course, the recipient. . . . It was a purely private transaction—I might say a personal transaction." He cleared his throat pompously. "Even though you may have the dog in your possession now, I can hardly see—that is, I fail to understand—"

"Major," Vance interrupted brusquely, "I am not prying into your private affairs. But a rather serious matter has arisen, and it will be much better for you to confide in me than to have the District Attorney summon you to his office."

Higginbottom's little eyes opened very wide and he fumbled with the ashes in his pipe.

"Well, well, of course, if the matter is as serious as that, I suppose I can trust you. . . . But, for Heaven's sake, man," he added appealingly, "don't let this go any further."

Again he glanced around to make sure that no one was listening.

"The fact is, Mr. Vance, I have a very dear friend in New York—a young woman—a very charming young woman, I might say—"

"A blonde?" asked Vance casually.

"Yes, yes, the young woman is a blonde. Do you know her by any chance?"

Vance shook his head regretfully.

"No, I haven't had the pleasure. But pray continue, Major."

"Well, you see, it's like this, Mr. Vance. I come to the city quite often—on business, y' understand—and I enjoy a night-club and the theatre now and then, and—you know how it is—I don't care to go alone, and Mrs. Higginbottom has no interest in such frivolous things—"

"Pray don't make apologies, Major," Vance put in. "What did you say the young lady's name was?"

"Miss Doris Delafield—and a very fine young woman she is. Comes of an excellent family—"

"And it was Miss Delafield to whom you gave the dog six months ago?"

"That's right. But I'm most anxious to keep the matter a secret. You see, Mr. Vance, I wouldn't care to have Mrs. Higginbottom know of it, as she might not understand exactly."

"I'm sure she wouldn't," Vance murmured. "And I quite sympathize with your predicament. . . . And where does Miss Delafield live, Major?"

"At the Belle Maison apartments at 90 West 71st Street."

Vance's eyes flickered very slightly as he took out a cigarette and lighted it slowly.

"That's the small apartment house just across the vacant lot from Archer Coe's residence, isn't it?"

"That's right." The major nodded vindictively. "Coe—the old swindler! It served him right, what happened to him the other night. I'll warrant he was killed by somebody he bilked. . . . But, after all," he added more tolerantly, "I couldn't dislike the old chap altogether. And of course we shouldn't say anything but good about the dead. That's the sporting attitude, isn't it?"

"So I understand," nodded Vance. . . . "You've been reading the newspapers, eh, Major?"

"Naturally, sir." Higginbottom seemed a little surprised at the question. "I was interested. The fact is, Mr. Vance, I was calling on Miss Delafield the very night he was murdered."

"Indeed, Major! That's most interestin'." Vance leaned over and snapped off a dead leaf from one of the Talisman bushes. "By the by, Major," he went on in an offhand tone, "little Miss MacTavish was found in the Coe house the next morning, with a rather vicious wound across her head."

The major's pipe fell from his mouth to the lawn, and was ignored. He stared at Vance like a man transfixed, and the blood went from his face.

"I—I—really. . . . Are you—sure?" he stammered.

"Oh, quite. Quite. As I told you, I have Miss MacTavish in my apartment now. I found her in the house—in the lower hall. I took her to Doctor Blamey,—she's coming round in first-class shape. . . . But how do you account for the fact, Major,"—Vance looked at the man squarely—"that your dog was in the murder house at the time the crime was committed?"

"Account for it!" the man blustered excitedly. "I can't account for it. . . . Good gad! This is incredible! I'm completely bowled over—"

"But how does it happen, Major," Vance cut in placidly, "that you haven't heard of the dog's absence from Miss Delafield's apartment—?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," said the major, and hesitated.

"Ah, what did you forget to tell me?"

The major shifted his eyes.

"I omitted to mention the fact that Miss Delafield sailed for Europe on Wednesday night."

"The night Mr. Archer Coe was murdered," Vance said slowly.

"Just so," the major returned aggressively. "The reason I happened to be at her apartment that night was because we were having a farewell dinner, and I was to see her off on the boat."

"And how does it happen, Major, that your dog was not returned to your kennels here when Miss Delafield sailed for Europe?"

"The fact of the matter is"—Higginbottom became apologetic—"Doris—that is, Miss Delafield—on my advice, left the dog in the care of her maid, who was to look after the apartment during her absence."

"On your advice? . . . Why?"

"I thought it best," the major explained weakly. "You see, sir, if I brought the dog here it might involve the situation a bit, as I would have to give explanations to my wife when Doris—Miss Delafield—returned from Europe and wished to have the dog back. And, of course—"

"Ah, yes. I quite understand," nodded Vance.

"You see," Higginbottom continued, "I had expected my wife to go to Europe this fall, but she decided to remain here, and one or two matters of a—ah—confidential nature arose, which made it advisable for me to let Miss Delafield sail to Europe for a short while—until certain little gossip blew over. . . . I'm sure, Mr. Vance, you can comprehend the situation."

"Oh, quite. And what time did Miss Delafield sail Wednesday night?"

"On the *Olympic*—at midnight."

"And you were in the apartment at what time?"

"I called about six o'clock and we went out immediately. We had dinner—let me see—at a little restaurant—I suppose you might call it a speakeasy—and we remained there until it was time to go to the boat."

"What little restaurant was it?"

Higginbottom knit his brow.

"Really, Mr. Vance, I can't remember." He hesitated. "You know, I'm not certain that it even had a name. It was a small place in the West Fifties—or was it the Forties? It was a place that had been recommended to Miss Delafield by a friend."

"A bit vague—eh, what?" Vance let his eyes come to rest mildly on the major. "But thank you just the same. I think I'll stagger back



to New York and have a chat with Miss Delafield's maid. I'm sure you won't mind. What, by the by, is her name?"

The major looked a bit startled.

"Annie Cochrane," he said, and then hurried on: "But I say, Mr. Vance, this thing sounds rather serious. Would you mind if I accompanied you to the city? I myself would like to know why Annie didn't report to me the absence of the dog."

"I'd be delighted," Vance told him.

We drove back to New York with Major Higginbottom, stopping at the Riviera for a hurried luncheon, and went direct to the Belle Maison.

Annie Cochrane was a young dark-haired woman in her early thirties, obviously of Irish descent, and when, on opening the door to our ring, she saw Major Higginbottom, she appeared frightened and flustered.

"Listen here, Annie," the major began aggressively. "Why didn't you let me know that Miss Delafield's dog had disappeared?"

Annie explained stumbingly that she had been afraid to say anything about the dog's disappearance, as she considered it her fault that the dog was gone, and that she had hoped from day to day that it would return. The woman was patently frightened.

"Just when did the dog disappear, Annie?" asked Vance in a consoling tone.

The woman looked up at him gratefully. "I missed her, sir," she said, "just after Major Higginbottom and Miss Doris went out Wednesday night, at about nine o'clock, sir."

Vance turned to Higginbottom with a faint smile. "Didn't I understand you to say that you went out at six o'clock, Major?"

Before Higginbottom could answer, the maid blurted: "Oh, no; it wasn't six o'clock. It wasn't until nine o'clock. I got dinner for them here a little after eight."

The major looked down and stroked his chin cogitatively.

"Yes, yes." He nodded. "That's right. I'd thought it was six o'clock, but now I remember. And an excellent dinner you prepared that night, Annie." He looked up at Vance with a smile of nonchalant frankness. "Sorry to have misinformed you, Mr. Vance. The—ah—incident rather slipped my memory. . . . I had intended to take Miss Delafield out to dinner. But when I arrived Annie had prepared everything for us, so we changed our plans."

Vance appeared to accept his explanation without question.

"And what time did you arrive here that evening, Major?"

Higginbottom seemed to ponder the question; but before he could speak Annie supplied the information.

"You arrived about six o'clock, sir," she informed him with a respectful naïveté. "And Miss Doris came in at half-past seven."

"Ah, yes. Quite right, Annie." The major pretended to be grateful for having this moot point recalled to his memory. "Miss Delafield," he explained blandly to Vance, "said she had been shopping."

"Well, well," murmured Vance. "I didn't know the shops were open so late. . . . Astonishin'."

The major squinted his small eyes and glanced quickly in Vance's direction.

"Oh, I'm quite sure," he supplied, "that a number of the smaller Madison Avenue shops are open late."

Vance apparently did not hear this explanation. He had already turned to the maid.

"By the by, Annie," he asked, "was the dog here during dinner?"

"Oh, yes, sir," the woman assured him. "She always gets under my feet when I'm serving."

"And how do you account for the fact that she disappeared immediately after Major Higginbottom and Miss Delafield had gone?"

"I don't know, sir—honest I don't. I looked for her everywhere. I looked out in the back yard and in the court, and I went through every rear hallway in the house. But she wasn't anywhere."

"Why didn't you look in the street?" Vance asked.

"Oh, she couldn't have got into the street," the maid explained. "She was in the kitchen and the dining-room here, sir; and only the front door of the living-room leads into the main hall. But that was closed and locked after Miss Doris and Mr. Higginbottom went out."

"Then, as I understand it, the dog could only have gone into the rear yard?"

"Yes, sir; that's all. And that's the strange thing about it, sir; for if she had been in the rear yard, I would have found her."

"Did you look in the vacant lot next door, between this house and Mr. Coe's residence?"

"I looked there too, sir, though I knew it wouldn't do any good. There's no way she could have gotten through the gate, for it's always kept locked."

"Miss MacTavish was allowed, however, to run in the rear yard, wasn't she?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Being as we are on the first floor, it was most convenient, and I always left the kitchen door open so she could come and go when she wanted to."

Vance did not speak for a moment; then he asked with unwonted seriousness:

"At just what time, Annie, did you start your search for the dog? It is quite important that you be accurate."

"I can tell you almost exactly, sir," the woman answered, without hesitation. "It was when I was through with my dishes and the housework. Miss Doris and Mr. Higginbottom went out at nine o'clock, and when I had straightened everything up, it was exactly half-past ten."

Vance nodded. "How do you account for the dog's disappearance, Annie?"

"I can't account for it, sir. At first, when I couldn't find her, I thought that maybe some delivery boy, or one of the expressmen, had stolen her. She's a sly little devil, she is. And very sweet. And she has a lovable nature. Almost any one could get her to follow them. But no one had been here after seven o'clock that evening."

She turned to the major beseechingly.

"I'm terrible sorry, sir, honest I am. I loved little Miss MacTavish—"

"That's quite all right, Annie," Vance said in a kindly tone. "Miss MacTavish is well and happy." He turned to Higginbottom.

"By the by," he asked, "where did you get Miss MacTavish, Major?"

"I bought her from Mr. Henry Bixby, when she was five months old, and I turned her over immediately to Miss Delafield," the major



said regretfully. "Doris became attached to her and insisted upon showing her. I tried to discourage her—"

"She was quite worthy of being shown," said Vance. . . . "So you drove out to Mr. William Prentice's and had him trim her for the ring—eh, what? . . . But why did you enter her under your own name at Englewood?"

"By gad, I don't know." The major seemed thoroughly disgusted with himself. "One of those foolish things we all do." He looked appealingly at Vance, who nodded sympathetically. "Mr. Bixby made out the papers in my name," the major continued, "and I never took the trouble to have the dog re-transferred. It never occurred to me that Doris would want to show her. So I filled out the blank—and there you are. Trouble, trouble, trouble. . . . Is there anything else, Mr. Vance?"

"No, I think not. . . . Only, I'd like to ask Annie another question." He turned to the maid. "Annie," he said, "what kind of lip-stick does Miss Delafield use?"

The maid seemed greatly surprised at this question and stared at Vance. Then she shot a quick glance at Higginbottom.

"Well, do you know, or don't you, Annie?" the major asked her severely.

"Yes, sir, I know. Miss Doris sent me to Broadway to the drug-store only Wednesday morning to buy her a lip-stick."

"Well, tell Mr. Vance what kind it was."

"It was a Duplex Carmine—or something like that; Miss Doris wrote it out for me," she said.

"Thanks awfully, Annie. That will be all."

As we emerged into 71st Street, the major expressed his curiosity in a question: "What about that lip-stick, sir?"

"Nothing serious—I hope," Vance returned casually. "I just wanted to clear up a little point. An empty holder of Duplaix's Carmine lip-stick was found in the waste-paper basket in Mr. Coe's library Thursday morning."

"By gad! You don't say!" The major, however, did not seem particularly perturbed. "Doris must have dropped in on Archer Coe to say good-bye."

"Oh, she knew him, then?"

The major nodded sourly.

"I introduced him to her about a year ago. She visited him occasionally, I understand—though, I might add, I didn't encourage these little visits. Fact is, I told her quite frankly I'd prefer she didn't see him."

"Did Miss Delafield know of the way Coe had treated you in connection with your Chinese paintings?"

"Oh, yes." The major was candor itself. "I told her about it. But she didn't see how that could make any difference. You know how women are. No sense of business ethics."

"No doubt—no doubt," Vance returned vaguely.

Then he held out his hand.

"Well, Major, I want to thank you for your help. I'll let you know of any developments in connection with the little Scottie. In the meantime you may rest assured she is being taken good care of."

"What should I do now?" asked the major.

"Well," returned Vance cheerfully, "if I were you, I'd go home and get a good night's rest."

"Not me," declared the major. "I'm going to the club and dive into my locker—I never needed Scotch as I do at this minute."

When he had gone, Vance entered his car, which was waiting outside the Belle Maison, and gave orders to be driven at once to the Criminal Courts Building. As soon as we were shown into Markham's office, Vance threw himself into a chair and, lying back, closed his eyes.

"I have a bit of news, Markham, old dear," he announced.

"I'm most grateful." Markham reached into a drawer for a fresh cigar. "What might it be?"

Vance sank even deeper into his chair.

"I think I know who killed the Coe brothers."

## 19. DEATH AND REVELATIONS

(Saturday, October 13; 4.30 p.m.)

Markham leaned forward in his chair, and gave Vance a quizzical look.

"You positively stagger me," he said. "What name shall I write in on the warrant?"

"Too much haste, Markham," Vance reproved him. "Far too much haste. There are various little things to be done—little knots to be tied—before the arm of the law can pounce upon the culprit—only, arms don't pounce, do they?"

"In that case, perhaps you could bring yourself to confide in me." Markham still spoke ironically.

"Really, I'd rather not, old dear. Let me have my little secret for a brief period." Then Vance became serious. "After all, my conclusion is, to a certain extent, only a guess. It hangs on a somewhat slender clue—a clue which any good criminal lawyer could tear to shreds. And the fact that my conclusion satisfies me does not mean that it would satisfy a jury—or even a lawyer. But I believe I can add a little substantiation to it. . . . You don't mind biding a wee, do you, Markham?"

"Since you seem to have gone Scotch," retorted Markham, "I'll merely say that I'll make an effort to dree my weird. . . . I assume, however, that you know how the crimes were committed."

"Alas, no!" Vance shook his head lugubriously. "That's the chief reason why I shall hoard my theory as to who perpetrated them. Really, y' know, Markham, one shouldn't accuse a person of committing a crime when one has no idea how it was committed, and especially when the person could prove conclusively that he couldn't have committed it."

"You sound extremely vague," Markham commented.

"I feel vague," said Vance. "I could make out an excellent case against the murderer for the doing-in of Archer. My great difficulty, however, would be that there was no point whatever in the murderer's killing Brisbane. Motive is lacking—in fact, that particular murder is meaningless from a logical point of view. But I'm sure the murderer most passionately desired the death of Archer. And yet, it would be utterly unreasonable to accuse him of killing Archer—he apparently couldn't possibly have done it. . . . And there you are. Do you not sympathize with me in my predicament?"

"I'm on the point of bursting into tears," returned Markham. "But just what do you propose doing to extricate yourself from your embarrassing situation?"

Vance drew himself together and stood up. He was now alert and serious.

"I propose to go to the Coe house and ask many questions of its inmates. Will you accompany me?"

Markham glanced at the clock on the wall and rang for Swacker.

"I'm leaving for the day," he told his secretary.

And, taking his hat and coat from the stand in the corner, he went toward the private-entrance door. "I'm interested," he said, "—in a mild way. . . . But what about Heath?"

"Oh, the Sergeant, by all means," Vance replied. "He's definitely indicated."

Markham returned to his desk and phoned the Homicide Bureau. When he had replaced the receiver he walked back to the door.

"Heath will be waiting for us in front of Police Headquarters."

We got into Vance's car, picked up the Sergeant, who seemed unusually surly, and drove uptown. At 59th Street and Fifth Avenue we entered Central Park and took the winding roads toward the 72nd Street west-side entrance.

It was still light as we passed the lake, although there was a sunset haze in the air. The thermometer had been rising all afternoon, and there was a muggy, warm atmosphere over the city. I remember that the thought passed through my mind that we were probably entering upon Indian summer. The leaves had begun to turn, and the vista of the park, spread out before us in its hazy and speckled coloring, recalled a Monet painting I had seen in the *Salle Commandeau*, in the Louvre.

As we approached the western entrance to the park, I noticed a familiar figure seated on one of the benches just beyond the cut privet hedge, a little distance from the roadway; and at that moment Vance leaned over and gave an order to the chauffeur to halt the car.

"Wrede is communing with his soul on yon bench," he said. "And he was one of the persons with whom I wished to have parley. I think I'll toddle over and put a few questions to him."

He opened the door of the car. We followed him into the roadway and turned east toward a small opening in the hedge.

Wrede was sitting with his back to us, perhaps a hundred feet away, gazing over the lake. Just as we came opposite him along the hedge, I noticed the rotund figure of Enright walking down the path toward the bench on which Wrede sat. He had the Doberman Pinscher on a leash.

"Well, well," Vance remarked; "the talkative Mr. Enright is invading new territory. Perhaps Ruprecht tired of the vista over the reservoir. . . ."

Just then an amazing thing happened. The Doberman suddenly halted in his tracks, drew back a foot or two, and crouched down as if in terror. Then, with a curious whine, he bounded forward, dragging his leash from the astonished Enright's hand. He leapt straight toward Wrede.

Wrede turned his head toward the dog, drew back, and started to rise. But he was too late. The Doberman sprang at him with unerring aim and fastened his powerful fangs in the man's neck. Wrede was bowled over backwards, with the dog on top of him growling throatily. It was a terrible sight.

Sergeant Heath yelled at the top of his voice in a futile effort to distract the dog, and jumped over the hedge with an alacrity that amazed me. As he ran toward the struggling Wrede, he drew his revolver. Vance looked on with a coldness that I could not understand.

"There's justice in that, Markham," he commented, lighting a cigarette with steady fingers.

Heath had now reached the dog and placed the revolver against its head. There were two sharp reports. The Doberman staggered

forward on its side and went limp, lying very still.

When we reached Wrede, there was no movement in his body. He lay on his back, his eyes staring, his arms drawn up, as motionless as death. His throat was red, and a great pool of blood had formed under his head. It was a sight I wish I had never seen.

Enright came lumbering up, his mouth open, his face the color of chalk.

"My God!—oh, my God!" he muttered over and over.

Vance stood looking down at Wrede, smoking complacently. He turned to Enright.

"It's quite all right, don't y' know," he said in a hard voice. "It serves him jolly well right. He'd beaten and misused the animal in some outrageous fashion; and this is the dog's revenge."

Vance knelt down and felt the prostrate man's pulse. Then he leaned over and inspected the wound in Wrede's neck, nodding slowly. He stood up and shrugged.

"He's quite dead, Markham," he said without the slightest emotion. "The dog's fangs severed the jugular vein and the carotid artery. Wrede died almost at once from the profuse hemorrhage and, possibly, an air embolism. . . . No use rushing him to a doctor's."

At this moment a uniformed officer came running up. He recognized Markham and saluted.

"Anything I can do, sir?"

"You might call an ambulance, officer," Markham answered in a strained, husky voice. "This is Sergeant Heath of the Homicide Bureau," he added.

The officer hurried away toward his call-box on 72nd Street.

"And what do you want me to do?" wailed the frightened Enright.

Vance answered him.

"Go home and take a stiff drink and try to forget the episode. If we need you, we'll call on you."

Enright made an attempt to answer, but failing, he turned and waddled away into the gathering mist.

"Let's be going, Markham," suggested Vance. "Wrede's appearance doesn't charm me, and the Sergeant will look after things." He turned to Heath. "By the by, Sergeant, we'll be at the Coe house. Join us there after the ambulance comes."

Heath nodded without looking up. He still stood, revolver in hand, gazing down at the dead body of Wrede, like a man hypnotized.

"Who'd have thought a dog could do it!" he mumbled.

"Personally I feel rather grateful to the Doberman," Vance said in a low voice, as he walked away toward his parked car.

It was only two blocks to the Coe residence and nothing was said en route; but when we were seated in the library, Markham broke the silence by trying to put into words his baffled state of mind.

"There's something queer about all this, Vance—your interest in that Doberman Pinscher, and then to have him attack Wrede in that brutal fashion. And I can't see that we're getting anywhere. There's just one tragedy after another, without any light on the case. I suppose you see some connection between the Scottish terrier and the Doberman. Would you mind telling me what was in your mind when you looked up Enright?"

"There was nothing cryptic about it, my dear Markham." Vance was moving about the room aimlessly, looking at the various vases and *objets d'art*. "When the Sergeant told me that Wrede owned a dog, I was particularly interested, for he wasn't the type of man that could love any animal. He was an enforced egoist, with a somewhat violent inferiority complex—his egoism, in fact, had been automatically built up to cover his complete lack of confidence in himself. He had a shrewd, unscrupulous brain which he was unable to use in any practical way. And he was constantly in need of substitutes for his sense of inferiority. It is not uncommon for persons of his nature to go in for dumb animals. They do not do so because of any instinctive liking for the animals, but because, having failed to impress themselves upon their equals, they can bully and torment and torture an animal, and thus give themselves a feeling of heroism and superiority. The animal is merely an outlet for their lack of self-confidence; and, at the same time, the animal gratifies their profound instinct for domination. The moment I heard that Wrede had owned a dog, I wanted to see the dog, for I was sure he had mistreated it. And when I saw the Doberman's frightened and timid demeanor, I knew that he had suffered horribly at Wrede's hands. Markham, that Doberman showed all the signs of having been beaten and abused—and that fitted perfectly with my estimate of Wrede's character."

"But," objected Markham, "the Doberman certainly showed no timidity at the sight of Wrede. He was aggressive and vicious—ugh!"

"He had regained his confidence in himself," Vance explained. "Enright's kindness and benevolent treatment after the dog's terrible experiences at Wrede's hands, was what, in the end, revived the Doberman's courage sufficiently to kill Wrede."

He sat down and lighted another cigarette.

"Almost any man may be a murderer, but only a certain type of man can injure a dog the way that Scottie was injured here the other night. By striking that little bitch over the head, the murderer left his signature on the crime. . . . Now do you understand why I was so interested in Wrede's Doberman Pinscher?"

Markham leaned forward.

"Do you mean to say that Wrede—?"

Vance held up his hand.

"Just a moment. I want to talk to Liang. There are certain things to be explained. Perhaps Liang will tell us—now."

Before Gamble had brought in the Chinaman, Heath arrived. He was pale and upset. He nodded abstractedly and sat down.

"He was dead all right. . . . This case don't look right to me." He appealed helplessly to Markham. "What next, Chief?"

"Mr. Vance wants to talk to the Chinese cook," Markham returned listlessly.

"Where'll that get you, Mr. Vance?" Heath asked with solemn hopelessness.

Before Vance could reply, Liang entered the library from the dining-room and stood respectfully at the door, without looking at any of us.

Vance rose and went to him, holding out his cigarette-case.

"Please have a *Régie*, Mr. Liang." His tone was that of an equal. "This is not to be an interrogation. It's a conference in which we need your help."

Liang looked at Vance with studious calm. (I shall probably never know what sudden unspoken understanding passed between them in that moment of silent mutual scrutiny.) Liang inclined his head with a murmured "Thank you," and took one of the *Régies*, which Vance lighted for him.

Vance returned to his chair and Liang sat down.

"Mr. Liang," Vance began, "I think I apprehend the position in which you have been placed by the unfortunate events which have taken place in this house, and I also think you realize that I have not been entirely ignorant of your predicament. You have acted, I might say, in very much the same way I myself might have acted, had our positions been reversed. But the time has come when frankness is wisdom—and I hope you trust me sufficiently to believe me when I tell you that no possible danger can come to you. You are no longer in jeopardy. There is now no possibility of misunderstanding. As a matter of fact, I have not misunderstood you from the first."

Liang again bowed his head, and said:

"I should be most happy to help you, if I might be assured that the truth would prevail in this unhappy house, and that I would not be accused of things of which some one desired I should be accused."

"I can assure you of that, Mr. Liang," Vance returned quietly. Then he added significantly: "Mr. Wrede is dead."

"Ah!" the man murmured. "That puts a different aspect on matters."

"Oh, quite. Mr. Wrede was killed by a dog he had abused."

"Lao-Tzu has said," returned Liang, "that he who abuses the weak is eventually destroyed by his own weakness."

Vance inclined his head in polite agreement.

"Some day," he said, "I hope the wisdom of the Tão Teh King will penetrate to our western civilization. . . . But, handicapped as we are by lack of knowledge of the profound wisdom of the Orient, I can only ask you to help us in our present dilemma. . . . Will you tell us what happened—or, rather, what you saw—when you returned to this house between eight and nine Wednesday night?"

Liang moved slightly in his chair and let his eyes rest searchingly on Vance. He hesitated before he spoke, drawing deeply on the cigarette Vance had given him.

"It was exactly eight," he began in an even voice. "When I entered the kitchen I heard voices here in the library. Mr. Wrede and Mr. Archer Coe were talking. They were angry. I tried not to listen, but their voices rose until they penetrated even to my bedroom. Mr. Coe was protesting violently, and Mr. Wrede was becoming more angry every second. I heard a scuffle, a startled ejaculation, and a noise as if something heavy had fallen to the floor. A brief silence ensued—and I thought I detected a tinkling sound like broken china. Then another silence. A few moments later I heard some one pass stealthily through the kitchen, and go out the rear door. I waited in my bedroom for perhaps fifteen minutes, asking myself if I should interfere with matters which did not concern me; and then I decided that, in loyalty to my employer, I should investigate the situation.

"So I came forth and looked in the library here. The room was empty, but the small table in front of the davenport was upset. I put it on its feet; then returned to the kitchen and read for perhaps an hour. But something seemed to trouble me—I did not like the fact that Mr. Wrede had not gone out the front door, but went out so stealthily through the kitchen. I went upstairs to Mr. Coe's bedroom and knocked on the door. There was no answer. I knocked again. Still there was no answer. I tried the door. It was unbolted; and when I opened it, I saw Mr. Coe seated in his chair, apparently asleep. But I did not like the color of his face. I went to him and touched him, but he did not move—and I knew he was dead. . . . I came out of the room, closed the door, and returned to the kitchen.

"I asked myself what was best for me to do, and decided that since no one knew I had returned to the house I would go away and come back much later that night. So I went—to some friends of mine. When I returned at about midnight, I made unnecessary noise, so that any one in the house would hear me returning. After a while I came again into this library and looked round very carefully, for I could not understand what had happened that night. I found the poker lying on the hearth, and there was blood on it. I also found the dagger in the large Yung Chêng *Ting yao* vase on the table there. I had a definite feeling that both of these articles were left here for some special purpose, and it occurred to me that if a murder had been committed that night, it was I who was supposed to take the blame. . . ."

"You are quite right, Mr. Liang. I think that both weapons were left here in order to involve you."

"I did not quite understand the situation," the Chinaman continued. "But I felt that it might be safer for me if I took the poker and the dagger and hid them. I could see the possibilities of a case being built up against me, if the weapons were found in the library, especially as it might be proved that I had been here at the time. Moreover, the dagger is Chinese, and it could be easily ascertained that I was not in sympathy with the means Mr. Archer Coe used in depriving my country of its rightful antiques."

"Yes," nodded Vance. "That was no doubt the intention of the murderer. . . . And so, when you had the opportunity, you placed both weapons in the room upstairs?"

"That is true," Liang admitted. "I placed them there when the butler sent me to Miss Lake's room the next morning. Perhaps if I had realized how serious the situation was and had understood all of its complications, I might have acted differently. I do not yet understand the mechanism of the crime. The physical misunderstanding, so to speak, between Mr. Wrede and Mr. Archer Coe took place in this library, and yet his dead body was in his bedroom upstairs."

"There was no possibility," inquired Vance, "that Mr. Wrede could have assisted Mr. Coe upstairs, after the *mêlée*?"

"Oh, no," Liang was quite emphatic. "Within a few moments of the encounter here in the library, Mr. Wrede came out through the kitchen, surreptitiously, and departed through the rear door."

"How can you be sure it was Wrede, Mr. Liang, if you did not see him?" Vance asked.

The Chinaman gave a slow smile.

"In my country the senses are more acute than in the Occident. I had heard Mr. Wrede move about this house too often not to know his step and sense his presence." Liang paused and looked at Vance. "And may I be permitted now to ask a question of you?"

Vance bowed acquiescence.

"Ask me any question you care to, Mr. Liang, and I will try to be as frank as you have been."

"How, then, did you know that I was aware of the crime on the night it was committed?"

"There were several indications, Mr. Liang," Vance replied; "but it was you yourself who told me as much—by a slip of the tongue. When I first spoke to you, the next morning, you mentioned a tragedy; and when I asked you how you knew there had been a tragedy, you replied you had heard Gamble telephoning—while you were preparing breakfast."

Liang looked at Vance for a moment, a puzzled expression in his eyes. Then a faint smile appeared slowly on his mouth.

"I understand now," he said. "I had already prepared the breakfast when the butler telephoned, for he discovered the crime when he was taking Mr. Coe's breakfast to him. . . . Yes, I gave myself away, but it took a clever man to grasp the error."

Vance acknowledged the compliment.

"And now I shall ask you another question, Mr. Liang. Why were you pretending to work in the kitchen at three o'clock yesterday morning, after the attack on Mr. Grassi?"

The Chinaman looked up shrewdly. "Pretending?"

"The ink was quite dry on the papers you had so neatly arranged on the kitchen table."

A slow smile again spread over Liang's ascetic mouth.

"I was afraid, afterwards," he said, "that you might have noticed that. . . . The fact is, Mr. Vance, I was standing guard. At about half-past two that morning, I was awakened by a slight sound. It was a key being inserted softly into the rear door. I sleep lightly—and I am sensitive to sounds. I listened, and some one opened the door and passed through the kitchen into the butler's pantry and the dining-room, and on into the library—"

"You recognized the footsteps?"

"Oh, yes. The person who came in so softly was Mr. Wrede. . . . I naturally did not trust him, knowing what I did, and I hoped that I could trap him in some way. So I rose, dressed, turned on all the lights in the kitchen, and took my post at the table—as if I were working. Fifteen minutes later, I heard Mr. Wrede come back softly into the butler's pantry and then retreat again toward this room. I knew that he had seen the lights in the kitchen and was afraid to enter. I did not hear the front door open—which is the only other means of egress except the windows—and I decided to stand my ground.

"A little later I heard Mr. Grassi call out, and then I heard the butler telephoning. Even so, I thought it best to remain in the kitchen, for it occurred to me that Mr. Wrede might still be hiding in the house, waiting for a chance to escape through the rear door. When you came into the kitchen and informed me of the attack on Mr. Grassi, I suggested the den window. I could not see how else Mr. Wrede could have gone out of the house."

Liang looked up sadly.

"I am sorry my efforts were not more successful, but at least I made it difficult for Mr. Wrede."

Vance got up and put out his cigarette.

"You've helped us no end," he said. "You've clarified many things. We are most grateful."

He walked to Liang and held out his hand. The Chinaman took it and bowed.

## 20. THE STARTLING TRUTH

(Saturday, October 13; 6.30 p.m.)

When Liang had gone out, Vance sent Gamble for Hilda Lake. As soon as she entered the library, Vance informed her that Wrede was dead.

She looked at him a moment, lifted her eyebrows, shrugged slightly, and said: "It is no great loss to the world."

"Furthermore," Vance went on, "I believe that Mr. Wrede murdered your uncles and attempted the life of Mr. Grassi."

"I would not be in the least surprised," the young woman commented coldly. "I have suspected all along that he murdered Uncle Archer—but I could not quite see how he accomplished it. Have you learned his *modus operandi*?"

Vance shook his head.

"No, Miss Lake," he admitted. "That's a part of the problem still to be solved."

"But why," she asked, "should he kill Uncle Brisbane? Uncle Brisbane was his ally."

"That's another phase of the problem that must be worked out. There was an error—a miscalculation—somewhere."

"I can understand," Hilda Lake remarked, "why he should attempt Mr. Grassi's life. Mr. Wrede was intensely jealous of Mr. Grassi."

"All clever, scheming men with a sense of their own inferiority," said Vance, "are inclined toward intense jealousy. . . . But there's a particular thought that has entered my mind this evening, and I shall ask you about it.—Tell me, Miss Lake, what reason would Brisbane have had for killing Archer?"

Vance's question amazed me, and when I glanced at Markham and Heath, I saw that they, too, were startled. But Hilda Lake accepted it as if it had been the most casual and conventional of queries.

"Oh, various reasons," she answered calmly. "There was a deep antagonism between the two. Uncle Brisbane had many ideas and many ambitions, but he was always handicapped by the fact that Uncle Archer controlled all the money. There was, therefore, the money motive. Again, Uncle Brisbane did not feel that Uncle Archer had treated me fairly, and he was quite anxious for me to marry Mr. Wrede. Uncle Archer, as you know, was violently opposed to the marriage."

"And you, Miss Lake?"

"Oh," she returned offhandedly, "I thought the marriage might be rather a good thing. Mr. Wrede was a comforting kind of soul who wouldn't have bothered me in the slightest—and I was tremendously desirous of escaping from this queer household. I knew all his faults, but as long as they didn't interfere with me—"

"Perhaps," suggested Vance, "the arrival of Mr. Grassi changed your mind a bit?"

For the first time during my acquaintance with Hilda Lake, I noticed a soft, feminine expression come into her eyes. She glanced down as if embarrassed.

"Perhaps, as you say," she replied in a low voice, "the arrival of Mr. Grassi changed my mind."

Vance stood up.

"I hope, Miss Lake," he said, "that you will both be very happy."

We dined at Vance's apartment that night. Both Vance and Markham were troubled, for the case had not had a satisfactory ending,—there were many things that had been left unexplained; there were many links in the chain of evidence which had not been found. But before the night was over there were no longer any mysteries: each step in this monstrous crime, and each perplexing and contradictory factor, had been clarified.

The final elucidation came in a most unexpected manner. We were sitting in Vance's library talking, after dinner.

"I'm not satisfied," grumbled Markham. "There are too many factors in this case which I cannot understand and which have not been satisfactorily explained. Why should Wrede have murdered Brisbane? How did that revolver get in Archer's hand—and why the bullet in his head, long after he was dead? Why the carefully bolted door and all the technical thought that went into the bolting of the door? . . ."

Vance smoked in doleful silence for a while.

"It's dashed mystifyin'," he muttered. "What I can't understand is how Archer got upstairs after he had been stabbed in the library. There's little doubt, after Liang's story, that the bloody work was done downstairs."

"I'm not so sure you're right about that, Vance," submitted Markham. "If your theory is correct, you must logically admit the proposition that a dead man walked upstairs."

Vance inclined his head.

"I realize that," he said thoughtfully. Then he leapt to his feet and stood before Markham, tense and animated. "A dead man walked upstairs," he repeated in a strained, hushed voice. "That's it! That's the answer to everything. . . . Yes, Markham,"—he nodded with curious significance—"a *dead man walked upstairs!*"

Markham looked up at him with benevolent concern.

"Come, come, Vance," he said, in a kindly, paternal tone. "This case has upset you. Take a good stiff nightcap and go to bed—"

"No, no, Markham," Vance cut in, his eyes staring straight ahead. "That's just what happened the other night. Archer Coe—already a dead man—walked upstairs. And—what is even more terrible, Markham—he *didn't know he was dead!*"

Vance turned quickly and went to a set of thick quarto volumes on the lower shelf of one of his bookcases. He ran his finger along the books until he came to volume "E." He turned the pages and found what he was looking for. Then he glanced down the column of fine type.

"Listen, Markham," he said. "Here's a historical case of a dead person walking." He read from the encyclopædia: "'Elizabeth (Amélie Eugénie), 1837-1898, consort of Francis Joseph, emperor of Austria, a daughter of Duke Maximilian Joseph of Bavaria and Louisa Wilhelmina, was born on the 24th of December, 1837, at Lake Starnberg. . . .'" He turned the page. "But here's the passage regarding

her death: *'Elizabeth spent much of her time traveling through Europe and at the palace she had built in Corfu. On the 10th of September, 1898, she was walking through the streets of Geneva with her entourage, from her hotel to the steamer, when an anarchist, named Luigi Luccheni, ran suddenly into the roadway and stabbed her in the back, with a shoemaker's awl. The police immediately pounced upon the man and were about to drag him away, when the Empress stayed them and gave the order that they should release him. "He has not injured me," she said, "and I wish, on this occasion, to forgive him." She continued her walk to the steamer, which was more than half a mile distant, and made a farewell speech to her subjects from the deck. She then retired to her cabin and lay down. Several hours later she was found dead. Luccheni had actually stabbed her without her being aware of it, and she had died hours later of an internal hemorrhage. This crime was the final misfortune which came to the Austrian emperor, and all Europe was aroused to a state of intense indignation.'*"

Vance closed the book and threw it to one side.

"Now do you see what I mean, Markham?" he asked. "A dead person often does strange things without knowing he is dead. . . . But wait a minute. I have another book here—"

He went to another bookcase, and, after a moment's search, pulled out a black, gold-lettered volume.

"Here's a rare book, Markham,—'An Old Gate of England,' by A. G. Bradley.<sup>[30]</sup> . . . There's a passage in it I want to read to you. As I remember, it was in the chapter on Rye." He turned the pages. "The passage relates, as I recall, to the Duke of Cumberland's visit to Rye when he made an inspection of the defenses of the neighborhood and was entertained by Mr. Lamb who was still mayor. . . . Ah, here it is—I hope I don't bore you: *'These particulars have been kindly given me by almost the only living representative of the Lamb-Grebell families—which have otherwise died out in Rye. In regard to the Grebell murder, which took place from this house, my informant gives some particulars, unknown to the local chroniclers, in part at least, that are physiologically interesting. Mr. Grebell had been supping with his brother-in-law Lamb, and having some business in the town borrowed his scarlet overcoat. On returning late through the church-yard, he felt some one push heavily as he thought against him, and merely remarking "Get away, you drunken hound," passed on to Lamb House, quite unconcerned. He duly reported the incident, but as the family were going to bed, said he felt so tired that, instead of going home, he would have a sleep in the arm-chair by the fire. In the morning he was found dead, with a stab in the back, which had caused internal bleeding.'*<sup>[31]</sup> . . ." Do you see, Markham? Do you recall what Doctor Doremus said? 'An internal hemorrhage!' That's the whole story—that's the key to everything. That's how Archer could have been killed in the library and still have walked upstairs."

Markham stood up and walked back and forth across the room.

"Good God!" His words were scarcely audible. "So that's the explanation! No wonder we couldn't understand the things that happened there that night. Unbelievable!"

Vance had sunk back into his chair, relaxed. He took a deep inspiration, like a man who had suddenly found a friendly settlement in the midst of a hostile jungle.

"Really, Markham," he said with a slight upward glance, taking out his case of beloved *Régies*, "I'll never forgive you for this—never! It was *you* who guessed the solution. And I knew it all the time, but I couldn't correlate my knowledge."

Markham came to a sudden halt.

"What do you mean by saying that *I* guessed the solution?"

"Didn't you say," asked Vance mildly, "that the only way one could explain the circumstances was by the assumption that a dead man walked upstairs? . . . No, Markham, I am sure I shall never forgive you."

Markham sat down and muttered a disgusted oath. He smoked a while in silence.

"The internal hemorrhage explains many things," he admitted finally. "But I still don't understand Brisbane's death, and the bolted door."

"And yet, d' ye see," returned Vance, "it all fits in perfectly, now that we have the key."

He lay back in his chair and stretched his legs. He took several puffs on his cigarette and half closed his eyes.

"I think, Markham, I can reconstruct the amazin' and contradict'ry occurrences that took place in the Coe domicile last Wednesday night. . . . I doubt if Wrede actually planned to murder Archer Coe that night. The idea had no doubt been in his mind for a long time, for he had obviously taken the precaution of securing a duplicate key to the spring lock on the rear door. But I have a feelin' that he wished only to argue various matters out with Archer last Wednesday night before actually resorting to murder. It's obvious that he called on Archer that night and tried to convince him that he would be the perfect mate for Hilda Lake. Archer disagreed—and disagreed violently. That was no doubt the argument that Liang overheard. I imagine that the debate reached the point where blows were struck. The poker was quite handy, don't y' know, and Wrede, with his tremendous sense of personal inferiority, would naturally reach for some outside agent to help him over the top. He snatched the poker and struck Archer over the head.

"Archer fell forward against the table, upsetting it and fracturing his rib. Wrede was in a quand'ry. But again his sense of inferiority invaded him. He looked round the room quickly, saw the dagger in the cabinet, took it out and, as Archer lay on the floor, drove it into his back. . . . The deed was done. He had vindicated himself in a physical way, and had removed all obstacles from his path. He believed he was alone in the house with Archer; but still there was the question of a suspect. Into his shrewd brain flashed the thought of Liang, whom he had always suspected of being more than a servant. He figured that if he left the Chinese dagger where it would be found in the library, Liang would be the logical suspect. He threw the dagger into the *Ting yao* vase. But he threw it in too hard. It broke the vase—and again Wrede was in a quand'ry. He picked up the dagger and placed it in the other vase on the table. Then he gathered up the fragments of the *Ting yao*, carried them through the kitchen and placed them in the garbage pail on the rear porch. The poker he had thrown back on the hearth. And he left the house through the rear entrance, passed behind the hedge in the vacant lot, unlatched the gate at the rear of his apartment house, and went to his rooms."

"So far, so good," said Markham. "But what of Brisbane?"

"Brisbane? Ah, yes. *He* was an unexpected element. But Wrede knew nothing about it. . . . As I see it, Markham, Brisbane had planned to get rid of Archer that same night. His trip to Chicago was merely a blind. With his knowledge of criminology and his shrewd technical brain, he had worked out a perfectly logical means of doing away with his brother and having the crime appear a



suicide. Naturally he chose Wednesday night when he knew Archer would be alone in the house. He established his alibi by having Gamble make reservations on the 5.15 train to Chicago. His plan was to go back to the house and take a later train. It was an excellent idea, and it was almost detection-proof. And he did come back to the house, Markham, with the definite intention of killing Archer. . . .

"Still, I don't see—"

"Oh, it's all quite simple," Vance went on. "But before Brisbane returned that night, strange and uncanny things happened. The plot became cluttered with complications, and Brisbane, instead of creating a perfect crime, walked into a plot more diabolical than the one he himself had conceived. . . ."

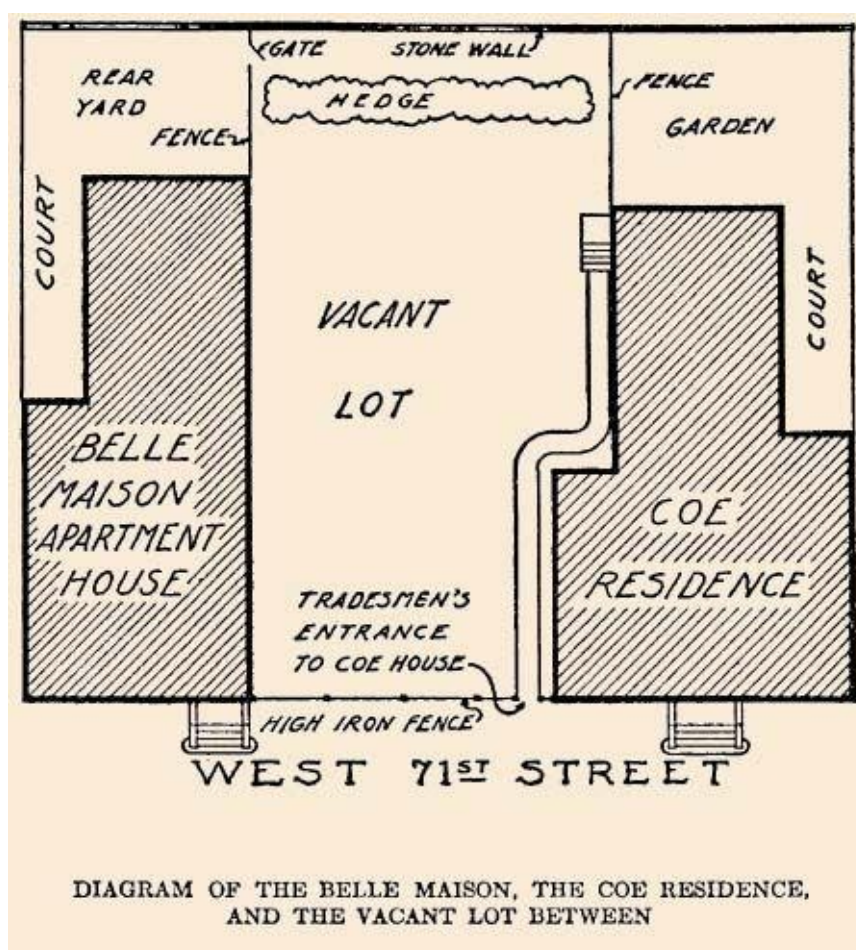
Vance moved in his chair.

"This is what had happened in the meantime: Archer, recovering from the blow of the poker, and not realizing that he had also been stabbed, went upstairs to his bedroom. The shades were up, and Wrede, from his own apartment, could see him across the vacant lot. . . . No one will ever know what thoughts went on in Coe's mind at this time. But obviously he was incensed at Wrede, and he probably sat down to write him a letter forbidding him ever to put foot in the house again. He began to feel tired—perhaps the blood had commenced to choke his lungs. The pen fell from his fingers. He made an effort to prepare himself for bed. He took off his coat and waistcoat and hung them carefully in the closet. Then he put on his dressing-gown, buttoned it, and tied the belt about him. He walked to the windows and pulled down the shades. That act took practically all of his remaining vitality. He started to get his bedroom slippers, but the black mist of death was drifting in upon him. He thought it fatigue—the result, perhaps, of the blow Wrede had struck him over the head. He sat down in his easy chair. *But he never got up*, Markham. He never changed his shoes. As he sat there the final inevitable fog stifled him! . . ."

"Good God, Vance! I see the horror of it," breathed Markham.

"All these steps in that sinister situation," Vance continued, "are clearly indicated. . . . But think what must have gone on in Wrede's mind when he looked out of his window and saw the man he had murdered moving about the room upstairs, arranging the papers on his desk, changing his clothes, going about his affairs as if nothing whatever had happened!"

Vance inhaled several times on his cigarette and broke the ashes into a small tray beside him.



"My word, Markham! Can you imagine Wrede's emotions? He had killed a man; and yet he could look across a vacant lot and see this dead man acting as if nothing had happened. Wrede had to start all over again. It was a delicate and terrible situation. He knew that



he had thrust a deadly dagger into Archer Coe's body. But Archer was still alive—and retribution must inevitably follow. And don't forget that the lights did not go out in Archer Coe's room. Wrede, no doubt, frantically asked himself a thousand times what was going on behind those drawn shades. He not only feared the incalculable mystery of the situation, but, I am inclined to think, he was perturbed most by his speculation concerning the things he could not see. . . . I wouldn't care to put in the two hours that Wrede spent between eight o'clock and ten that night. He realized that some decision must be made—that some action must be taken. But he had nothing whatever to go on: his imagination was his only guide. . . ."

"And he came back!" said Markham huskily.

"Yes," nodded Vance, "he came back. He had to come back! But in that interim of his indecision something unforeseen and horrible had taken place. Brisbane had returned to the house—he had returned stealthily, letting himself in with his own key. He had returned to kill his brother! He looked into the library: the lights were on, but Archer was not there. He went to the drawer of the table and took out the revolver. Then he went upstairs. Perhaps he saw the light through Archer's bedroom door. He opened the door. . . ."

Vance paused.

"Y' know, Markham, I am inclined to think that Brisbane was prepared for any emergency. He had worked out a scheme for killing Archer, placing him in his bedroom with the revolver in his hand, and then bolting the door from the hall, so as to make it appear as suicide. And when he saw Archer sitting in his easy chair, apparently asleep, he no doubt felt that the fates were with him, that his road had been made easy. I can see him tiptoeing across the room to the easy chair where the other sat. I can see him place the revolver against Archer's right temple and pull the trigger,—the impact of the bullet drove Archer's head to the left. Then I can see Brisbane place the revolver in Archer's hand and return to the door, where he carefully put in operation the mechanism he had worked out for bolting the door from the hall. . . . My word, Markham, what a situation!—Brisbane shooting a dead man, and then elaborately setting the stage to prove that it was suicide!"

"Good God!" breathed Markham.

"But during this tragic farce," Vance went on, "Wrede had arrived at a decision. He had decided to come back to Archer Coe and finish, for all time, the crime which apparently he had only started. He bethought himself of the *Ting yao* vase he had broken, and perhaps fearing its absence would be noted, he picked out a superficially similar vase from his own small collection and carried it back to the Coe house. The hour, I should say, was around ten o'clock. . . . Wrede opened the gate of the rear yard, and left it ajar; and it was then that the Scottie followed him on his dark errand. He went in the rear door of the Coe house, leaving it open—and the Scottie followed. Everything was black and still. He went through the dining-room into the library, and placed his own inferior vase on the teak-wood base where the *Ting yao* vase had stood. He took the dagger from the vase in which he had hidden it, and moved toward the hall. . . ."

Vance raised himself a little in his chair.

"And when he reached the door, Markham, he saw a figure coming down the stairs from the second floor. There was a light in the library, but it was not sufficient to make possible an absolute recognition of the figure on the stairs. To Wrede that figure was Archer. (Archer and Brisbane, you'll recall, were of the same height and general build, and they did not look dissimilar.) Wrede stood behind the portières at the library door, the dagger grasped in his hand, and waited till his opportunity came. The shadowy figure came down the stairs and walked toward the closet door at the end of the hall,—Brisbane was no doubt going back for the overcoat and hat which he had left there on coming in. But Wrede, with his inflamed imagination, assumed that Archer was preparing to leave the house to tell some one of the attack—to report him to the police, perhaps. He couldn't be sure: he only knew that it spelled danger for himself. And he was more thoroughly determined than ever to put an end to Archer. . . ."

"Brisbane, as I now see it, had just placed the strings, which he had used for bolting Archer's door, in the pocket of his top-coat, when Wrede came silently upon him from behind and thrust the dagger into his back. He collapsed immediately, and Wrede pushed the body, which he thought was Archer's, entirely into the closet and closed the door. He went back to the library; and it was at this time that he probably stumbled over the Scottie, which had followed him in. He decided that it was safest to get rid of her immediately. She may even have barked, or made some sound when he stumbled over her; and he was in no frame of mind at that moment to meet new emergencies logically. He dropped the dagger back into the vase and picked up the poker. Then he struck the Scottie over the head,—it was the simplest and most direct way of dealing with an unexpected circumstance when there was no time for thought. The presence of the dog was unexpected, incalculable. . . ."

"There can be little doubt that the man was in a panic—and with sufficient reason. He did not even switch off the lights in the library. The whole thing was amazin'. He went home through the rear door, thinking that he had left Archer's dead body in the coat closet. Then, when Gamble summoned him the following morning, he found that Archer was still in his bedroom, behind a bolted door! The man must have felt that the whole world had gone insane. I imagine he rushed to the hall closet, when Gamble wasn't looking, to check his sanity, so to speak; and then he saw the dead body of Brisbane. Some of the truth, at least, must have dawned upon him. He had killed his friend—his ally—by accident! What mental torture he must have suffered! And there was also in his mind the terrible problem of Archer's death. . . . I wonder the man stood up so well when we arrived. The cold desperation of a final necessity, I suppose. . . ."

Markham moved about the room restlessly.

"I see it all," he muttered, as if to himself. He stopped and swung round. "But what of Wrede's attempted murder of Grassi?"

"That was logical and in keeping with his character," said Vance. "Miss Lake explained it—intense jealousy of his lucky rival. Wrede thought he had successfully pulled the wool over our eyes, and the fact gave him confidence. He knew exactly where the dagger was; he knew the domestic arrangements of the Coe house; he had a key to the rear door; and he doubtless knew of the broken lock on Grassi's door. He had probably brooded over his loss of a wealthy bride until he could no longer resist the urge to follow up his—as he thought—successful murder of Archer by the murder of Grassi. He would thus have won a complete victory over the forces that had temporarily defeated him. His frustrated ego again. And had it not been for Liang's perspicacity—which Wrede underestimated—and the shift of Grassi's arm, he would have succeeded."

"But what," asked Markham, "first gave you the idea that Wrede had committed the murders?"

"The Scottie, Markham," answered Vance. "After having found she belonged to Higginbottom, I ascertained that he had given her to his *inamorata* who lived in the Belle Maison. And once I had followed the Scottie's trail and knew that she belonged next door, I made a bit of an investigation. I learned from a perfectly honest Irish maid that both Higginbottom and his lady fair—a Miss Delafield—had been having a farewell dinner at the time Coe was murdered. Y' see, I had thought perhaps that some blond lady with a Duplaix lip-stick had admitted the Scottie into the Coe house earlier in the evening. But although Miss Delafield used Duplaix lip-stick and had undoubtedly called on Archer Coe before half-past seven, it was not she who had let the Scottie in; for the little dog was in the Delafield apartment after nine o'clock that night, and had disappeared some time between then and half-past ten, at which hour the maid instituted a search for her. Moreover, I learned that the Scottie could have entered the Coe house only if some one had unlocked the gate between the Belle Maison and the vacant lot next to the Coe residence. And I further learned that there was no way for the Scottie to escape from the Belle Maison, except into the rear yard. Only some one who had unlocked the gate and opened the rear door of the Coe residence would have given her the opportunity of entering the house. And Wrede was the only person who could have done this."

\* \* \* \* \*

The following year Hilda Lake and Grassi were married, and the alliance seems to have been highly successful. Vance became the owner of Miss MacTavish. He had become attached to her during the days he had nursed her back to health, and the romance (if one may call it that) between Higginbottom and Doris Delafield ran on the rocks shortly after the lady's return from Europe. After her break with the major she showed little interest in the dog; and Higginbottom, in appreciation of some nebulous favor which he considered Vance had done him, made him a present of the bitch. Vance placed her in his kennels, but she did not seem to be happy there; and he finally took her into his apartment. He still has her, and she has been "pensioned" for life. Sometimes I think that Vance would rather part with one of his treasured Cézannes than with little Miss MacTavish.

THE END

## Footnotes

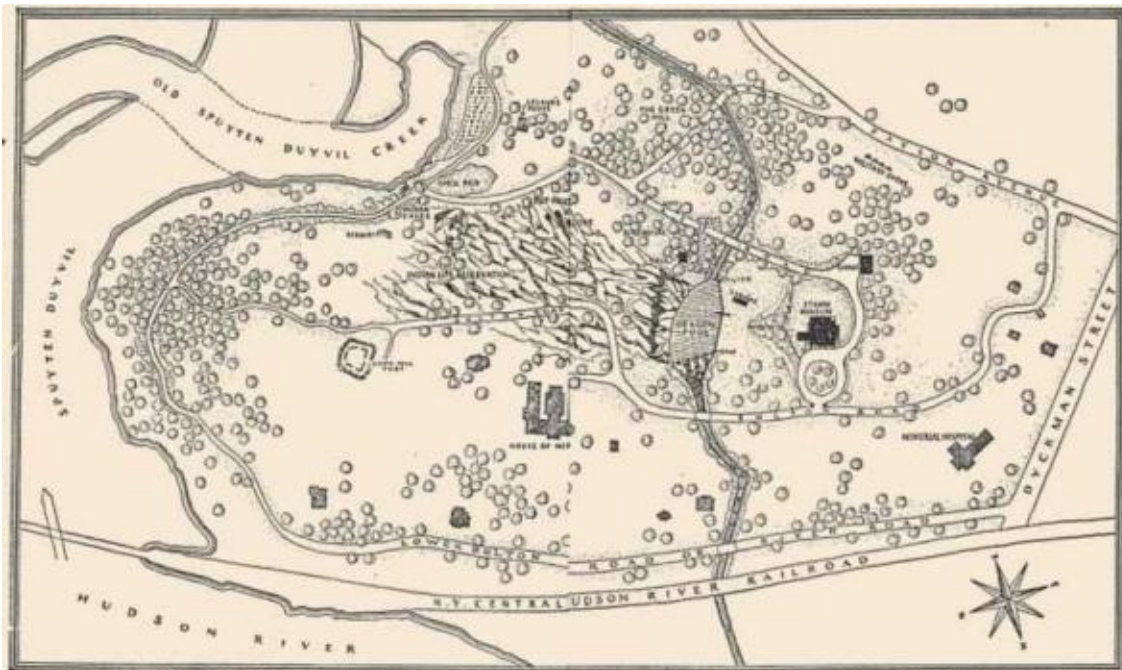
- [1] "The Scarab Murder Case" (Scribners, 1930).
- [2] Vance was referring to Sergeant Ernest Heath, of the Homicide Bureau, who had been in charge of the various cases in which Vance had figured.
- [3] I learned later that Grassi claimed some family connection with the famous Italian doctor who, with Bastianelli, furthered the researches of Ronald Ross and proved that the Anopheles—a genus of mosquito—is the only insect that carries the malaria germ, and the sole method of transmission of this disease.
- [4] Uccushma was "the Killer of Demons," and many pictures of him are in existence. Perhaps the best is in the British Museum.
- [5] "An Illustrated Description of the Celebrated Wares of Different Dynasties." (Dr. S. W. Bushell has made translations of this great work in his famous book on Chinese ceramics.)
- [6] Edwin Reginald Blamey, M.R.C.V.S., the official veterinarian of the American Kennel Club, whose offices and surgery are at 17 West 71st Street.
- [7] Captain Dubois was the finger-print expert of the New York Police Department; and Heath had asked especially that he be sent to the house.
- [8] Vance was referring to "Concerning Dogs" in "The Shadow on the Dial," a collection of Bierce's essays published posthumously by Robertson in San Francisco.
- [9] "The Great Sword Society," an organization opposed to extraterritoriality and foreign aggression and plunder.
- [10] Gobi is a Mongol word meaning "desert."
- [11] I learned later that the dagger dated from the Hsüan Tê reign of the Ming dynasty.
- [12] Vance's mirror-black vase, which I had often seen and admired, was fifteen inches tall, whereas the C. P. Allen vase is only seven inches tall.
- [13] There is little doubt that Vance had been much impressed and helped, especially in the early days of his dog-breeding, by Doctor Fayette C. Ewing's weekly column on Scottish terriers in *Popular Dogs*; and Doctor Ewing's book, "The Book of the Scottish Terrier," (for which I, by the way, wrote an appreciative introduction) was one of Vance's "bibles."
- [14] Vance was referring to the case of Wenzel Kokoschka, a cooperative-society cashier, who shot himself, and who hours later seriously wounded Joseph Marcs, an inspector of gendarmes, with the same revolver—the result of *rigor mortis* acting on the trigger of the gun still held in the dead man's hand.
- [15] Joseph D. Trego, a war veteran of Reading, Pennsylvania, came very near shooting the coroner, hours after his own death, by the muscular contraction of his hand. It took the coroner half an hour to wrest the revolver from the dead man's hand.
- [16] A modification of this old method was employed by Tony Skeel in "The 'Canary' Murder Case."
- [17] This method consists merely of putting a hairpin around the handle of the turn-bolt, and then pulling the hairpin out through the keyhole or under the door.
- [18] This device was used by Edgar Wallace in his "The Clue of the Twisted Candle," and consists of resting the drop-bolt on a candle which, as it burns down or softens, permits the bolt to fall into place.
- [19] A modification of, and an improvement on, the melted candle device.
- [20] It was a Hodder and Stoughton reprint.
- [21] Wallace, "The Clue of the New Pin," pp. 274-275.
- [22] "Überzeugt, dass Frau Konrad ihre Kinder nicht ermordet und dann Selbstmord begangen hatte, entschloss sich Hollmann, einen letzten Versuch zu machen, und die ganze Tür inwendig und auswendig mikroskopisch genau zu untersuchen. Aber nirgends war die geringste Öffnung zu finden, ja die Tür passte so genau in ihren Rahmen, dass man nicht einmal einen Papierstreifen durch irgend einen Riss hätte ziehen können. In stundenlanger Arbeit untersuchte Hollmann die Tür mit einer starken Lupe, um endlich seine Mühe belohnt zu sehen. Genau über dem Riegel, an der Innenseite, fast an der Kante der Tür, fand er ein ganz kleines, kaum bemerkbares Loch. Als er aber an der Aussenseite der Tür die dem Loch direkt gegenüberliegende Fläche untersuchte, war kein entsprechendes Loch zu entdecken. Er fand jedoch an dieser Stelle einen kleinen Fleck, wo der Anstrich frischer war, als an der übrigen Tür. Der Fleck war fest, was trotzdem Hollmann in seiner Forschungsarbeit nicht entmutigte. Von einem Mieter im Hause borgte er eine gewöhnliche Hutnadel, heizte sie und führte sie von der Innenseite in das Loch. Mit ganz geringem Druck durchbohrte die geheizte Hutnadel die Tür, und kam genau in der Mitte des frischgestrichenen Flecks an der Aussenseite zum Vorschein. Als Hollmann die Hutnadel wieder herauszog, klebte ein Stück zähes Rosshaar daran fest, während die Nadel mit einer dünnen Wachsschicht überzogen war. . . . Nun war es klar, durch welches Verfahren es Konrad gelungen war, die Tür von aussen zu verriegeln. Zuerst hatte er ein winzig kleines Loch über dem Riegel durch die Tür gebohrt, hatte dann eine Schlinge von Rosshaar um den Knopf am Riegel gelegt und die beiden Enden durch das Loch gezogen. Dann hatte er den Riegelknopf aufwärts gezogen, bis die Schlinge sich vom Knopf abgelöst, und darauf das Rosshaar wieder aus dem Loch herausgezogen. Ein Stück des Rosshaars war jedoch im Loch hängengeblieben. Sodann hatte Konrad das Loch mit Wachs verstopft und es an der Aussenseite mit Farbe überstrichen, und damit sozusagen jede Spur seines verbrecherischen Verfahrens getilgt. Später wurde er des Mordes seiner Familie überführt, zum Tode verurteilt, und gehängt."—K. Bernstein, "Der Merkwürdige Fall Konrad," pp. 222-224.
- [23] Notably "The Bishop Murder Case."
- [24] This great Doberman, who won his Sieger title when less than fifteen months old, being the youngest dog ever to receive this award, has recently been imported to this country by F. R. Kingman, and made his American championship without difficulty.
- [25] It might be interesting to note here that Jacob Munter Lobsenz, M.D., later became Vance's personal physician.
- [26] Marguerite Kirmse, the etcher and also a breeder and judge of Scottish terriers, is in private life Mrs. George W. Cole.
- [27] Vance owned three of Marguerite Kirmse's Scottie etchings—"My Scotties," "Safety First," and "Gangway!"

[28] It is considered unethical for any judge to acquaint himself, either by catalogue or otherwise, with any of the names of the entries in a show at which he is to officiate, and every reputable judge abides by this unwritten law. After the distribution of awards, he may, of course, acquaint himself with the names and ownership of any dog in the entry.

[29] Mr. Rice explained to us that the judges' books and entry blanks were kept for six or seven months, until they had been thoroughly checked with the records and found correct.

[30] A. G. Bradley: "An Old Gate of England" ("The English Countryside Series"), published by Robert Scott, London, 1917.

[31] Bradley, "An Old Gate of England," p. 64.



• INWOOD and THE STAMM ESTATE •

## 07. DRAGON

### 1. THE TRAGEDY

(Saturday, August 11; 11.45 p.m.)

That sinister and terrifying crime, which came to be known as the dragon murder case, will always be associated in my mind with one of the hottest summers I have ever experienced in New York.

Philo Vance, who stood aloof from the eschatological and supernatural implications of the case, and was therefore able to solve the problem on a purely rationalistic basis, had planned a fishing trip to Norway that August, but an intellectual whim had caused him to cancel his arrangements and to remain in America. Since the influx of post-war, *nouveau-riche* Americans along the French and Italian Rivas, he had forgone his custom of spending his summers on the Mediterranean, and had gone after salmon and trout in the streams of North Bergenhus. But late in July of this particular year his interest in the Menander fragments found in Egypt during the early years of this century, had revived, and he set himself to complete their translation—a work which, you may recall, had been interrupted by that amazing series of Mother-Goose murders in West 75th Street.<sup>[1]</sup>

However, once again this task of research and love was rudely intruded upon by one of the most baffling murder mysteries in which Vance ever participated; and the lost comedies of Menander were again pigeon-holed for the intricate ratiocination of crime. Personally I think Vance's criminal investigations were closer to his heart than the scholastic enterprises on which he was constantly embarking, for though his mind was ever seeking out abstruse facts in the realm of cultural lore, he found his greatest mental recreation in intricate problems wholly unrelated to pure learning. Criminology satisfied this yearning in his nature, for it not only stimulated his analytical processes but brought into play his knowledge of recondite facts and his uncanny instinct for the subtleties of human nature.

Shortly after his student days at Harvard he asked me to officiate as his legal adviser and monetary steward; and my liking and admiration for him were such that I resigned from my father's firm of Van Dine, Davis and Van Dine to take up the duties he had outlined. I have never regretted that decision; and it is because of the resultant association with him that I have been able to set down an accurate and semi-official account of the various criminal investigations in which he participated. He was drawn into these investigations as a result of his friendship with John F.-X. Markham during the latter's four years' incumbency as District Attorney of New York County.

Of all the cases I have thus far recorded none was as exciting, as weird, as apparently unrelated to all rational thinking, as the dragon murder. Here was a crime that seemed to transcend all the ordinary scientific knowledge of man and to carry the police and the investigators into an obfiscous and unreal realm of demonology and folk-lore—a realm fraught with dim racial memories of legendary terrors.

The dragon has ever entered into the emotional imaginings of primitive religions, throwing over its conceivers a spell of sinister and terrifying superstition. And here in the city of New York, in the twentieth century, the police were plunged into a criminal investigation which resuscitated all the dark passages in those dim forgotten times when the superstitious children of the earth believed in malignant monsters and the retributive horrors which these monsters visited upon man.

The darkest chapters in the ethnological records of the human race were reviewed within sight of the skyscrapers of modern Manhattan; and so powerful was the effect of these resuscitations that even scientists searched for some biological explanation of the grotesque phenomena that held the country enthralled during the days following the uncanny and incomprehensible death of Sanford Montague. The survival of prehistoric monsters—the development of subterranean Ichthyopsida—the unclean and darksome matings of earth and sea creatures—were advanced as possible scientific explanations of the extraordinary and hideous facts with which the police and the District Attorney's office were faced.

Even the practical and hard-headed Sergeant Ernest Heath of the Homicide Bureau was affected by the mysterious and incalculable elements of the case. During the preliminary investigation—when there was no actual evidence of murder—the unimaginative Sergeant sensed hidden and ominous things, as if a miasmatic emanation had arisen from the seemingly commonplace circumstances surrounding the situation. In fact, had it not been for the fears that arose in him when he was first called to take charge of the tragic episode, the dragon murder might never have come to the attention of the authorities. It would, in all probability, have been recorded conventionally in the archives of the New York Police Department as another "disappearance," accounted for along various obvious lines and with a cynical wink.

This hypothetical eventuality was, no doubt, what the murderer intended; but the perpetrator of that extraordinary crime—a crime, as far as I know, unparalleled in the annals of violent homicide—had failed to count on the effect of the sinister atmosphere which enveloped his unholy act. The fact that the imaginative aboriginal fears of man have largely developed from the inherent mysteries enshrouded in the dark hidden depths of water, was overlooked by the murderer. And it was this oversight that roused the Sergeant's vague misgivings and turned a superficially commonplace episode into one of the most spectacular and diabolical murder cases of modern times.

Sergeant Heath was the first official to go to the scene of the crime—although, at the time, he was not aware that a crime had been committed; and it was he who stammered out his unidentifiable fears to Markham and Vance.

It was nearly midnight on August 11. Markham had dined with Vance at the latter's roof-garden apartment in East 38th Street, and the three of us had spent the evening in a desultory discussion of various topics. There had been a lackadaisical atmosphere over our gathering, and the periods of silence had increased as the night wore on, for the weather was both hot and sultry, and the leaves of the tree-tops which rose from the rear yard were as still as those on a painted canvas. Moreover, it had rained for hours, the downpour ceasing only at ten o'clock, and a heavy breathless pall seemed to have settled over the city.

Vance had just mixed a second champagne cup for us when Currie, Vance's butler and major-domo, appeared at the door to the roof-garden carrying a portable telephone.

"There is an urgent call for Mr. Markham," he announced; "and I took the liberty of bringing the telephone. . . . It's Sergeant Heath,

sir."

Markham looked nettled and a bit surprised, but he nodded and took the instrument. His conversation with the Sergeant was a brief one, and when he replaced the receiver he was frowning.

"That's queer," he commented. "Unlike the Sergeant. He's worried about something—wants to see me. He didn't give any hint of the matter, and I didn't press the point. Said he found out at my home that I was here. . . . I didn't like the suppressed tone of his voice, and told him he might come here. I hope you don't mind, Vance."

"Delighted," Vance drawled, settling deeper into his wicker chair. "I haven't seen the doughty Sergeant for months. . . . Currie," he called, "bring the Scotch and soda. Sergeant Heath is joining us." Then he turned back to Markham. "I hope there's nothing amiss. . . . Maybe the heat has hallucinated the Sergeant."

Markham, still troubled, shook his head.

"It would take more than hot weather to upset Heath's equilibrium." He shrugged. "Oh, well, we'll know the worst soon enough."

It was about twenty minutes later when the Sergeant was announced. He came out on the terrace garden, wiping his brow with an enormous handkerchief. After he had greeted us somewhat abstractedly he dropped into a chair by the glass-topped table and helped himself to a long drink of the Scotch whisky which Vance moved toward him.

"I've just come from Inwood, Chief," he explained to Markham. "A guy has disappeared. And to tell you the truth, I don't like it. There's something phony somewhere."

Markham scowled.

"Anything unusual about the case?"

"No—nothing." The Sergeant appeared embarrassed. "That's the hell of it. Everything in order—the usual sort of thing. Routine. And yet . . ." His voice trailed off, and he lifted the glass to his lips.

Vance gave an amused smile.

"I fear, Markham," he observed, "the Sergeant has become intuitive."

Heath set down his glass with a bang.

"If you mean, Mr. Vance, that I've got a hunch about this case, you're right!" And he thrust his jaw forward.

Vance raised his eyebrows whimsically.

"What case, Sergeant?"

Heath gave him a dour look and then grinned.

"I'm going to tell you—and you can laugh all you want to. . . . Listen, Chief." He turned back to Markham. "Along about ten forty-five tonight a telephone call comes to the Homicide Bureau. A fellow, who says his name is Leland, tells me there's been a tragedy out at the old Stamm estate in Inwood and that, if I have any sense, I better hop out. . . ."

"A perfect spot for a crime," Vance interrupted musingly. "It's one of the oldest estates in the city—built nearly a hundred years ago. It's an anachronism today, but—my word!—it's full of criminal possibilities. Legendry, in fact, with an amazin' history."

Heath contemplated Vance shrewdly.

"You got the idea, sir. I felt just that way when I got out there. . . . Well, anyway, I naturally asked this fellow Leland what had happened and why I should come. And it seems that a bird named Montague had dived into the swimming pool on the estate, and hadn't come up—"

"Was it, by any chance, the old Dragon Pool?" inquired Vance, raising himself and reaching for his beloved *Régie* cigarettes.

"That's the one," Heath told him; "though I never knew the name of it till I got there tonight. . . . Well, I told him that wasn't in my line, but he got persistent and said that the matter oughta be looked into, and the sooner I came the better. He talked in a funny tone—it sorta got to me. His English was all right—he didn't have any foreign accent—but I got the idea he wasn't an American. I asked him why he was calling up about something that had happened on the Stamm estate; and he said he was an old friend of the family and had witnessed the tragedy. He also said Stamm wasn't able to telephone, and that he had temporarily taken charge of the situation. . . . I couldn't get any more out of him; but there was something about the way the fellow talked that made me leery."

"I see," Markham murmured non-committally. "So you went out?"

"Yeah, I went out." Heath nodded sheepishly. "I got Hennessey and Burke and Snitkin, and we hopped a police car."

"What did you find?"

"I didn't find anything, sir," Heath returned aggressively, "except what that guy told me over the phone. There was a week-end house-party on the estate, and one of the guests—this bird named Montague—had suggested they all go swimming in the pool. There'd probably been considerable drinking, so they all went down to the pool and put on bathing suits. . . ."

"Just a moment, Sergeant," Vance interrupted. "Was Leland drunk, by any chance?"

"Not him." The Sergeant shook his head. "He was the coolest member of the lot. But there was something queer about him. He seemed greatly relieved when I got there; and he took me aside and told me to keep my eyes open. I naturally asked him what he meant, but right away he got casual, so to speak, and merely said that a lot of peculiar things had happened around those parts in the old days, and that maybe something peculiar had happened tonight."

"I think I know what he meant," Vance said with a slight nod. "That part of the city has given rise to many strange and grotesque legends—old wives' tales and superstitions that have come down from the Indians and early settlers."

"Well, anyway,"—Heath dismissed Vance's comments as irrelevant—"after the party had gone down to the pool, this fellow Montague walked out on the spring-board and took a fancy dive. And he never came up. . . ."

"How could the others be so sure he didn't come up?" asked Markham. "It must have been pretty dark after the rain: it's cloudy now."

"There was plenty of light at the pool," Heath explained. "They've got a dozen flood-lights on the place."

"Very well. Go on." Markham reached impatiently for his champagne. "What happened then?"

Heath shifted uneasily.

"Nothing much," he admitted. "The other men dove after him and tried to find him, but after ten minutes or so they gave up. Leland,

it seems, told 'em that they'd all better go back to the house and that he'd notify the authorities. Then he called the Homicide Bureau and spilled the story."

"Queer he should do that," ruminated Markham. "It doesn't sound like a criminal case."

"Sure it's queer," agreed Heath eagerly. "But what I found was a whole lot queerer."

"Ah!" Vance blew a ribbon of smoke upward. "That romantic section of old New York is at last living up to its reputation. What were these queer things you found, Sergeant?"

Heath moved again with uneasy embarrassment.

"To begin with, Stamm himself was cock-eyed drunk, and there was a doctor from the neighborhood trying to get him to function. Stamm's young sister—a good-looker of about twenty-five—was having hysterics and going off into faints every few minutes. The rest of 'em—there was four or five—were trying to duck and making excuses why they had to get away *pronto*. And all the time this fellow Leland, who looks like a hawk or something, was going round as cool as a cucumber with lifted eyebrows and a satisfied grin on his brown face, as if he knew a lot more than he was telling.—Then there was one of those sleezy, pasty-faced butlers, who acted like a ghost and didn't make any noise when he moved. . . ."

"Yes, yes," Vance nodded whimsically. "Everything most mystifyin'. . . . And the wind moaned through the pines; and an owl hooted in the distance; and a lattice rattled in the attic; and a door creaked; and there came a tapping—eh, what, Sergeant? . . . I say, do have another spot of Scotch. You're positively jittery." (He spoke humorously, but there was a shrewd, interested look in his half-closed eyes and an undercurrent of tension in his voice that made me realize that he was taking the Sergeant far more seriously than his manner indicated.)

I expected the Sergeant to resent Vance's frivolous attitude, but instead he wagged his head soberly.

"You got the idea, Mr. Vance. Nothing seemed on the level. It wasn't normal, as you might say."

Markham's annoyance was mounting.

"The case doesn't strike me as peculiar, Sergeant," he protested. "A man dives into a swimming pool, hits his head on the bottom, and drowns. And you've related nothing else that can't be explained on the most commonplace grounds. It's not unusual for a man to get drunk, and after a tragedy of this kind a hysterical woman is not to be regarded as unique. Naturally, too, the other members of the party wanted to get away after an episode like this. As for the man Leland: he may be just a peculiar officious character who wished to dramatize a fundamentally simple affair. And you always had an antipathy for butlers. However you look at the case, it doesn't warrant anything more than the usual procedure. It's certainly not in the province of the Homicide Bureau. The idea of murder is precluded by the very mechanism of Montague's disappearance. He himself suggested a swim in the pool—a rational enough suggestion on a night like this—and his plunge into the pool and his failure to come to the surface could hardly be indicative of any other person's criminal intent."

Heath shrugged and lighted a long black cigar.

"I've been telling myself the same things for the past hour," he returned stubbornly; "but that situation at the Stamm house ain't right."

Markham pursed his lips and regarded the Sergeant meditatively.

"Was there anything else that upset you?" he asked, after a pause.

Heath did not answer at once. Obviously there was something else on his mind, and it seemed to me that he was weighing the advisability of mentioning it. But suddenly he lifted himself in his chair and took his cigar deliberately from his mouth.

"I don't like those fish!" he blurted.

"Fish?" repeated Markham in astonishment. "What fish?"

Heath hesitated and contemplated the end of his cigar sheepishly.

"I think I can answer that question, Markham," Vance put in. "Rudolph Stamm is one of the foremost aquarists in America. He has a most amazin' collection of tropical fish—strange and little-known varieties which he has succeeded in breeding. It's been his hobby for twenty years, and he is constantly going on expeditions to the Amazon, Siam, India, the Paraguay basin, Brazil and Bermuda. He has also made trips to China and has scoured the Orinoco. Only a year or so ago the papers were full of his trip from Liberia to the Congo. . . ."

"They're queer-looking things," Heath supplemented. "Some of 'em look like sea-monsters that haven't grown up."

"Their shapes and their colorings are very beautiful, however," commented Vance with a faint smile.

"But that wasn't all," the Sergeant went on, ignoring Vance's aesthetic observation. "This fellow Stamm had lizards and baby alligators—"

"And probably turtles and frogs and snakes—"

"I'll say he has snakes!" The Sergeant made a grimace of disgust. "Plenty of 'em—crawling in and out of big flat tanks of water. . . ."

"Yes." Vance nodded and looked toward Markham. "Stamm, I understand, has a terrarium along with his fish. The two often go together, don't y' know."

Markham grunted and studied the Sergeant for a moment.

"Perhaps," he remarked at length, in a flat, matter-of-fact tone, "Montague was merely playing a practical joke on the other guests. How do you know he didn't swim under water to the other side of the pool and disappear up the opposite bank? Was it dark enough there so the others couldn't have seen him?"

"Sure it was dark enough," the Sergeant told him. "The flood-lights don't reach all across the water. But that explanation is out. I myself thought something of the kind might have happened, seeing as how there had been a lot of liquor going round, and I took a look over the place. But the opposite side of the pool is almost a straight precipice of rock, nearly a hundred feet high. Across the upper end of the pool, where the creek runs in, there's a big filter, and not only would it be hard for a man to climb it, but the lights reach that far and any one of the party could have seen him there. Then, at the lower end of the pool, where the water has been dammed up with a big cement wall, there's a drop of twenty feet or so, with plenty of rocks down below. No guy's going to take a chance dropping over the dam in order to create a little excitement. On the side of the pool nearest the house, where the spring-board is, there's a concrete



retaining wall which a swimmer might climb over; but there again the floodlights would give him dead away."

"And there's no other possible way Montague could have got out of the pool without being seen?"

"Yes, there's one way he might have done it—but he didn't. Between the end of the filter and the steep cliff that comes down on the opposite side of the pool, there's a low open space of about fifteen feet which leads off to the lower part of the estate. And this flat opening is plenty dark so that the people on the house side of the pool couldn't have seen anything there."

"Well, there's probably your explanation."

"No, it isn't, Mr. Markham," Heath asserted emphatically. "The minute I went down to the pool and got the lay of the land, I took Hennessey with me across the top of the big filter and looked for footprints on this fifteen-foot low bank. You know it had been raining all evening, and the ground over there is damp anyway, so that if there had been any kind of footprints they would have stuck out plain. But the whole area was perfectly smooth. Moreover, Hennessey and I went back into the grass a little distance from the bank, thinking that maybe the guy might have climbed up on a ledge of the rock and jumped over the muddy edge of the water. But there wasn't a sign of anything there either."

"That being the case," said Markham, "they'll probably find his body when the pool is dragged. . . . Did you order that done?"

"Not tonight I didn't. It would take two or three hours to get a boat and hooks up there, and you couldn't do anything much at night anyway. But that'll all be taken care of the first thing in the morning."

"Well," decided Markham impatiently, "I can't see that there's anything more for you to do tonight. As soon as the body is found the Medical Examiner will be notified, and he'll probably say that Montague has a fractured skull and will put the whole thing down as accidental death."

There was a tone of dismissal in his voice, but Heath refused to be moved by it. I had never seen the Sergeant so stubborn.

"You may be right, Chief," he conceded reluctantly. "But I got other ideas. And I came all the way down here to ask you if you wouldn't come up and give the situation the once-over."

Something in the Sergeant's voice must have affected Markham, for instead of replying at once he again studied the other quizzically. Finally he asked:

"Just what have you done so far in connection with the case?"

"To tell the truth, I haven't done much of anything," the Sergeant admitted. "I haven't had time. I naturally got the names and addresses of everybody in the house and questioned each one of 'em in a routine way. I couldn't talk to Stamm because he was out of the picture and the doctor was working over him. Most of my time was spent in going around the pool, seeing what I could learn. But, as I told you, I didn't find out anything except that Montague didn't play any joke on his friends. Then I went back to the house and telephoned to you. I left things up there in charge of the three men I took along with me. And after I told everybody that they couldn't go home until I got back, I beat it down here. . . . That's my story, and I'm probably stuck with it."

Despite the forced levity of his last remark, he looked up at Markham with, I thought, an appealing insistence.

Once more Markham hesitated and returned the Sergeant's gaze.

"You are convinced there was foul play?" he queried.

"I'm not convinced of anything," Heath retorted. "I'm just not satisfied with the way things stack up. Furthermore, there's a lot of funny relationships in that crowd up there. Everybody seems jealous of everybody else. A couple of guys are dotty on the same girl, and nobody seemed to care a hoot—except Stamm's young sister—that Montague didn't come up from his dive. The fact is, they all seemed damn pleased about it—which didn't set right with me. And even Miss Stamm didn't seem to be worrying particularly about Montague. I can't explain exactly what I mean, but she seemed to be all upset about something else connected with his disappearance."

"I still can't see," returned Markham, "that you have any tangible explanation for your attitude. The best thing, I think, is to wait and see what tomorrow brings."

"Maybe yes." But instead of accepting Markham's obvious dismissal Heath poured himself another drink and relighted his cigar.

During this conversation between the Sergeant and the District Attorney, Vance had lain back in his chair contemplating the two dreamily, sipping his champagne cup and smoking languidly. But a certain deliberate tenseness in the way he moved his hand to and from his lips, convinced me that he was deeply interested in everything that was being said.

At this point he crushed out his cigarette, set down his glass, and rose to his feet.

"Really, y' know, Markham old dear," he said in a drawling voice, "I think we should toddle along with the Sergeant to the site of the mystery. It can't do the slightest harm, and it's a beastly night anyway. A bit of excitement, however tame the ending, might help us forget the weather. And we may be affected by the same sinister atmospheres which have so inflamed the Sergeant's hormones."

Markham looked up at him in mild astonishment.

"Why in the name of Heaven, should you want to go to the Stamm estate?"

"For one thing," Vance returned, stifling a yawn, "I am tremendously interested, d' ye see, in looking over Stamm's collection of toy fish. I bred them myself in an amateur way once, but because of lack of space, I concentrated on the color-breeding of the *Betta splendens* and *cambodia*—Siamese Fighting Fish, don't y' know." [2]

Markham studied him for a few moments without replying. He knew Vance well enough to realize that his desire to accede to the Sergeant's request was inspired by a much deeper reason than the patently frivolous one he gave. And he also knew that no amount of questioning would make Vance elucidate his true attitude just then.

After a minute Markham also rose. He glanced at his watch and shrugged.

"Past midnight," he commented disgustedly. "The perfect hour, of course, to inspect fish! . . . Shall we drive out in the Sergeant's car or take yours?"

"Oh, mine, by all means. We'll follow the Sergeant." And Vance rang for Currie to bring him his hat and stick.

## 2. A STARTLING ACCUSATION

(Sunday, August 12; 12.30 a.m.)

A few minutes later we were headed up Broadway. Sergeant Heath led the way in his small police car and Markham and Vance and I followed in Vance's Hispano-Suiza. Reaching Dyckman Street, we went west to Payson Avenue and turned up the steep winding Bolton Road.[3] When we had reached the highest point of the road we swung into a wide private driveway with two tall square stone posts at the entrance, and circled upward round a mass of evergreen trees until we reached the apex of the hill. It was on this site that the famous old Stamm residence had been built nearly a century before.

It was a wooded estate, abounding in cedar, oak, and spruce trees, with patches of rough lawn and rock gardens. From this vantage point could be seen, to the north, the dark Gothic turrets of the House of Mercy, silhouetted against a clearing sky which seemed to have sucked up the ghostly lights of Marble Hill a mile distant across the waters of Spuyten Duyvil. To the south, through the trees, the faintly flickering glow of Manhattan cast an uncanny spell. Eastward, on either side of the black mass of the Stamm residence, a few tall buildings along Seaman Avenue and Broadway reached up over the hazy horizon like black giant fingers. Behind and below us, to the west, the Hudson River moved sluggishly, a dark opaque mass flecked with the moving lights of boats.

But although on every side we could see evidences of the modern busy life of New York, a feeling of isolation and mystery crept over me. I seemed infinitely removed from all the busy activities of the world; and I realized then, for the first time, how strange an anachronism Inwood was. Though this historic spot—with its great trees, its crumbling houses, its ancient associations, its rugged wildness, and its rustic quietude—was actually a part of Manhattan, it nevertheless seemed like some hidden fastness set away in a remote coign of the world.

As we turned into the small parking space at the head of the private driveway, we noticed an old-fashioned Ford coupe parked about fifty yards from the wide balustraded stone steps that led to the house.

"That's the doctor's car," Heath explained to us, as he hopped down from his machine. "The garage is on the lower road on the east side of the house."

He led the way up the steps to the massive bronze front door over which a dim light was burning; and we were met by Detective Snitkin in the narrow panelled vestibule.

"I'm glad you're back, Sergeant," the detective said, after saluting Markham respectfully.

"Don't you like the situation either, Snitkin?" Vance asked lightly.

"Not me, sir," the other returned, going toward the inner front door. "It's got me worried."

"Anything else happen?" Heath inquired abruptly.

"Nothing except that Stamm has begun to sit up and take notice."

He gave three taps on the door which was immediately opened by a liveried butler who regarded us suspiciously.

"Is this really necessary, officer?" he asked Heath in a suave voice, as he reluctantly held the door open for us. "You see, sir, Mr. Stamm—"

"I'm running this show," Heath interrupted curtly. "You're here to take orders, not to ask questions."

The butler bowed with a sleek, obsequious smile, and closed the door after us.

"What are your orders, sir?"

"You stay here at the front door," Heath replied brusquely, "and don't let any one in." He then turned to Snitkin, who had followed us into the spacious lower hallway. "Where's the gang and what are they doing?"

"Stamm's in the library—that room over there—with the doctor." Snitkin jerked his thumb toward a pair of heavy tapestry portières at the rear of the hall. "I sent the rest of the bunch to their rooms, like you told me. Burke is sitting out on the rear doorstep, and Hennessey is down by the pool."

Heath grunted.

"That's all right." He turned to Markham. "What do you want to do first, Chief? Shall I show you the lay of the land and how the swimming pool is constructed? Or do you want to ask these babies some questions?"

Markham hesitated, and Vance spoke languidly.

"Really, Markham, I'm rather inclined to think we should first do a bit of what you call probing. I'd jolly well like to know what preceded this *alfresco* bathing party, and I'd like to view the participants. The pool will keep till later; and—one can't tell, can one?—it may take on a different significance once we have established a sort of social background for the unfortunate escapade."

"It doesn't matter to me." Markham was plainly impatient and skeptical. "The sooner we find out why we're here at all, the better pleased I'll be."

Vance's eyes were roving desultorily about the hallway. It was panelled in Tudor style, and the furniture was dark and massive. Life-sized, faded oil portraits hung about the walls, and all the doors were heavily draped. It was a gloomy place, filled with shadows, and with a musty odor which accentuated its inherent unmodernity.

"A perfect setting for your fears, Sergeant," Vance mused. "There are few of these old houses left, and I'm trying to decide whether or not I'm grateful."

"In the meantime," snapped Markham, "suppose we go to the drawing-room. . . . Where is it, Sergeant?"

Heath pointed to a curtained archway on the right, and we were about to proceed when there came the sound of soft descending footsteps on the stairs, and a voice spoke to us from the shadows.

"Can I be of any assistance, gentlemen?"

The tall figure of a man approached us. When he had come within the radius of flickering light thrown by the old-fashioned crystal chandelier, we discerned an unusual and, as I thought at the time, sinister person.

He was over six feet tall, slender and wiry, and gave the impression of steely strength. He had a dark, almost swarthy, complexion, with keen calm black eyes which had something of the look of an eagle in them. His nose was markedly Roman and very narrow. His cheek-bones were high, and there were slight hollows under them. Only his mouth and chin were Nordic: his lips were thin and met in a straight line; and his deeply cleft chin was heavy and powerful. His hair, brushed straight back from a low broad forehead, seemed very black in the dim light of the hallway. His clothes were in the best of taste, subdued and well-cut, but there was a carelessness in the way he wore them which made me feel that he regarded them as a sort of compromise with an unnecessary convention.

"My name is Leland," he explained, when he had reached us. "I am a friend of long standing in this household, and I was a guest tonight at the time of the most unfortunate accident."

He spoke with peculiar precision, and I understood exactly the impression which the Sergeant had received over the telephone when Leland had first communicated with him.

Vance had been regarding the man critically.

"Do you live in Inwood, Mr. Leland?" he asked casually.

The other gave a barely perceptible nod.

"I live in a cottage in Shorakapkok, the site of the ancient Indian village, on the hillside which overlooks the old Spuyten Duyvil Creek."

"Near the Indian caves?"

"Yes, just across what they now call the Shell Bed."

"And you have known Mr. Stamm a long time?"

"For fifteen years." The man hesitated. "I have accompanied him on many of his expeditions in search of tropical fish."

Vance kept his gaze steadily upon the strange figure.

"And perhaps also," he said, with a coldness which I did not then understand, "you accompanied Mr. Stamm on his expedition for lost treasure in the Caribbean? It seems I recall your name being mentioned in connection with those romantic adventures."

"You are right," Leland admitted without change of expression.

Vance turned away.

"Quite—oh, quite. I think you may be just the person to help us with the present problem. Suppose we stagger into the drawing-room for a little chat."

He drew apart the heavy curtains, and the butler came swiftly forward to switch on the electric lights.

We found ourselves in an enormous room, the ceiling of which was at least twenty feet high. A large Aubusson carpet covered the floor; and the heavy and ornate Louis-Quinze furniture, now somewhat dilapidated and faded, had been set about the walls with formal precision. The whole room had a fusty and tarnished air of desuetude and antiquity.

Vance looked about him and shuddered.

"Evidently not a popular rendezvous," he commented as if to himself.

Leland glanced at him shrewdly.

"No," he vouchsafed. "The room is rarely used. The household has lived in the less formal rooms at the rear ever since Joshua Stamm died. The most popular quarters are the library and the vivarium which Stamm added to the house ten years ago. He spends most of his time there."

"With the fish, of course," remarked Vance.

"They are an absorbing hobby," Leland explained without enthusiasm.

Vance nodded abstractedly, sat down and lighted a cigarette.

"Since you have been so kind as to offer your assistance, Mr. Leland," he began, "suppose you tell us just what the conditions were in the house tonight, and the various incidents that preceded the tragedy." Then, before the other could reply, he added: "I understand from Sergeant Heath that you were rather insistent that he should take the matter in hand. Is that correct?"

"Quite correct," Leland replied, without the faintest trace of uneasiness. "The failure of young Montague to come to the surface after diving into the pool struck me as most peculiar. He is an excellent swimmer and an adept at various athletic sports. Furthermore, he knows every square foot of the pool; and there is practically no chance whatever that he could have struck his head on the bottom. The other side of the pool is somewhat shallow and has a sloping wall, but the near side, where the *cabañas* and the diving-board are, is at least twenty-five feet deep."

"Still," suggested Vance, "the man may have had a cramp or a sudden concussion from the dive. Such things have happened, don't y' know." His eyes were fixed languidly but appraisingly on Leland. "Just what was your object in urging a member of the Homicide Bureau to investigate the situation?"

"Merely a question of precaution—" Leland began, but Vance interrupted him.

"Yes, yes, to be sure. But why should you feel that caution was necessary in the circumstances?"

A cynical smile appeared at the corners of the man's mouth.

"This is not a household," he replied, "where life runs normally. The Stamms, as you may know, are an intensely inbred line. Joshua Stamm and his wife were first cousins, and both pairs of grandparents were also related by blood. Paresis runs in the family. There has been nothing fixed or permanent in the natures of the last two generations of Stamms, and life in this household is always pushing out at unexpected angles. The ordinary family diagrams are constantly being broken up. There is little stabilization, either physical or intellectual."

"Even so"—Vance, I could see, had become deeply interested in the man—"how would these facts of heredity have any bearing on Montague's disappearance?"

"Montague," Leland returned in a flat voice, "was engaged to Stamm's sister, Bernice."

"Ah!" Vance drew deeply on his cigarette. "You are inferring perhaps that Stamm was opposed to the engagement?"

"I am making no inferences." Leland took out a long-stemmed briar pipe and a pouch of tobacco. "If Stamm objected to the alliance, he made no mention of it to me. He is not the kind of man who reveals his inner thoughts or feelings. But his nature is pregnant with

potentialities, and he may have hated Montague." Deftly he filled his pipe and lighted it.

"And are we to assume, then, that your calling in the police was based on—what shall we call it?—the Mendelian law of breeding as applied to the Stammers?"

Again Leland smiled cynically.

"No, not exactly—though it may have been a factor in rousing my suspicious curiosity."

"And the other factors?"

"There has been considerable drinking here in the last twenty-four hours."

"Oh, yes; alcohol—that great releaser of inhibitions. . . . But let's forgo the academic for the time being."

Leland moved to the centre-table and leaned against it.

"The personages of this particular house-party," he said at length, "are not above gaining their ends at any cost."

Vance inclined his head.

"That remark is more promising," he commented. "Suppose you tell us briefly of these people."

"There are few enough of them," Leland began. "Besides Stamm and his sister, there is a Mr. Alex Greeff, a reputed stock-broker, who unquestionably has some designs on the Stamm fortune. Then there is Kirwin Tatum, a dissipated and disreputable young ne'er-do-well, who, as far as I can make out, exists wholly by sponging on his friends. Incidentally, he has made something of an ass of himself over Bernice Stamm. . . ."

"And Greeff—what are his sentiments toward Miss Stamm?"

"I cannot say. He poses as the family's financial adviser, and I know that Stamm has invested rather heavily at his suggestion. But whether or not he wishes to marry the Stamm fortune is problematical."

"Thanks no end. . . . And now for the other members of the party."

"Mrs. McAdam—they call her Teeny—is the usual type of widow, talkative, gay, and inclined to overindulgence. Her past is unknown. She is shrewd and worldly, and has a practical eye on Stamm—always making a great fuss over him, but obviously with some ulterior motive. Young Tatum whispered to me confidentially, in a moment of drunken laxity, that Montague and this McAdam woman once lived together."

Vance clicked his tongue in mock disapproval.

"I begin to sense the potentialities of the situation. Most alluring! . . . Any one else to complicate this delightful social *mélange*?"

"Yes, a Miss Steele. Ruby is her first name. She is an intense creature, of indeterminate age, who dresses fantastically and is always playing a part of some kind. She paints pictures and sings and talks of her 'art.' I believe she was once on the stage. . . . And that completes the roster—except for Montague and myself. Another woman was invited, so Stamm told me, but she sent in her regrets at the last minute."

"Ah! Now that's most interestin'. Did Mr. Stamm mention her name?"

"No, but you might ask him when the doctor gets him in shape."

"What of Montague?" Vance asked. "A bit of gossip regarding his proclivities and background might prove illuminatin'."

Leland hesitated. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe and refilled it. When he had got it going again he answered with a show of reluctance:

"Montague was what you might call a professional handsome-man. He was an actor by profession, but he never seemed to get very far—although he was featured in one or two motion pictures in Hollywood. He always lived well, at one of the fashionable and expensive hotels. He attended first nights and was a frequenter of the east-side night-clubs. He had a decidedly pleasant manner and was, I understand, most attractive to women. . . ." Leland paused, packed his pipe, and added: "I really know very little about the man."

"I recognize the type." Vance regarded his cigarette. "However, I shouldn't say the gathering was altogether unusual, or that the elements involved were necessarily indicative of deliberate tragedy."

"No," Leland admitted. "But it impressed me as noteworthy that practically every one present at the party tonight might have had an excellent motive for putting Montague out of the way."

Vance lifted his eyebrows interrogatively.

"Yes?" he urged.

"Well, to begin with, Stamm himself, as I have said, might have been violently opposed to Montague's marrying his sister. He is very fond of her, and he certainly has intelligence enough to realize that the match would have been a sorry misalliance.—Young Tatum is certainly in a state of mind to murder any rival for Miss Stamm's affections.—Greeff is a man who would stop at nothing, and Montague's marrying into the Stamm family might easily have wrecked his financial ambition to control the fortune. Or, perhaps he actually hoped to marry Bernice himself.—Then again, there was unquestionably something between Teeny McAdam and Montague—I noticed it quite plainly after Tatum had told me of their former relationship. She may have resented his deflection to another woman. Nor is she the kind that would tolerate being thrown over. Furthermore, if she really has any matrimonial designs on Stamm, she may have been afraid that Montague would spoil her prospects by telling Stamm of her past."

"And what about the tense *bohémienne*, Miss Steele?"

A hard look came into Leland's face as he hesitated. Then he said, with a certain sinister resolution:

"I trust her least of them all. There was some definite friction between her and Montague. She was constantly making unpleasant remarks about him—in fact, she ridiculed him openly, and rarely addressed an ordinarily civil word to him. When Montague suggested the swim in the pool she walked with him to the *cabañas*, talking earnestly. I could not make out what was said, but I got a decided impression that she was berating him for something. When we came out in our bathing suits and Montague was about to take the first dive, she walked up to him with a leer and said, in a tone which I could not help overhearing, 'I hope you never come up.' And when Montague failed to appear her remark struck me as significant. . . . Perhaps now you can realize—"

"Quite—oh, quite," Vance murmured. "I can see all the possibilities you put forth. A sweet little conclave—eh, what?" He looked up sharply. "And what about yourself, Mr. Leland? Were you, by any chance, interested in Montague's demise?"

"Perhaps more than any of the others," Leland answered with grim frankness. "I disliked the man intensely, and I considered it an

outrage that he was to marry Bernice. I not only told her so, but I also expressed my opinion to her brother."

"And why," pursued Vance dulcetly, "should you take the matter so much to heart?"

Leland shifted his position on the edge of the table and took his pipe slowly from his mouth.

"Miss Stamm is a very fine and unusual young woman." He spoke with slow deliberation, as if carefully choosing his words. "I admire her greatly. I have known her since she was a child, and during the past few years we have become very good friends. I simply did not think that Montague was good enough for her." He paused and was about to continue, but changed his mind.

Vance had been watching the man closely.

"You're quite lucid, don't y' know, Mr. Leland," he murmured, nodding slowly and looking vaguely at the ceiling. "Yes—quite so. I apprehend that you had an excellent motive for doing away with the dashing Mr. Montague. . . ."

At this moment there came an unexpected interruption. The portières of the drawing-room had been left parted, and suddenly we heard rapid footsteps on the stairs. We turned toward the door, and a moment later a tall, spectacular woman thrust herself excitedly into the room.

She was perhaps thirty-five years old, with an unusually pallid face and crimson lips. Her dark hair was parted in the middle and smoothed back over her ears into a knot at the back of her neck. She wore a long black chiffon gown which seemed to have been cut in one piece and moulded to her figure. The only touches of color in her costume were supplied by her jade jewelry. She wore long pendant jade earrings, a triple jade bead necklace, jade bracelets, several jade rings, and a large carved jade brooch.

As she entered the room her eyes were fixed blazingly on Leland, and she took a few steps toward him. There was a tiger-like menace in her attitude. Then she cast a quick glance at the rest of us, but immediately brought her gaze back to Leland, who stood regarding her with quizzical imperturbability. Slowly she raised her arm and pointed at him, at the same time leaning toward him and narrowing her eyes.

"There's the man!" she cried passionately, in a deep resonant voice.

Vance had risen lazily to his feet and reached for his monocle. Adjusting it, he regarded the woman mildly but critically.

"Thanks awfully," he drawled. "We have met Mr. Leland informally. But we haven't yet had the pleasure—"

"My name is Steele," she cut in almost viciously. "Ruby Steele. And I could hear some of the things that were being said about me by this man. They are all lies. He is only trying to shield himself—to focus suspicion on others."

She turned her fiery eyes from Vance back to Leland and again lifted an accusing finger.

"He's the man that's responsible for Sanford Montague's death. It was he who planned and accomplished it. He hated Monty, for he himself is in love with Bernice Stamm. And he told Monty to keep away from Bernice, or he would kill him. Monty told me that himself. Ever since I came to this house yesterday morning, I have had a clutching feeling here"—she pressed her hands dramatically against her bosom—"that some terrible thing was going to happen—that this man would carry out his threat." She made a theatrical gesture of tragedy, interlocking her fingers and carrying them to her forehead. "And he has done it! . . . Oh, he is sly! He is shrewd—"

"Just how, may I ask," put in Vance, in a cool, unemotional voice, "did Mr. Leland accomplish this feat?"

The woman swung toward him disdainfully.

"The technique of crime," she replied throatily, and with exaggerated hauteur, "is not within my province. You should be able to find out how he did it. You're policemen, aren't you? It was this man who telephoned to you. He's sly, I tell you! He thought that if anything suspicious were discovered when poor Monty's body was found, you'd eliminate him as the murderer because he had telephoned to you."

"Very interestin'," nodded Vance, with a touch of irony. "So you formally accuse Mr. Leland of deliberately planning Mr. Montague's death?"

"I do!" the woman declared sententiously, extending her arms in a studied gesture of emphasis. "And I know I'm right, though it's true I do not know how he did it. But he has strange powers. He's an Indian—did you know that?—an Indian! He can tell when people have passed a certain tree, by looking at the bark. He can track people over the whole of Inwood by broken twigs and crushed leaves. He can tell by the moss on stones how long it has been since they were moved or walked over. He can tell by looking at the ashes of fires how long the flames have been out. He can tell by smelling a garment or a hat, to whom it belongs. And he can read strange signs and tell by the scent of the wind when the rain is coming. He can do all manner of things of which white men know nothing. He knows all the secrets of these hills, for his people have lived in them for generations. He's an Indian—a subtle, scheming Indian!" As she spoke her voice rose excitedly and an impressive histrionic eloquence informed her speech.

"But, my dear young lady," Vance protested pleasantly, "the qualities and characteristics which you ascribe to Mr. Leland are not what one would call unusual, except in a comparative sense. His knowledge of woodcraft and his sensitivity to odors are really not a convincing basis for a criminal accusation. Thousands of boy scouts would constantly be in jeopardy if that were the case."

The woman's eyes became sullen, and she compressed her lips into a line of anger. After a moment she extended her hands, palms upward, in a gesture of resignation, and gave a mirthless laugh.

"Be stupid, if you want to," she remarked with forced and hollow lightness. "But some day you'll come to me and tell me how right I was."

"It will be jolly good fun, anyway," smiled Vance. "*Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit*, as Vergil put it. . . . In the meantime, I must be most impolite and ask that you be good enough to wait in your room until such time as we shall wish to question you further. We have several little matters to attend to."

Without a word she turned and swept majestically from the room.

### 3. THE SPLASH IN THE POOL

(Sunday, August 12; 1.15 a.m.)

During Ruby Steele's diatribe Leland had stood smoking placidly, watching the woman with stoical dignity. He did not seem in the least disturbed by her accusation, and when she had left the room, he shrugged mildly and gave Vance a weary smile.

"Do you wonder," he asked, with a touch of irony, "why I telephoned the police and insisted that they come?"

Vance studied him listlessly.

"You anticipated being accused of having manoeuvred Montague's disappearance—eh, what?"

"Not exactly. But I knew there would be all manner of rumors and whisperings, and I thought it best to have the matter over with at once, and to give the authorities the best possible chance of clarifying the situation and fixing the blame. However, I did not expect any such scene as we have just gone through. Needless to tell you, all Miss Steele has just said is a hysterical fabrication. She told but one truth—and that was only half a truth. My mother was an Algonkian Indian—the Princess White Star, a proud and noble woman, who was separated from her people when a child and reared in a southern convent. My father was an architect, the scion of an old New York family, many years my mother's senior. They are both dead."

"You were born here?" asked Vance.

"Yes, I was born in Inwood, on the site of the old Indian village, Shorakapkok; but the house has long since gone. I live here because I love the place. It has many happy associations of my childhood, before I was sent to Europe to be educated."

"I suspected your Indian blood the moment I saw you," Vance remarked, with non-committal aloofness. Then he stretched his legs and took a deep inhalation on his cigarette. "But suppose you tell us, Mr. Leland, just what preceded the tragedy tonight. I believe you mentioned the fact that Montague himself suggested the swim."

"That is true." Leland moved to a straight chair by the table and sat down. "We had dinner about half-past seven. There had been numerous cocktails beforehand, and during dinner Stamm brought out some heavy wines. After the coffee there was brandy and port, and I think every one drank too much. As you know, it was raining and we could not go outdoors. Later we went to the library, and there was more drinking—this time Scotch highballs. There was a little music of a rowdy nature. Young Tatum played the piano and Miss Steele sang. But that did not last long—the drinking had begun to take effect, and every one was uneasy and restless."

"And Stamm?"

"Stamm especially indulged. I have rarely seen him drink so much, though he has managed for years to punish liquor pretty systematically. He was taking Scotch straight, and after he had downed at least half a bottle I remonstrated with him. But he was in no condition to listen to reason. He became sullen and quiet, and by ten o'clock he was ignoring every one and dozing off. His sister, too, tried to bring him back to his senses, but without any success."

"At just what time did you go for your swim?"

"I do not know exactly, but it was shortly after ten. It stopped raining about that time, and Montague and Bernice stepped out on the terrace. They came back almost immediately, and it was then that Montague announced that the rain had ceased and suggested that we all take a swim. Every one was willing—every one, that is, but Stamm. He was in no condition to go anywhere or do anything. Bernice and Montague urged him to join us, thinking perhaps that the water would sober him. But he was ugly and ordered Trainor to bring him another bottle of Scotch. . . ."

"Trainor?"

"That is the butler's name. . . . Stamm was sodden and helpless, so I told the others to leave him alone, and we all went down to the *cabañas*. I myself pushed the switch in the rear hallway, that turns on the lights on the stairs down to the pool and also the flood-lights at the pool. Montague was the first to appear in his bathing suit, but the rest of us were ready a minute or so later. . . . Then came the tragedy—"

"I say, just a moment, Mr. Leland," Vance interrupted, leaning over and breaking the ashes of his cigarette in the fireplace. "Was Montague the first in the water?"

"Yes. He was waiting at the spring-board—posing, I might say—when the rest of us came out of the *cabañas*. He rather fancied himself and his figure, and I imagine there was a certain amount of vanity in his habit of always hurrying to the pool and taking the first plunge when he knew all eyes would be on him."

"And then?"

"He took a high swan dive, beautifully timed and extremely graceful—I'll say that much for the chap. We naturally waited for him to come up before following suit. We waited an interminable time—it was probably not more than a minute, but it seemed much longer. And then Mrs. McAdam gave a scream, and we all went quickly, with one accord, to the very edge of the pool and strained our eyes across the water in every direction. By this time we knew something had happened. No man could stay under water voluntarily as long as that. Miss Stamm clutched my arm, but I threw her off and, running to the end of the spring-board, dived in as near as possible at the point where Montague had disappeared."

Leland compressed his lips, and his gaze shifted.

"I swam downward," he continued, "till I came to the bottom of the pool, and searched round as best I could. I came up for air and went down again, and again I came up. A man was in the water just beside me, and I thought for a moment it was Montague. But it was only Tatum, who had joined me in the water. He too had dived in, in an effort to find Montague. Greeff also, in a bungling kind of way—he is not a very good swimmer—helped us look for the poor fellow. . . . But it was no go. We spent at least twenty minutes in the effort. Then we gave it up. . . ."

"Exactly how did you feel about the situation?" Vance asked, without looking up. "Did you have any suspicions then?"

Leland hesitated and pursed his lips, as if trying to recall his exact emotions. Finally he replied:

"I cannot say just how I did feel about it. I was rather overwhelmed. But still there was something—I do not know just what—in the back of my mind. My instinct at that moment was to get to a telephone and report the affair to the police. I did not like the turn of events—they struck me as too unusual. . . . Perhaps," he added, lifting his eyes to the ceiling with a far-away look, "I remembered—unconsciously—too many tales about the old Dragon Pool. My mother told me many strange stories when I was a child—"

"Yes, yes. Quite a romantic and legend'ry spot," Vance murmured, with a tinge of sarcasm in his words. "But I'd much rather know just what the women were doing and how they affected you when you joined them after your heroic search for Montague."

"The women?" There was a mild note of surprise in Leland's voice, and he looked penetratingly at Vance. "Oh, I see—you wish to know how they acted after the tragedy. . . . Well, Miss Stamm was crouched down on the top of the wall at the edge of the water, with her hands pressed to her face, sobbing convulsively. I do not think she even noticed me—or any one else, for that matter. I got the impression that she was more frightened than anything else.—Miss Steele was standing close beside Bernice, with her head thrown back, her arms out-stretched in a precise gesture of tragic supplication. . . ."

"It sounds rather as if she were rehearsing for the role of Iphigenia at Aulis. . . . And what about Mrs. McAdam?"

"Funny thing about her," Leland ruminated, frowning at his pipe. "She was the one who screamed when Montague failed to come to the surface; but when I got out of the water, she was standing back from the bank, under one of the flood-lights, as cold and calm as if nothing had happened. She was looking out across the pool in a most detached fashion, as if there was no one else present. And she was half smiling, in a hard, ruthless sort of way. 'We could not find him,' I muttered, as I came up to her: I do not know why I should have addressed her rather than the others. And without moving her eyes from the opposite side of the pool, she said, to no one in particular: 'So that's that.'"

Vance appeared unimpressed.

"So you came to the house here and telephoned?"

"Immediately. I told the others they had better get dressed and return to the house at once, and after I had telephoned I went back to my *cabaña* and got into my clothes."

"Who notified the doctor about Stamm's condition?"

"I did," the other replied. "I did not enter the library when I first came here to telephone, but when I had got into my clothes I went at once to Stamm, hoping his mind would have cleared sufficiently for him to realize the terrible thing that had happened. But he was unconscious, and the bottle on the tabouret by the davenport was empty. I did my best to arouse him, but did not succeed."

Leland paused, frowned with uncertainty, and then continued:

"I had never before seen Stamm in a state of complete insensibility through overindulgence in liquor, although I had seen him pretty far gone on several occasions. The state of the man shocked me. He was scarcely breathing, and his color was ghastly. Bernice came into the room at that moment and, on seeing her brother sprawled out on the davenport, exclaimed, 'He's dead, too. Oh, my God!' Then she fainted before I could reach her. I intrusted her to Mrs. McAdam—who showed an admirable competency in handling the situation—and went immediately to the telephone to summon Doctor Holliday. He has been the Stamm family physician for many years and lives in 207th Street, near here. Luckily he was at home and hurried over."

Just then a door slammed noisily somewhere at the rear of the house, and heavy footsteps crossed the front hall and approached the drawing-room. Detective Hennessey appeared at the door, his mouth partly open and his eyes protruding with excitement.

He greeted Markham perfunctorily and turned quickly to the Sergeant.

"Something's happened down there at the pool," he announced, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "I was standing by the spring-board like you told me to do, smoking a cigar, when I heard a funny rumbling noise up at the top of the rock cliff opposite. And pretty soon there was a hell of a splash in the pool—sounded like a ton of bricks had been dumped off the cliff into the water. . . . I waited a couple minutes, to see if anything else'd happen, and then I thought I'd better come up and tell you."

"Did you see anything?" demanded Heath aggressively.

"Nary a thing, Sergeant." Hennessey spoke with emphasis. "It's dark over there by the rocks, and I didn't go round over the filter ledge, because you told me to keep off that low stretch at the other end."

"I told him to keep off," the Sergeant explained to Markham, "because I wanted to go over that ground again for footprints in the daylight tomorrow." Then he turned back to Hennessey. "Well, what do you think the noise was?" he asked with the gruffness of exasperation.

"I'm not thinkin'," Hennessey retorted. "I'm simply tellin' you all I know."

Leland rose and took a step toward the Sergeant.

"If you will pardon me, I think I can offer a reasonable explanation of what this man heard in the pool. Several large pieces of rock, at the top of the cliff, are loosened where the strata overlap, and I have always had a fear that one of them might come crashing down into the pool. Only this morning Mr. Stamm and I went up to the top of the bluff and inspected those rocks. In fact, we even attempted to pry one of them loose, but could not do so. It is quite possible that the heavy rain tonight may have dislodged the earth that was holding it."

Vance nodded.

"At least that explanation is a pleasin' bit of rationality," he observed lightly.

"Maybe so, Mr. Vance," Heath conceded reluctantly. Hennessey's tale had disturbed him. "But what I want to know is why it should happen on this particular night."

"As Mr. Leland has told us, he and Mr. Stamm attempted to pry the rock loose today—or should I say yesterday? Perhaps they did loosen it, and that would account for its having shifted and fallen after the rain."

Heath chewed viciously on his cigar for a moment. Then he waved Hennessey out of the room.

"Go back and take up your post," he ordered. "If anything else happens down at the pool, hop up here and report *pronto*."

Hennessey disappeared—reluctantly, I thought.

Markham had sat through the entire proceedings with an air of tolerant boredom. He had taken only a mild interest in Vance's questioning, and when Hennessey had left us, he got to his feet.

"Just what is the point in all this discussion, Vance?" he asked irritably. "The situation is normal enough. Admittedly it has certain morbid angles, but all of this esoteric stuff seems to me the result of nerves. Every one's on edge, and I think the best thing for us to do is to go home and let the Sergeant handle the matter in the routine way. How could there be anything premeditated in connection with Montague's possible death when he himself suggested going swimming and then dived off the spring-board and disappeared while every one was looking on?"

"My dear Markham," protested Vance, "you're far too logical. It's your legal training, of course. But the world is not run by logic. I infinitely prefer to be emotional. Think of the masterpieces of poetry that would have been lost to humanity if their creators had been pure logicians—the *Odyssey*, for instance, the *Ballade des dames du temps jadis*, the *Divina Commedia*, *Laus Veneris*, the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*—"

"But what do you propose to do now?" Markham cut in, annoyed.

"I propose," answered Vance, with an exasperating smile, "to inquire of the doctor concerning the condition of our host."

"What could Stamm have to do with it?" protested Markham. "He seems less concerned in the affair than any of the other people here."

Heath, impatient, had risen and started for the door.

"I'll get the doc," he rumbled. And he went out into the dim hallway.

A few minutes later he returned, followed by an elderly man with a closely cropped gray Vandyke. He was clad in a black baggy suit with a high, old-fashioned collar several sizes too large for him. He was slightly stout and moved awkwardly; but there was something in his manner that inspired confidence.

Vance rose to greet him, and after a brief explanation of our presence in the house, he said:

"Mr. Leland has just told us of Mr. Stamm's unfortunate condition tonight, and we'd like to know how he's coming along."

"He's following the normal course," the doctor replied, and hesitated. Presently he went on: "Since Mr. Leland informed you of Mr. Stamm's condition I won't be violating professional ethics in discussing the case with you. Mr. Stamm was unconscious when I arrived. His pulse was slow and sluggish, and his breathing shallow. When I learned of the amount of whisky he had taken since dinner I immediately gave him a stiff dose of apomorphine—a tenth of a grain. It emptied his stomach at once, and after the reaction he went back to sleep normally. He had consumed an astonishing amount of liquor—it was one of the worst cases of acute alcoholism I have ever known. He is just waking up now, and I was about to telephone for a nurse when this gentleman"—indicating Heath—"told me you wished to see me."

Vance nodded understandingly.

"Will it be possible for us to talk to Mr. Stamm at this time?"

"A little later, perhaps. He is coming round all right, and, once I get him up-stairs to bed, you may see him. . . . But you understand, of course," the doctor added, "he will be pretty weak and played out."

Vance murmured his thanks.

"Will you let us know when it is convenient to have us talk to him?"

The doctor inclined his head in assent.

"Certainly," he said, and turned to go.

"And in the meantime," Vance said to Markham, "I think it might be well to have a brief chat with Miss Stamm. . . . Sergeant, will you produce the young lady for us?"

"Just a moment." The doctor turned in the doorway. "I would ask you, sir, not to disturb Miss Stamm just now. When I came here I found her in a very high-strung, hysterical condition over what had happened. So I gave her a stiff dose of bromides and told her to go to bed. She's in no condition to be questioned about the tragedy. Tomorrow, perhaps."

"It really doesn't matter," Vance returned. "Tomorrow will do just as well."

The doctor went lumberingly into the hall, and a moment later we could hear him dialing a number on the telephone.



#### 4. AN INTERRUPTION

(Sunday, August 12; 1.35 a.m.)

Markham heaved a deep, annoyed sigh, and focused his eyes on Vance in exasperation.

"Aren't you satisfied yet?" he demanded impatiently. "I suggest we get along home."

"Oh, my dear Markham!" Vance protested whimsically, lighting a fresh *Régie*. "I should never forgive myself if I went without at least making the acquaintance of Mrs. McAdam. My word! Really now, wouldn't you like to meet her?"

Markham snorted with angry resignation and settled back in his chair.

Vance turned to Heath.

"Shepherd the butler in, Sergeant."

Heath went out with alacrity, returning immediately with the butler in tow. He was a short, pudgy man in his late fifties, with a smug, round face. His eyes were small and shrewd; his nose flat and concave, and the corners of his mouth were pinched into a downward arc. He wore a blond toupee which neither fitted him nor disguised the fact that he was bald. His uniform needed pressing, and his linen was far from immaculate; but he had an unmistakable air of pompous superiority.

"I understand your name is Trainor," said Vance.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Trainor, there seems to be considerable doubt as to just what happened here tonight. That's why the District Attorney and I have come up." Vance's eyes were fixed on the man with appraising interest.

"If I may be permitted to say so, sir," Trainor submitted in a mincing falsetto, "I think your being here is an excellent idea. One never can tell what is behind these mysterious episodes."

Vance lifted his eyebrows.

"So you think the episode mysterious? . . . Can you tell us something that might be helpful?"

"Oh, no, sir." The man elevated his chin haughtily. "I haven't the slightest suggestion to make—thanking you, sir, for the honor of asking me."

Vance let the matter drop, and said:

"Doctor Holliday has just told us that Mr. Stamm had a close call tonight, and I understand from Mr. Leland that Mr. Stamm ordered another bottle of whisky at the time the other members of the party went down to the pool."

"Yes, sir. I brought him a fresh quart of his favorite Scotch whisky—Buchanan's Liqueur . . . although I will say, sir, in extenuation, so to speak, that I took the liberty of protesting with Mr. Stamm, inasmuch as he had already been drinking rather heavily all day. But he became almost abusive, I might say; and I remarked to myself, 'Every man to his own poison'—or words to that effect. It was not my place, you can understand, to refuse to obey the master's orders."

"Of course—of course, Trainor. We certainly do not hold you responsible for Mr. Stamm's condition," Vance assured him pleasantly.

"Thank you, sir. I might say, however, that Mr. Stamm has been quite unhappy about something these past few weeks. He's been worrying a great deal. He even forgot to feed the fish last Thursday."

"My word! Something really upsettin' must have been preying on his mind. . . . And did you see to it, Trainor, that the fish did not go hungry Thursday?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I am very fond of the fish, sir. And I'm something of an authority on the subject—if I do say so myself. In fact, I disagree with the master quite frequently on the care of some of his rarer varieties. Without his knowing it I have made chemical tests of the water, for acidity and alkalinity—if you know what I mean, sir. And I took it upon myself to increase the alkalinity of the water in the tanks in which the *Scatophagus argus* are kept. Since then, sir, the master has had much better luck with them."

"I myself am partial to brackish water for the *Scatophagus*," Vance commented, with an amused smile. "But we will let that drop for the moment. . . . Suppose you tell Mrs. McAdam that we desire to see her, here in the drawing-room."

The butler bowed and went out, and a few minutes later ushered a short, plump woman into the room.

Teeny McAdam's age was perhaps forty, but from her clothes and her manner it was obvious that she was making a desperate effort to give the impression of youth. There was, however, a hardness about her which she could not disguise. She seemed perfectly calm as she sat down in the chair which Vance held for her.

Vance explained briefly who we were and why we were there, and I was interested in the fact that she showed no surprise.

"It's always well," Vance explained further, "to look into tragedies of this kind, where there is a feeling of doubt in the mind of any one present. And there seems to be considerable doubt in the minds of several witnesses of Mr. Montague's disappearance."

For answer the woman merely gave an arctic smile and waited.

"Are there any doubts in your mind, Mrs. McAdam?" Vance asked quietly.

"Doubts? What kind of doubts? Really, I don't know what you mean." She spoke in a cold, stereotyped voice. "Monty is unquestionably dead. Had it been any one else who disappeared, one might suspect that a practical joke had been played on us. But Monty was never a practical joker. In fact, any sense of humor was painfully lacking in him. He was far too conceited for humor."

"You have known him a long time, I take it."

"Far too long," the woman replied, with what I thought was a touch of venom.

"You screamed, I am told, when he failed to rise to the surface."

"A maidenly impulse," she remarked lightly. "At my age I should, of course, be more reserved."

Vance contemplated his cigarette a moment.

"You weren't, by any chance, expecting the young gentleman's demise at the time?"

The woman shrugged, and a hard light came into her eyes.

"No, not expecting it," she returned bitterly, "but always hoping for it—as were many others."

"Most interestin'," Vance murmured. "But what were you looking for so intently across the pool, after Montague's failure to come up?"

Her eyes narrowed, and her expression belied the careless gesture she made.

"I really do not recall my intentness at that time," she answered. "I was probably scanning the surface of the pool. That was natural, was it not?"

"Quite—oh, quite. One does instinctively scan the water when a diver has failed to reappear—doesn't one? But I was given the impression your attitude was not indicative of this natural impulse. In fact, I was led to believe that you were looking *across* the water, to the rock cliffs opposite."

The woman shifted her gaze to Leland, and a slow contemptuous smile spread over her face.

"I quite understand," she sneered. "This half-breed has been trying to divert suspicion from himself." She swung quickly back to Vance and spoke between clenched teeth. "My suggestion to you, sir, is that Mr. Leland can tell you far more of the tragedy than any one else here."

Vance nodded carelessly.

"He has already told me many fascinatin' things." Then he leaned forward with a half smile that did not extend to his eyes. "By the by," he added, "it may interest you to know that a few minutes ago there was a terrific splash in the pool, near the point, I should say, where you were looking."

A sudden change came over Teeny McAdam. Her body seemed to go taut, and her hands tightened over the arms of her chair. Her face paled perceptibly, and she took a slow deep breath, as if to steady herself.

"You are sure?" she muttered, in a strained voice, her eyes fixed on Vance. "You are sure?"

"Quite sure. . . . But why should that fact startle you?"

"There are strange stories about that pool—" she began, but Vance interrupted.

"Oh, very strange. But you're not, I trust, superstitious?"

She gave a one-sided smile, and her body relaxed.

"Oh, no, I am far too old for that." She was speaking again in her former cold, reserved tone. "But for a moment I got jumpy. This house and its surroundings are not conducive to calm nerves. . . . So there was a splash in the pool? I can't imagine what it might have been. Maybe it was one of Stamm's flying fish," she suggested, with an attempt at humor. Then her face hardened, and she gave Vance a defiant look. "Is there anything else you wish to ask me?"

It was obvious that she had no intention of telling us anything concerning what she may have feared or suspected, and Vance rose listlessly to his feet.

"No, madam," he responded. "I have quite exhausted my possibilities as an interrogator. . . . But I shall have to ask you to remain in your room for the present."

Teeny McAdam rose also, with an exaggerated sigh of relief.

"Oh, I expected that. It's so messy and inconvenient when any one dies. . . . But would it be against the rules and regulations if the tubby Trainor brought me a drink?"

"Certainly not." Vance bowed gallantly. "I will be delighted to send you anything you desire—if the cellar affords it."

"You are more than kind," she returned sarcastically. "I'm sure Trainor can scratch me up a stinger."

She thanked Vance facetiously, and left the room.

Vance sent for the butler again.

"Trainor," he said, when the man entered, "Mrs. McAdam wants a stinger—and you'd better use two jiggers each of brandy and *crème de menthe*."

"I understand, sir."

As Trainor went from the room, Doctor Holliday appeared at the door.

"I have Mr. Stamm in bed," he told Vance, "and the nurse is on her way. If you care to speak to him now it will be all right."

The master bedroom was on the second floor, just at the head of the main stairs, and when we entered, ushered in by Doctor Holliday, Stamm stared at us with resentful bewilderment.

I could see, even as he lay in bed, that he was an unusually tall man. His face was lined and cadaverous. His piercing eyes were ringed with shadows, and his cheeks were hollow. He was slightly bald, but his eyebrows were heavy and almost black. Despite his pallor and his obviously weakened condition, it was evident he was a man of great endurance and physical vitality. He was the type of man that fitted conventionally into the stories of his romantic exploits in the South Seas.

"These are the gentlemen that wished to see you," the doctor told him, by way of introduction.

Stamm looked from one to the other of us, turning his head weakly.

"Well, who are they, and what do they want?" His voice was low and peevish.

Vance explained who we were, and added:

"There has been a tragedy here on your estate tonight, Mr. Stamm; and we are here to investigate it."

"A tragedy? What do you mean by a tragedy?" Stamm's sharp eyes did not leave Vance's face.

"One of your guests has, I fear, been drowned."

Stamm suddenly became animated. His hands moved nervously over the silk spread, and he raised his head from the pillow, his eyes glaring.

"Some one drowned!" he exclaimed. "Where? And who? . . . I hope it was Greeff—he's been pestering the life out of me for weeks."

Vance shook his head.

"No, it was not Greeff—it was young Montague. He dived into the pool and didn't come up."

"Oh, Montague." Stamm sank back on his pillow. "That vain ass! . . . How is Bernice?"

"She's sleeping," the doctor informed him consolingly. "She was naturally upset, but she will be all right in the morning."

Stamm seemed relieved, and after a moment he moved his head wearily toward Vance.

"I suppose you want to ask questions."

Vance regarded the man on the bed critically and, I thought, suspiciously. I admit that I myself got a distinct impression that Stamm was playing a part, and that the remarks he had made were fundamentally insincere. But I could not say specifically what had caused this impression. Presently Vance said:

"We understand that one of the guests you invited to your week-end party did not put in an appearance."

"Well, what of it?" complained Stamm. "Is there anything so unusual about that?"

"No, not unusual," Vance admitted, "but a bit interestin'. What was the lady's name?"

Stamm hesitated and shifted his eyes.

"Ellen Bruett," he said finally.

"Could you tell us something about her?"

"Very little," the man answered ungraciously. "I haven't seen her for a great many years. I met her on a boat going to Europe, and I ran across her again in Paris. I know nothing of her personally, except that she's a pleasant sort, and extremely attractive. Last week I was surprised to receive a telephone call from her. She said she had just returned from the Orient and intimated that she would like to renew our acquaintance. I needed another woman for the party; so I asked her to join us. Friday morning she phoned me again to say she was leaving unexpectedly for South America. . . . That's the extent of what I know about her."

"Did you," asked Vance, "by any chance, mention to her the names of the other guests you had invited?"

"I told her that Ruby Steele and Montague were coming. They had both been on the stage, and I thought she might know the names."

"And did she?" Vance raised his cigarette deliberately to his lips.

"As I recall, she said she had met Montague once in Berlin."

Vance walked to the window and back.

"Curious coincidence," he murmured.

Stamm's eyes followed him.

"What's curious about it?" he demanded sourly.

Vance shrugged and halted at the foot of the bed.

"I haven't the groggiest notion—have you?"

Stamm raised himself from the pillow and glared.

"What do you mean by that question?"

"I mean simply this, Mr. Stamm:—Vance's tone was mild—"every one we have talked to so far seems to have a peculiar *arrière-pensée* with regard to Montague's death, and there have been intimations of foul play—"

"What about Montague's body?" Stamm broke in. "Haven't you found it yet? That ought to tell the story. He probably bashed his skull while doing a fancy dive to impress the ladies."

"No, his body has not yet been found. It was too late to get a boat and grappling hooks to the pool tonight. . . ."

"You don't have to do that," Stamm informed him truculently. "There are two big gates in the stream just above the filter, and they can be closed. And there's a turnstile lock in the dam. That lets the water drain from the pool. I drain it every year or so, to clean it out."

"Ah! That's worth knowing—eh, Sergeant?" Then to Stamm: "Are the gates and lock difficult to manipulate?"

"Four or five men can do the job in an hour."

"We'll attend to all that in the morning then." Vance looked at the other thoughtfully. "And, by the by, one of Sergeant Heath's men just reported that there was quite a noisy splash in the pool a little while ago—somewhere near the opposite side."

"A part of that damned rock has fallen," Stamm remarked. "It's been loose for a long time." Then he moved uneasily, and asked: "What difference does it make?"

"Mrs. McAdam seemed rather upset about it."

"Hysteria," snorted Stamm. "Leland has probably been telling her stories about the pool. . . . But what are you driving at, anyway?"

Vance smiled faintly.

"I'm sure I don't know. But the fact that a man disappeared in the Dragon Pool tonight seems to have impressed several people in a most peculiar fashion. None of them seem wholly convinced that it was an accidental death."

"Tommy-rot!"

Stamm drew himself up until he rested on his elbows, and thrust his head forward. A wild light came into his glaring eyes, and his face twitched spasmodically.

"Can't a man get drowned without having a lot of policemen all over the place?" His voice was loud and shrill. "Montague—bah! The world's better off without him. I wouldn't give him tank space with my Guppies—and I feed them to the Scalares."

Stamm became more and more excited, and his voice grew shriller.

"Montague jumped into the pool, did he? And he didn't come up? Is that any reason to annoy me when I'm ill? . . ."

At this moment there came a startling and blood-chilling interruption. The door into the hall had been left open, and there suddenly came to us, from the floor above, a woman's maniacal and terrifying scream.

## 5. THE WATER-MONSTER

(Sunday, August 12; 2 a.m.)

There was a second of tense startled silence. Then Heath swung round and rushed toward the door, his hand slipping into his outer coat pocket where he carried his gun. As he reached the threshold Leland stepped quickly up to him and placed a restraining hand on his shoulder.

"Do not bother," he said quietly. "It is all right."

"The hell it is!" Heath shot back, throwing off the other's hand and stepping into the hallway.

Doors had begun to open along the hallway, and there were several smothered exclamations.

"Get back in your rooms!" bawled Heath. "And stay in 'em." He planted himself aggressively outside the door, glowering down the corridor.

Evidently some of the guests, frightened by the scream, had come out to see what the trouble was. But confronted with the menacing attitude of the Sergeant and cowed by his angry command, they returned to their quarters, and we could hear the doors close again. The Sergeant, confused and indecisive, turned threateningly to Leland who was standing near the door with a calm but troubled look on his face.

"Where'd that scream come from?" he demanded. "And what does it mean?"

Before Leland could answer Stamm raised himself to a semi-recumbent position and glowered at Vance.

"For the love of God," he complained irritably, "will you gentlemen get out of here! You've done enough damage already. . . . Get out, I tell you! Get out!" Then he turned to Doctor Holliday. "Please go up to mother, doctor, and give her something. She's having another attack—what with all this upheaval round the house."

Doctor Holliday left the room, and we could hear him mounting the stairs.

Vance had been unimpressed by the whole episode. He stood smoking casually, his eyes resting dreamily on the man in bed.

"Deuced sorry to have upset your household, Mr. Stamm," he murmured. "Every one's nerves are raw, don't y' know. Hope you'll be better in the morning. . . . We'll toddle down-stairs—eh, what, Markham?"

Leland looked at him gratefully and nodded.

"I am sure that would be best," he said, leading the way.

We went out of the room and descended the stairs. Heath, however, remained in the hall for a moment glaring up toward the third floor.

"Come, Sergeant," Vance called to him. "You're overwrought."

Heath finally took his hand from his coat pocket and followed us reluctantly.

Again in the drawing-room, Vance settled into a chair and, looking at Leland inquiringly, waited for an explanation.

Leland took out his pipe again and slowly packed it.

"That was Stamm's mother, Matilda Stamm," he said when he had got his pipe going. "She occupies the third floor of the house. She is a little unbalanced. . . ." He made a slight but significant gesture toward his forehead. "Not dangerous, you understand, but erratic—given occasionally to hallucinations. She has queer attacks now and then, and talks incoherently."

"Sounds like mild paranoia," Vance murmured. "Some hidden fear, perhaps."

"That is it, I imagine," Leland returned. "A psychiatrist they had for her years ago suggested a private sanitarium, but Stamm would not hear of it. Instead he turned the third floor over to her, and there is some one with her all the time. She is in excellent physical health and is perfectly rational most of the time. But she is not permitted to go out. However, she is well taken care of, and the third floor has a large balcony and a conservatory for her diversion. She spends most of her time cultivating rare plants."

"How often do her attacks come?"

"Two or three times a year, I understand, though she is always full of queer ideas about people and things. Nothing to worry about, though."

"And the nature of these attacks?"

"They vary. Sometimes she talks and argues with imaginary people. At other times she becomes hysterical and babbles of events that occurred when she was a girl. Then, again, she will suddenly take violent dislikes to people, for no apparent reason, and proceed to berate and threaten them."

Vance nodded.

"Typical," he mused. Then, after several deep inhalations on his *Régie*, he asked in an offhand manner: "On which side of the house are Mrs. Stamm's balcony and conservat'ry?"

Leland's eyes moved quickly toward Vance, and he lifted his head.

"On the northeast corner," he answered with a slightly rising inflection, as if his answer were purposely incomplete.

"Ah!" Vance took his cigarette slowly from his mouth. "Overlooking the pool, eh?"

Leland nodded. Then, after a brief hesitation, he said: "The pool has a curious hold on her fancy. It is the source of many of her hallucinations. She sits for hours gazing at it abstractedly, and the German woman who looks after her—a capable companion-nurse named Schwarz—tells me that she never goes to bed without first standing in rapt attention for several minutes at the window facing the pool."

"Very interestin'. . . . By the by, Mr. Leland, do you know when the pool was constructed?"

Leland frowned thoughtfully.

"I cannot say exactly. I know it was built by Stamm's grandfather—that is to say, he built the dam to broaden the water of the stream. But I doubt if he had anything in mind except a scenic improvement. It was Stamm's father—Joshua Stamm—who put in the retaining

wall on this side of the pool, to keep the water from straying too far up the hill toward the house. And it was Stamm himself who installed the filter and the gates, when he first began to use the pool for swimming. The water was not particularly free from rubbish, and he wanted some way of filtering the stream that fed it, and also of closing off the inflow, so that the pool could be cleaned out occasionally."

"How did the pool get its name?" asked Vance casually.

Leland gave a slight shrug.

"Heaven only knows. From some old Indian tradition, probably. The Indians hereabouts originally called it by various terms—*Amangaming*, *Amangemokdom Wikit*, and sometimes *Amangemokdomipek*—but as a rule the shorter word, *Amangaming*, was used, which means, in the Lenape dialect of the Algonkians, the 'place of the water-monster.'<sup>[4]</sup> When I was a child my mother always referred to the pool by that name, although at that time it was pretty generally known as the Dragon Pool, which is a fairly accurate transliteration of its original name. Many tales and superstitions grew up around it. The water-dragon—*Amangemokdom*<sup>[5]</sup> or, sometimes, *Amangegach*—was used as a bogey with which to frighten recalcitrant children. . . ."

Markham got to his feet impatiently and looked at his watch.

"This is hardly the hour," he complained, "for a discussion of mythology."

"Tut, tut, old dear," Vance chided him pleasantly. "I say, these ethnological data are most fascinatin'. For the first time tonight we seem to be getting a little forrader. I'm beginning to understand why nearly every one in the house is filled with doubts and misgivings."

He smiled ingratiatingly and turned his attention again to Leland.

"By the by," he went on, "is Mrs. Stamm given to such distressin' screams during her cloudy moments?"

Again Leland hesitated, but finally answered: "Occasionally—yes."

"And do these screams usually have some bearing on her hallucinations regarding the pool?"

Leland inclined his head.

"Yes—always." Then he added: "But she is never coherent as to the exact cause of her perturbation. I have been present when Stamm has tried to get an explanation from her, but she has never been lucid on the subject. It is as if she feared something in the future which her momentarily excited mind could not visualize. An inflamed and confused projection of the imagination, I should say—without any definite mental embodiment. . . ."

At this moment the curtains parted, and Doctor Holliday's troubled face looked into the room.

"I am glad you gentlemen are still here," he said. "Mrs. Stamm is in an unusual frame of mind, and insists on seeing you. She is having one of her periodical attacks—nothing serious, I assure you. But she seems very much excited, and she refused to let me give her something to quiet her. . . . I really don't feel that I should mention these facts to you, but in the circumstances—"

"I have explained Mrs. Stamm's condition to these gentlemen," Leland put in quietly.

The doctor appeared relieved.

"That being the case," he went on, "I can tell you quite frankly that I am a little worried. And, as I say, she insists that she see the police—as she calls you—at once." He paused as if uncertain. "Perhaps it might be best—if you do not mind. Since she has this idea, a talk with you might bring about the desired reaction. . . . But I warn you that she is a bit hallucinated, and I trust that you will treat her accordingly. . . ."

Vance had risen.

"We quite understand, doctor," he said assuringly, adding significantly: "It might be better for all of us if we talked with her."

We retraced our way up the dimly lighted stairs, and at the second-story hallway turned upward to Mrs. Stamm's quarters.

On the third floor the doctor led the way down a wide passage, toward the rear of the house, to an open door through which a rectangular shaft of yellow light poured into the gloom of the hall. The room into which we were ushered was large and crowded with early Victorian furniture. A dark green shabby carpet covered the floor, and on the walls was faded green paper. The overstuffed satin-covered chairs had once been white and chartreuse green, but were now gray and dingy. An enormous canopied bed stood at the right of the door, draped in pink damask; and similar damask, with little of its color left, formed the long overdrapes at the window. The Nottingham-lace curtains beneath were wrinkled and soiled. Opposite the bed was a fireplace, on the hearth of which lay a collection of polished conch shells; and beside it stood a high spool what-not overlaid with all manner of hideous trifles of the period. Several large faded oil paintings were suspended about the walls on wide satin ribbons which were tied in bows at the moulding.

As we entered, a tall, capable-looking gray-haired woman, in a Hoover apron, stepped aside to make way for us.

"You had better remain, Mrs. Schwarz," the doctor suggested as we passed her.

On the far side of the room, near the window, stood Mrs. Stamm; and the sight of her sent a strange chill through me. She was leaning with both hands on the back of a chair, her head thrust forward in an attitude of fearful expectancy. Even in the brilliant light of the room her eyes seemed to contain a fiery quality. She was a small, slender woman, but she gave forth an irresistible impression of great strength and vitality, as if every sinew in her body were like whipcord; and her large-boned hands, as they grasped the back of the chair, were more like a man's than a woman's. (The idea occurred to me that she could easily have lifted the chair and swung it about.) Her nose was Roman and pinched; and her mouth was a long slit distorted into a sardonic smile. Her hair was gray, streaked with black, and was tucked back over prominent ears. She wore a faded red silk kimono which trailed the floor, showing only the toes of her knitted slippers.

Doctor Holliday made a brief, nervous presentation which Mrs. Stamm did not even acknowledge. She stood gazing at us with that twisted smile, as if gloating over something that only she herself knew. Then, after several moments' scrutiny, the smile faded from her mouth, and a look of terrifying hardness came into her face. Her lips parted, and the blazing light in her eyes grew brighter.

"The dragon did it!" were her first words to us. "I tell you the dragon did it! There's nothing more you can do about it!"

"What dragon, Mrs. Stamm?" asked Vance quietly.

"What dragon, indeed!" She gave a scornful hollow laugh. "The dragon that lives down there in the pool below my window." She pointed vaguely with her hand. "Why do you think it's called the Dragon Pool? I'll tell you why. Because it's the home of the dragon—"

the old water-dragon that guards the lives and the fortunes of the Stamms. When any danger threatens my family the dragon arises in his wrath."

"And what makes you think"—Vance's voice was mild and sympathetic—"that the dragon exercised his tutelary powers tonight?"

"Oh, I know, I know!" A shrewd fanatical light came into her eyes, and again that hideous smile appeared on her lips. "I sit here alone in this room, year in and year out; yet I know all that is going on. They try to keep things from me, but they can't. I know all that has happened the last two days—I am aware of all the intrigues that are gathering about my house. And when I heard strange voices a while ago, I came to the top of the stairs and listened. I heard what my poor son said. Sanford Montague dived into the pool—and he didn't come up! He couldn't come up—he will never come up! The dragon killed him—caught him beneath the water and held him there and killed him."

"But Mr. Montague was not an enemy," Vance suggested mildly. "Why should the protective deity of your family kill him?"

"Mr. Montague was an enemy," the woman declared, pushing the chair aside and stepping forward. "He had fascinated my little girl and planned to marry her. But he wasn't worthy of her. He was always lying to her, and when her back was turned he was having affairs with other women. Oh, I've witnessed much these last two days!"

"I see what you mean," nodded Vance. "But is it not possible that, after all, the dragon is only a myth?"

"A myth?" The woman spoke with the calmness of conviction. "No, he's no myth. I've seen him too often. I saw him as a child. And when I was a young girl I talked with many people who had seen him. The old Indians in the village saw him too. They used to tell me about him when I would go to their huts. And in the long summer twilights I would sit on the top of the cliff and watch for him to come out of the pool, for water-dragons always come out after sundown. And sometimes, when the shadows were deep over the hills and the mists came drifting down the river, he would rise from the water and fly away—yonder—to the north. And then I would sit up all night at my window, when my governess thought I was asleep, and wait for his return; for I knew he was a friend and would protect me; and I was afraid to go to sleep until he had come back to our pool. But sometimes, when I waited for him on the cliff, he wouldn't come out of the pool at all, but would just ripple the water a little to let me know he was there. And those were the nights when I could sleep, for I didn't have to sit up and wait for his return."

Mrs. Stamm's voice, as she related these strange imaginary things, was poetic in its intensity. She stood before us, her arms hanging calmly at her sides, her eyes, which now seemed to have become misty, gazing past us over our heads.

"That's all very interestin'," Vance murmured politely; but I noticed that he kept a steady, appraising gaze on the woman from beneath partly lowered eyelids. "However, could not all that you have told us be accounted for by the romantic imaginings of a child? After all, don't y' know, the existence of dragons scarcely fits in with the conceptions of modern science."

"Modern science—bah!" She turned scornful eyes on Vance and spoke with almost vitriolic bitterness. "Science—science, indeed! A pleasant word to cover man's ignorance. What does any man know of the laws of birth and growth and life and death? What does any man know of what goes on under the water? And the greater part of the world is water—unfathomable depths of water. My son collects a few specimens of fish from the mouths of rivers and from shallow streams—but has he ever plumbed the depths of the vast oceans? Can he say that no monsters dwell in those depths? And even the few fish he has caught are mysteries to him. Neither he nor any other fish collector knows anything about them. . . . Don't talk to me of science, young man. I know what these old eyes have seen!"

"All that you say is quite true," Vance concurred, in a low voice. "But even admitting that some giant flying fish inhabits this pool from time to time, are you not attributing to him too great an intelligence—too great an insight into the affairs of your household?"

"How," she retorted contemptuously, "can any one gauge the intelligence of creatures of whom one knows nothing? Man flatters himself by assuming that no creature can have a greater intelligence than his own."

Vance smiled faintly.

"You are no lover of humanity, I perceive."

"I hate humanity," the woman declared bitterly. "This would be a cleaner, better world if mankind had been omitted from the scheme of things."

"Yes, yes, of course." Vance's tone suddenly changed, and he spoke with a certain decisive positivity. "But may I ask—the hour is getting rather late, y' know—just why you insisted on seeing us?"

The woman stiffened and leaned forward. The intense hysterical look came back into her eyes, and her hands flexed at her sides.

"You're the police—aren't you?—and you're here trying to find out things. . . . I wanted to tell you how Mr. Montague lost his life. Listen to me! He was killed by the dragon—do you understand that? He was killed by the dragon! No one in this house had anything to do with his death—no one! . . . That's what I wanted to tell you." Her voice rose as she spoke, and there was a terrific passion in her words.

Vance's steady gaze did not leave her.

"But why, Mrs. Stamm," he asked, "do you assume that we think some one here had a hand in Montague's death?"

"You wouldn't be here if you didn't think so," she retorted angrily, with an artful gleam in her eyes.

"Was what you heard your son say, just before you screamed," Vance asked, "the first inkling you had of the tragedy?"

"Yes!" The word was an ejaculation. But she added more calmly: "I have known for days that tragedy was hanging over this house."

"Then why did you scream, Mrs. Stamm?"

"I was startled—and terrified, perhaps—when I realized what the dragon had done."

"But how could you possibly have known," argued Vance, "that it was the dragon who was responsible for Montague's disappearance under the water?"

Again the woman's mouth twisted into a sardonic smile.

"Because of what I had heard and seen earlier tonight."

"Ah!"

"Oh, yes! About an hour ago I was standing by the window here, looking down at the pool—for some reason I was unable to sleep and had gotten out of bed. Suddenly I saw a great shape against the sky, and I heard the familiar flutter of wings coming nearer . . . nearer. . . . And then I saw the dragon sweep over the tree-tops and down before the face of the cliff opposite. And I saw him dive into

the pool with a great splash, and I saw the white spray rise from the water where he had disappeared. . . . And then all was silence again. The dragon had returned to his home."

Vance walked to the window and looked out.

"It's pretty dark," he commented. "I'm dashed if I can see the cliff from here—or even the water."

"But *I* can see—I can see," the woman protested shrilly, turning on Vance and shaking her finger at him. "I can see many things that other people can't see. And I tell you I saw the dragon return—"

"Return?" repeated Vance, studying the woman calmly. "Return from where?"

She gave a shrewd smile.

"I won't tell you that—I won't give away the dragon's secret. . . . But I will tell you this," she went on: "he had taken the body away to hide it."

"Mr. Montague's body?"

"Of course. He never leaves the bodies of his victims in the pool."

"Then there have been other victims?" Vance inquired.

"Many victims." The woman spoke in a strained sepulchral voice. "And he always hides their bodies."

"It might upset your theory a bit, Mrs. Stamm," Vance pointed out to her, "if we should find Mr. Montague's body in the pool."

She chuckled in a way that sent a shiver through me.

"Find his body? Find his body in the pool? You can't find it. It's not there!"

Vance regarded her a moment in silence. Then he bowed.

"Thank you, Mrs. Stamm, for your information and help. I trust the episode has not disturbed you too much and that you will rest tonight."

He turned and walked toward the door, and the rest of us followed him. In the hall Doctor Holliday stopped.

"I'm staying up here for a while," he told Vance. "I think I can get her to sleep now. . . . But, for Heaven's sake, don't take anything she said tonight seriously. She often has these little periods of hallucinosis. It's really nothing to worry about."

"I quite understand," Vance returned, shaking hands with him.

## 6. A CONTRETEMPS

(Sunday, August 12; 2.20 a.m.)

We descended to the main hallway, and Vance led the way back to the drawing-room.

"Well, are you through now?" Markham asked him irritably.

"Not quite."

I had rarely seen Vance so serious or so reluctant to postpone an investigation. I knew that he had been deeply interested in Mrs. Stamm's hysterical recital; but I could not understand, at the time, his reason for prolonging an interview that seemed to me both futile and tragic. As he stood before the fireplace his mind seemed far away, and there was a puzzled corrugation on his forehead. He watched the curling smoke from his cigarette for several moments. Suddenly, with a slight toss of the head, he brought himself back to his surroundings and turned to Leland who was leaning against the centre-table.

"What did Mrs. Stamm mean," he asked, "when she referred to other victims whose bodies the dragon had hidden?"

Leland moved uneasily and looked down at his pipe.

"There was a modicum of truth in that remark," he returned. "There have been two authentic deaths in the pool that I know of. But Mrs. Stamm was probably referring also to the wild stories which the old crones tell of mysterious disappearances in the pool in the old days."

"Sounds something like the old-timers' tales of Kehoe's Hole in Newark[6]. . . . What were the two authentic cases you speak of?"

"One happened about seven years ago, shortly after Stamm and I returned from our expedition to Cocos Island. Two suspicious characters were scouting the neighborhood—probably with a view to burglary—and one of them fell off the cliff on the far side of the pool, and was evidently drowned. Two schoolgirls from this vicinity saw him fall, and later the police picked up his companion who eventually, under questioning, verified the other's disappearance."

"Disappearance?"

Leland nodded grimly.

"His body was never found."

There was the suggestion of a skeptical smile on Vance's mouth as he asked: "How do you account for that?"

"There is only one sensible way of accounting for it," answered Leland, with a slightly aggressive accent, as if endeavoring to convince himself with his own words. "The stream gets swollen at times, and there is quite a flow of water over the dam—sufficient to carry a floating body over, if it happened to be caught by the current at a certain angle. This fellow's body was probably washed over the dam and carried down to the Hudson River."

"A bit far-fetched, but none the less tenable. . . . And the other case?"

"Some boys trespassed here one afternoon and went swimming. One of them, as I recall, dived from a ledge of the cliff into the shallow water, and did not come up. As soon as the authorities were notified—by an unidentified telephone call, incidentally—the pool was drained, but there was no trace of the body. Later, however, after the newspapers had made a two-days' sensation of the affair, the boy's body was found in the Indian Cave on the other side of the Clove. He had fractured his skull."

"And do you, by any chance, have an explanation for that episode also?" Vance asked, with a tinge of curtness.

Leland shot him a quick glance.

"I should say the boy struck his head in diving, and the other boys in the party became frightened and, not wanting to leave the body in the pool, lest they become involved, carried it down to the cave and hid it. It was probably one of them that telephoned to the police."

"Oh, quite. Very simple, don't y' know." Vance looked into space meditatively. "Yet both cases have ample esoteric implications to have taken root in Mrs. Stamm's weakened mind."

"Undoubtedly," Leland agreed.

A short silence ensued. Vance walked slowly across the room and back, his hands in his outer coat pockets, his head forward on his chest, his cigarette drooping from his lips. I knew what this attitude signified:—some stimulus had suddenly roused a train of thought in his mind. He again took up his position before the mantel and crushed out his cigarette on the hearth. He slowly turned his head toward Leland.

"You mentioned your expedition to Cocos Island," he said lazily. "Was it the lure of the *Mary Dear* treasure?"

"Oh, yes. The other famous caches are all too vague. Captain Thompson's treasure, however, is undeniably real and unquestionably the largest."

"Did you use the Keating map?"[7]

"Not altogether." Leland seemed as puzzled as the rest of us by Vance's line of questioning. "It is hardly authentic now, and I imagine several purely romantic directions entered into it—such as the stone turnstile to the cave. Stamm ran across an old map in his travels, which antedated, by many years, the original British survey of Cocos Island of 1838. So similar was it to this chart that he believed it to be genuine. We followed the directions on this map, checking them with the navigators' chart in the Hydrographic Office of the United States Navy Department."

"Did this map of Stamm's," pursued Vance, "indicate the treasure as hidden in one of the island caves?"

"The details were a bit hazy on that point. And that was what so impressed Stamm and, I must confess, myself also. You see, this old map differed in one vital respect from the United States Navy navigators' chart, in that it indicated land where the United States chart shows Wafer Bay; and it was on this section of land that the hiding-place of the treasure was indicated."

A flicker came into Vance's eyes, but when he spoke his tone was casual and but mildly animated.

"By Jove! I see the point. Most interestin'. There's no doubt that landslides and tropical rains have altered the topography of Cocos



Island, and many of the old landmarks have doubtless disappeared. I presume Mr. Stamm assumed that the land where the treasure was originally hidden now lies under the waters of the bay which is indicated on the more recent charts."

"Exactly. Even the French survey of 1889 did not show as large a bay as the American survey made in 1891; and it was Stamm's theory that the treasure lay beneath the waters of Wafer Bay, which is rather shallow at that spot."

"A difficult undertaking," Vance commented. "How long were you at the island?"

"The better part of three months." Leland smiled ruefully. "It took Stamm that length of time to realize that he did not possess the proper equipment. The shoals in the bay are treacherous, and there are curious holes at the bottom of the water, owing, no doubt, to geological conditions; and our diving equipment would have been scorned by any good pearl-fisher. What we needed, of course, was a specially constructed diving-bell, something like Mr. Beebe's bathysphere. Even that would have been just a beginning, for we were helpless without powerful submarine dredges. The one we took along was wholly inadequate. . . ."

Markham, who had been noticeably chafing under Vance's discussion of hidden treasure, now rose and strode forward, his cigar held tightly between his teeth.

"Where is all this getting us, Vance? If you are contemplating a trip to Cocos Island, I'm sure Mr. Leland would be willing to make a future appointment with you to discuss the details. And as for all the other investigations you have made here tonight: I can't see that anything has been brought to light that hasn't an entirely normal and logical explanation."

Heath, who had been following all the proceedings closely, now projected himself into the conversation.

"I'm not so sure about things around here being normal, sir." Though deferential, his tone was vigorous. "I'm for going ahead with this case. Some mighty queer things have happened tonight, and I don't like 'em."

Vance smiled appreciatively at the Sergeant.

"Stout fella!" He glanced toward Markham. "Another half-hour and we'll stagger home."

Markham gave in ungraciously.

"What more do you want to do here tonight?"

Vance lighted another cigarette.

"I could bear to commune with Greeff. . . . Suppose you tell the butler to fetch him, Sergeant."

A few minutes later Alex Greeff was ushered into the drawing-room by Trainor. He was a large, powerfully built man, with a ruddy bulldog type of face—wide-spaced eyes, a short, thick nose, heavy lips, and a strong, square chin. He was slightly bald, and there were cushions of gray hair over his small, close-set ears. He was wearing a conventional dinner suit, but there were certain touches of vulgar elegance in his attire. The satin lapels of his coat were highly peaked. There were two diamond studs in his shirt-bosom. Across his satin waistcoat was draped a platinum chain set with large pearls. His tie, instead of being solid black, had white pin-stripes running through it; and his wing collar seemed too high for his stocky neck.

He took a few steps toward us with his hands in his pockets, planted himself firmly, and glowered at us angrily.

"I understand one of you gentlemen is the District Attorney—" he began aggressively.

"Oh, quite." Vance indicated Markham with a careless movement of the hand.

Greeff now centred his bellicose attention on Markham.

"Well, perhaps *you* can tell me, sir," he growled, "why I am being held a virtual prisoner in this house. This man"—indicating Heath—"ordered me to remain in my room until further notice, and refused to let me go home. What is the meaning of such high-handed tactics?"

"A tragedy has taken place here tonight, Mr. Greeff—" Markham began, but he was interrupted by the other.

"Suppose an accident *has* happened, is that any reason why I should be held a prisoner without due process of law?"

"There are certain phases of the case," Markham told him, "that we are looking into, and it was to facilitate the investigation that Sergeant Heath requested all the witnesses to remain here until we could question them."

"Well, go ahead and question me." Greeff seemed a little mollified, and his tone had lost some of its belligerency.

Vance moved forward.

"Sit down and have a smoke, Mr. Greeff," he suggested pleasantly. "We sha'n't keep you long."

Greeff hesitated, looked at Vance suspiciously; then shrugged, and drew up a chair. Vance waited until the man had fitted a cigarette into a long jewelled holder, and then asked:

"Did you notice—or sense—anything peculiar about Montague's disappearance in the pool tonight?"

"Peculiar?" Greeff looked up slowly, and his eyes narrowed to shrewd slits. "So that's the angle, is it? Well, I'm not saying there wasn't something peculiar about it, now that you mention it; but I'm damned if I can tell you what it was."

"That seems to be the general impression," Vance returned; "but I was hoping you might be more lucid on the point than the others have been."

"What's there to be lucid about?" Greeff seemed to be avoiding the issue. "I suppose it's reasonable enough when a chap like Montague—who's always been riding for a fall—gets what's coming to him. But somehow, when it happens so neatly and at the right time, we're apt to think it's peculiar."

"Yes, yes, of course. But it wasn't the logical eventualities I was referring to." Vance's voice held a tinge of annoyance. "I was referring to the fact that the conditions in the house here during the last two days constituted a perfect atmosphere for a type of tragedy quite removed from the merely accidental."

"You're right about the atmosphere." Greeff spoke harshly. "There was murder in the air—if that's what you mean. And if Montague had passed out by any other means except drowning, I'd say his death warranted a pretty thorough investigation. But he wasn't poisoned; he wasn't accidentally shot; he didn't get vertigo and fall out of a window; and he didn't tumble down-stairs and break his neck. He simply dived off a spring-board, with every one looking on."

"That's what makes it so difficult, don't y' know. . . . I understand that you and Mr. Leland and young Tatum dived in after the johnny."

"It was the least we could do," Greeff came back pugnaciously; "though I'm frank to admit it was more or less a gesture on my part,

as I can't swim much, and if I had run into him he'd probably have dragged me down with him. Still, you hate to see any fellow, however rotten, pass out of this world in front of your eyes without making some attempt to save him."

"Quite noble of you, I'm sure," Vance murmured indifferently. "By the by, I understand Montague was engaged to Miss Stamm."

Greeff nodded and drew on his cigarette.

"I never knew why it was, except that good women always fall for that type of man," he commented, with a philosophic air. "But I think she would have broken the engagement sooner or later."

"Would you mind my asking what your own feelings toward Miss Stamm are?"

Greeff opened his eyes in surprise, then laughed noisily.

"I see what you're getting at. But you can't make me out the villain of the piece. I like Bernice—everybody who knows her likes her. But as for my being sentimental about her: I'm too old and wise for that. My feeling for her has always been a fatherly one. She often comes to me for advice when Stamm's too deep in his cups. And I give her good advice—yes, by Gad! I told her only yesterday that she was making a fool of herself to think of marrying Montague."

"How did she take this advice, Mr. Greeff?"

"The way all women take advice—haughtily and contemptuously. No woman ever wants advice. Even when they ask for it, they're merely looking for agreement with what they've already decided to do."

Vance changed the subject.

"Just what do you think happened to Montague tonight?"

Greeff spread his hands vaguely.

"Bumped his head on the bottom—or got a cramp. What else could have happened to him?"

"I haven't the vaguest notion," Vance admitted blandly. "But the episode is teeming with possibilities. I was hopin', don't y' know, that you might help to lead us out of our darkness." He spoke lightly, but his eyes were fixed with cold steadiness on the man opposite.

Greeff returned the gaze for several moments in silence, and his ruddy face tightened into a mask.

"I understand perfectly," he enunciated at length, in a chill, even tone. "But my advice to you, my friend, is to forget it. Montague had it coming to him, and he got it. It was an accident that fitted in with everybody's wishes. You can play with the idea till doomsday, but you'll end up with the fact I'm telling you now: *Montague was accidentally drowned.*"

Vance smiled cynically.

"My word! Are you intimatin' that Montague's death is that liter'ry pet of the armchair criminologists—the perfect crime?"

Greeff moved forward in his chair and set his jaw.

"I'm not intimating anything, my friend. I'm merely telling you."

"Really, y' know, we're dashed grateful." Vance crushed out his cigarette. "Anyway, I think we'll do a bit of pryin' around. . . ."

At this moment there came an interruption. We heard what sounded like a scuffle on the stairs, and there came to us the angry, shrill tones of Stamm's voice:

"Let go of my arm. I know what I'm doing."

And then Stamm jerked the drawing-room portières aside and glared at us. Behind him, fuming and remonstrative, stood Doctor Holliday. Stamm was clad in his pajamas, and his hair was dishevelled. It was obvious that he had just risen from bed. He fixed his watery eyes on Greeff with angry apprehension.

"What are you telling these policemen?" he demanded, bracing himself against the door jamb.

"My dear Rudolf," Greeff protested ingratiatingly, rising from his chair. "I'm telling them nothing. What is there to tell?"

"I don't trust you," Stamm retorted. "You're trying to make trouble. You're always trying to make trouble here. You've tried to turn Bernice against me, and now, I'll warrant, you're trying to turn these policemen against me." His eyes glared, and he had begun to tremble. "I know what you're after—money! But you're not going to get it. You think that if you talk enough you can blackmail me. . . ." His voice sank almost to a whisper, and his words became incoherent.

Doctor Holliday took him gently by the arm and tried to lead him from the room, but Stamm, with an exhausting effort, threw him off and moved unsteadily forward.

Greeff had stood calmly during this tirade, looking at his accuser with an expression of commiseration and pity.

"You're making a great mistake, old friend," he said in a quiet voice. "You're not yourself tonight. Tomorrow you'll realize the injustice of your words, just as you'll realize that I would never betray you."

"Oh, you wouldn't, eh?" Much of the anger had gone out of Stamm's attitude, but he still seemed to be dominated by the idea of Greeff's persecution. "I suppose you haven't been telling these people"—he jerked his head toward us—"what I said about Montague —"

Greeff raised his hand in protest and was about to reply, but Stamm went on hurriedly:

"Well, suppose I did say it! I had more right to say it than any one else. And as far as that goes, you've said worse things. You hated him more than I did." Stamm cackled unpleasantly. "And I know why. You haven't pulled the wool over my eyes about your feelings for Bernice." He raised his arm and wagged a quivering finger at Greeff. "If anybody murdered Montague, it was you!"

Exhausted by his effort, he sank into a chair and began to shake as if with palsy.

Vance stepped quickly to the stricken man.

"I think a grave mistake has been made here tonight, Mr. Stamm," he said in a kindly but determined voice. "Mr. Greeff has reported nothing to us that you have said. No remark he has made to us could possibly be construed as disloyalty to you. I'm afraid you're a bit overwrought."

Stamm looked up blearily, and Greeff went to his side, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"Come, old friend," he said, "you need rest."

Stamm hesitated. A weary sob shook his body and he permitted Greeff and Doctor Holliday to lift him from the chair and lead him to the door.

"That will be all tonight, Mr. Greeff," Vance said. "But we will have to ask you to remain here till tomorrow."

Greeff turned his head and nodded over his shoulder.

"Oh, that's all right." And he and the doctor piloted Stamm across the hallway toward the stairs.

A moment later the front door-bell rang. Trainor admitted the nurse for whom Doctor Holliday had telephoned and led her immediately up-stairs.

Vance turned from the door, where he had been standing, and came back into the room, halting before Leland who had remained passive throughout the strange scene between Stamm and Greeff.

"Have you, by any chance," he asked, "any comments to make on the little *contretemps* we have just witnessed?"

Leland frowned and inspected the bowl of his pipe.

"No-o," he replied, after a pause, "except that it is obvious Stamm is frightfully on edge and in a state of shock after his excessive drinking tonight. . . . And it might be, of course," he supplemented, "that in the back of his mind there has been a suspicion of Greeff in connection with financial matters, which came to the surface in his weakened condition."

"That sounds reasonable," Vance mused. "But why should Stamm mention the word murder?"

"He is probably excited and suspicious because of the presence of you gentlemen here," Leland suggested. "Not having been a witness to the tragedy, he is ignorant of all the details."

Vance did not reply. Instead he walked to the mantelpiece and inspected a carved gold clock which stood there. He ran his fingers over the incised scroll-work for a moment, and then turned slowly. His face was serious, and his eyes were looking past us.

"I think that will be all for tonight," he said in a flat, far-away tone. "Thank you for your help, Mr. Leland. But we must ask you too to remain here till tomorrow. We will be here again in the morning."

Leland bowed and, without a word, went softly from the room.

When he had gone, Markham rose.

"So you're coming here again in the morning?"

"Yes, old dear." Vance's manner had suddenly changed. "And so are you, don't y' know. You owe it to your constituency. It's a most absorbent case. And I'd wager one of my Cezanne water-colors that when Montague's body is found, the Medical Examiner's report will be anything but what you expect."

Markham's eyelids fluttered, and he looked searchingly at Vance.

"You think you have learned something that would point to an explanation other than accidental death?"

"Oh, I've learned an amazin' amount," was all that Vance would vouchsafe. And Markham knew him well enough not to push the matter further at that time.

## 7. THE BOTTOM OF THE POOL

(Sunday, August 12; 9.30 a.m.)

At half-past nine the following day Vance drove to Markham's quarters to take him back to the old Stamm estate in Inwood. On the way home the night before, Markham had protested mildly against continuing the case before the Medical Examiner had made his report; but his arguments were of no avail. So determined was Vance to return to the house next day, that Markham was impressed. His long association with Vance had taught him that Vance never made such demands without good reason.

Vance possessed what is commonly called an intuitive mind, but it was, in fact, a coldly logical one, and his decisions, which often seemed intuitive, were in reality based on his profound knowledge of the intricacies and subtleties of human nature. In the early stages of any investigation he was always reluctant to tell Markham all that he suspected: he preferred to wait until he had the facts in hand. Markham, understanding this trait in him, abided by his unexplained decisions; and these decisions had rarely, to my knowledge, proved incorrect, founded, as they were, on definite indications which had not been apparent to the rest of us. It was because of Markham's past experiences with Vance that he had grudgingly, but none the less definitely, agreed to accompany him to the scene of the tragedy the following morning.

Before we left the Stamm house the night before, there had been a brief consultation with Heath, and a course of action had been mapped out under Vance's direction. Every one in the house was to remain indoors; but no other restrictions were to be placed upon their actions. Vance had insisted that no one be allowed to walk through the grounds of the estate until he himself had made an examination of them; and he was particularly insistent that every means of access to the pool be kept entirely free of people until he had completed his inspection. He was most interested, he said, in the small patch of low ground north of the filter, where Heath and Hennessey had already looked for footprints.

Doctor Holliday was to be permitted to come and go as he chose, but Vance suggested that the nurse whom the doctor had called in be confined to the house, like the others, until such time as she was given permission to depart. Trainor was ordered to instruct the other servants—of whom there were only two, a cook and a maid—that they were to remain indoors until further notice.

Vance also suggested that the Sergeant place several of his men around the house at vantage points where they could see that all orders were carried out by the guests and members of the household. The Sergeant was to arrange for a small corps of men to report at the estate early the following morning to close the gates above the filter and open the lock in the dam, in order that the pool might be drained.

"And you'd better see that they come down the stream from the East Road, Sergeant," Vance advised, "so there won't be any new footprints round the pool."

Heath was placed in complete charge of the case by Markham, who promised to get the official verification of the assignment from Commanding Officer Moran of the Detective Bureau.

Heath decided to remain at the house that night. I had never seen him in so eager a frame of mind. He admitted frankly that he could see no logic in the situation; but, with a stubbornness which verged on fanaticism, he maintained that he knew something was vitally wrong.

I was also somewhat astonished at Vance's intense interest in the case. Heretofore he had taken Markham's criminal investigations with a certain nonchalance. But there was no indifference in his attitude in the present instance. That Montague's disappearance held a fascination for him was evident. This was owing, no doubt, to the fact that he had seen, or sensed, certain elements in the affair not apparent to the rest of us. That his attitude was justified is a matter of public record, for the sinister horror of Montague's death became a national sensation; and Markham, with that generosity so characteristic of him, was the first to admit that, if it had not been for Vance's persistence that first night, one of the shrewdest and most resourceful murderers of modern times would have escaped justice.

Although it was long past three in the morning when we arrived home, Vance seemed loath to go to bed. He sat down at the piano and played that melancholy yet sublime and passionate third movement from Beethoven's Sonata, Opus 106; and I knew that not only was he troubled, but that some deep unresolved intellectual problem had taken possession of his mind. When he had come to the final major chord he swung round on the piano bench.

"Why don't you go to bed, Van?" he asked somewhat abstractedly. "We have a long, hard day ahead of us. I've a bit of reading to do before I turn in." He poured himself some brandy and soda and, taking the glass with him, went into the library.

For some reason I was too nervous to try to sleep. I picked up a copy of "Marius the Epicurean," which was lying on the centre-table, and sat down at the open window. Over an hour later, on my way to my room, I looked in at the library door, and there sat Vance, his head in his hands, absorbed in a large quarto volume which lay on the table before him. A score of books, some of them open, were piled haphazardly about him, and on the stand at his side was a sheaf of yellowed maps.

He had heard me at the door, for he said: "Fetch the Napoleon and soda, will you, Van? There's a good fellow."

As I placed the bottles in front of him I looked over his shoulder. The book he was reading was an old illuminated copy of "Malleus Maleficarum." At one side, opened, lay Elliot Smith's "The Evolution of the Dragon" and Remy's "Demonolatry." At his other side was a volume of Howey's work on ophiolatry.

"Mythology is a fascinatin' subject, Van," he remarked. "And many thanks for the cognac." He buried himself in his reading again; and I went to bed.

Vance was up before I was the next morning. I found him in the living-room, dressed in a tan silk poplin suit, sipping his matutinal Turkish coffee and smoking a *Régie*.

"You'd better ring for Currie," he greeted me, "and order your plebeian breakfast. We're picking up the reluctant District Attorney in half an hour."

We had to wait nearly twenty minutes in Vance's car before Markham joined us. He was in execrable mood, and his greeting to us, as

he stepped into the tonneau, was barely amiable.

"The more I think of this affair, Vance," he complained, "the more I'm convinced that you're wasting your time and mine."

"What else have you to do today?" Vance asked dulcetly.

"Sleep, for one thing—after your having kept me up most of the night. I was slumbering quite peacefully when the hall boy rang my phone and told me that you were waiting for me."

"Sad . . . sad." Vance wagged his head in mock commiseration. "By Jove, I do hope you sha'n't be disappointed."

Markham grunted and lapsed into silence; and little more was said during our ride to the Stamm estate. As we drove up the circular roadway and came to a halt in the parking-space in front of the house, Heath, who had evidently been waiting for us, came down the stairs to meet us. He seemed disgruntled and ill at ease, and I noticed also that there was a skepticism and insecurity in his manner, as if he distrusted his suspicions of the night before.

"Things are moving," he reported half-heartedly; "but nothing's happened yet. Everything is going smoothly indoors, and the whole outfit is acting like human beings for a change. They all had breakfast together, like a lot of turtle-doves."

"That's interestin'," Vance remarked. "What about Stamm?"

"He's up and about. Looks a little green around the gills; but he's already taken two or three eye-openers."

"Has Miss Stamm put in an appearance this morning?"

"Yes." Heath looked puzzled. "But there's something queer about that dame. She was having hysterics last night and fainting in every open space; but this morning she's bright and snappy, and—if you ask me—she seems relieved that her boy-friend is out of the way."

"On whom did she lavish her attentions this morning, Sergeant?" Vance asked.

"How should I know?" returned Heath, in an injured tone. "They didn't ask me to eat at the table with 'em—I was lucky to get any groceries at all. . . . But I noticed that after breakfast she and Leland went into the drawing-room alone and had a long palaver."

"Really now." Vance meditated a moment, regarding his cigarette critically. "Very illuminatin'."

"Well, well," snorted Markham, giving Vance a disdainful look. "I suppose you regard that fact as an indication that your plot is thickening?"

Vance looked up facetiously.

"Thickening? My dear Markham! The plot is positively congealin', not to say stiffenin'." He sobered and turned back to Heath. "Any news from Mrs. Stamm?"

"She's all right today. The doctor was here a little while ago. He looked over the situation and said there was no more need of his services at the present. Said he'd be back this afternoon, though. . . . And speaking of doctors, I telephoned to Doc Doremus[8] and asked him to hop out here. I figured it was Sunday and I might not be able to catch him later; and we'll have Montague's body in a little while."

"Your men have got the pool gates closed then?"

"Sure. But it was a tough job. One of the gates had got water-logged. Anyway, they're all set now. Luckily the stream was pretty low and there wasn't much of a flow of water. The dam lock was corroded, too, but we hammered it open. It'll take about another hour for the pool to drain, according to Stamm. . . . By the way, he wanted to go down and supervise the operations, but I told him we could get along without him."

"It was just as well," nodded Vance. "Have your men put a screen of some kind over the lock in the dam? The body might go through, don't y' know."

"I thought of that too," Heath returned with a little self-satisfaction. "But it's all right. There was a coarse wire mesh already over the lock."

"Any visitors at the house this morning?" Vance asked next.

"Nobody, sir. They wouldn't have got in anyway. Burke and Hennessey and Snitkin are back on the job this morning—I had another bunch of fellows here last night guarding the place. Snitkin is at the east gate, and Burke's here in the vestibule. Hennessey's down at the pool seeing that nobody approaches from that direction." Heath looked at Vance with an uneasy, questioning eye. "What do you want to do first, sir? Maybe you want to interview Miss Stamm and this young Tatum. There's something wrong about both of 'em, if you ask me."

"No," drawled Vance. "I don't think we'll chivy the members of the household just yet. I'd like to meander round the grounds first. But suppose you ask Mr. Stamm to join us, Sergeant."

Heath hesitated a second; then went into the house. A few moments later he returned accompanied by Rudolf Stamm.

Stamm was dressed in gray tweed plus fours and a gray silk sleeveless sport shirt open at the throat. He wore no coat and was bareheaded. His face was pale and drawn, and there were hollows under his eyes, but his gait was steady as he came down the steps toward us.

He greeted us pleasantly and, I thought, a bit diffidently.

"Good morning, gentlemen. Sorry I was so crotchety last night. Forgive me. I was under the weather—and unstrung. . . ."

"That's quite all right," Vance assured him. "We understand perfectly—a dashed tryin' situation. . . . We're thinking of looking over the estate a bit, especially down by the pool, and we thought you'd be good enough to pilot us around."

"Delighted." Stamm led the way down a path on the north side of the house. "It's a unique place I've got here. Nothing quite like it in New York—or in any other city, for that matter."

We followed him past the head of the steps that led down to the pool, and on toward the rear of the house. We came presently to a slight embankment at the foot of which ran a narrow concrete road.

"This is the East Road," Stamm explained. "My father built it many years ago. It runs down the hill through those trees and joins one of the old roadways just outside the boundary of the estate."

"And where does the old roadway lead?" asked Vance.

"Nowhere in particular. It passes along the Bird Refuge toward the south end of the Clove, and there it divides. One branch goes to

the Shell Bed and the Indian Cave to the north, and joins the road which circles the headland and connects with the River Road. The other branch runs down by the Green Hill and turns into Payson Avenue north of the Military Ovens. But we rarely use the road—it's not in good condition."

We walked down the embankment. To our right, and to the southeast of the house, stood a large garage, with a cement turning-space in front of it.

"An inconvenient place for the garage," Stamm remarked. "But it was the best we could do. If we'd placed it in front of the house it would have spoiled the vista. However, I extended the cement road to the front of the house on the south side there."

"And this East Road runs past the pool?" Vance was glancing down the wooded hill toward the little valley.

"That's right," Stamm nodded, "though the road doesn't go within fifty yards of it."

"Suppose we waddle down," suggested Vance. "And then we can return to the house by way of the pool steps—eh, what?"

Stamm seemed pleased and not a little proud to show us the way. We walked down the sloping hill, across the short concrete bridge over the creek which fed the pool, and, circling a little to the left, got a clear view of the high stone cliff which formed the north boundary of the pool. A few feet ahead of us was a narrow cement walk—perhaps eighteen inches wide—which led off at right angles to the road in the direction of the pool.

Stamm turned into the walk, and we followed him. On either side of us were dense trees and underbrush, and it was not until we had come to the low opening at the northeast corner of the pool, between the cliff and the filter, that we were able to take our bearings accurately. From this point we could look diagonally across the pool to the Stamm mansion which stood on the top of the hill opposite.

The water-level of the pool was noticeably lower. In fact, half of the bottom—the shallow half nearest the cliff—was already exposed, and there remained only a channel of water, perhaps twenty feet wide, on the opposite side, nearest the house. And even this water was sinking perceptibly as it ran through the lock at the bottom of the dam.

The gates above the filter, immediately on our left, were tightly closed, thus acting as an upper dam and creating a miniature pond to the east of the pool. Fortunately, at this time of year the flow of the stream was less abundant than usual, and there was no danger that the water would reach the top of the gates or overflow its banks for several hours. Only a negligible amount of water trickled through the crack between the gates.

As yet the dead man had not come into view, and Heath, scanning the surface of the pool perplexedly, remarked that Montague must have met his death in the deep channel on the other side.

Directly ahead of us, within a few feet of the cliff, the apex of a large conical piece of jagged rock was partly imbedded in the muddy soil, like a huge inverted stalagmite. Stamm pointed at it.

"There's that damned rock I told you about," he said. "That's where you got your splash last night. I've been afraid for weeks it would fall into the pool. Luckily it didn't hit anybody, although I warned every one not to get too close to the cliff if they went swimming. . . . Now I suppose it will have to be dragged out. A mean job."

His eyes roamed over the pool. Only a narrow channel of water now remained along the concrete wall on the far side. And there was still no indication of the dead man.

"I guess Montague must have bumped his head just off the end of the spring-board," Stamm commented sourly. "Damn shame it had to happen. People are always getting drowned here. The pool is unlucky as the devil."

"What devil?" asked Vance, without glancing up. "The *Piasa*?"<sup>[9]</sup>

Stamm shot Vance a quick look and made a disdainful noise which was half a laugh.

"I see that you, too, have been listening to those crazy yarns. Good Lord! the old wives will soon have *me* believing there's a man-eating dragon in this pool. . . . By the way, where did you get that term *Piasa*? The word the Indians round here use for the dragon is *Amangemokdom*. I haven't heard the word *Piasa* for many years, and then it was used by an old Indian chief from out West who was visiting here. Quite an impressive old fellow. And I shall always remember his hair-raising description of the *Piasa*."

"*Piasa* and *Amangemokdom* mean practically the same thing—a dragon-monster," Vance returned in a low voice, his eyes still focused on the gradually receding water on the floor of the pool. "Different dialects, don't y' know. *Amangemokdom* was used by the Lenapes,<sup>[10]</sup> but the Algonkian Indians along the Mississippi called their devil-dragon the *Piasa*."

The water remaining in the channel seemed to be running out more swiftly now, and Stamm started to walk across the small flat area of sod at the edge of the pool, in order, I presume, to get a better view; but Vance caught him quickly by the arm.

"Sorry and all that," he said a bit peremptorily; "but we may have to go over this patch of ground for footprints. . . ."

Stamm looked at him with questioning surprise, and Vance added:

"Silly idea, I know. But it occurred to us that Montague might have swum across the pool to this opening and walked away."

Stamm's jaw dropped.

"Why, in God's name, should he do that?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Vance replied lightly. "He probably didn't. But if there's no body in the pool it will be most embarrassin'. And we'll have to account for his disappearance, don't y' know."

"Tommy-rot!" Stamm seemed thoroughly disgusted. "The body'll be here all right. You can't make a voodoo mystery out of a simple drowning."

"By the by," inquired Vance, "what sort of soil is on the bottom of this pool?"

"Hard and sandy," Stamm said, still rankled by Vance's former remark. "At one time I thought of putting in a cement bottom, but decided it wouldn't be any better than what was already there. And it keeps pretty clean, too. That accumulation of muddy silt you see is only an inch or so deep. When the water gets out of the pool you can walk over the whole bottom in a pair of rubbers without soiling your shoes."

The water in the pool was now but a stream scarcely three feet wide, and I knew it would be only a matter of minutes before the entire surface of the basin would be visible. The five of us—Vance, Markham, Heath, Stamm and myself—stood in a line at the end of the cement walk, looking out intently over the draining pool. The water at the upper end of the channel had disappeared, and, as the rest of the constantly narrowing stream flowed through the lock, the bottom of the channel gradually came into view.

We watched this receding line as it moved downward toward the dam, foot by foot. It reached the *cabañas*, and passed them. It approached the springboard, and I felt a curious tension in my nerves. . . . It reached the spring-board—then passed it, and moved down along the cement wall to the lock. A strange tingling sensation came over me, and, though I seemed to be held fascinated, I managed to drag my eyes away from the rapidly diminishing water and look at the four men beside me.

Stamm's mouth was open, and his eyes were fixed as if in hypnosis. Markham was frowning in deep perplexity. Heath's face was set and rigid. Vance was smoking placidly, his eyebrows slightly raised in a cynical arc; and there was the suggestion of a grim smile on his ascetic mouth.

I turned my gaze back to the lock in the dam. . . . All the water had now gone through it. . . .

At that moment there rang out across the hot sultry air, a hysterical shriek followed by high-pitched gloating laughter. We all looked up, startled; and there, on the third-floor balcony of the old mansion, stood the wizened figure of Matilda Stamm, her arms outstretched and waving toward the pool.

For a moment the significance of this distracting and blood-chilling interlude escaped me. But then, suddenly, I realized the meaning of it. From where we stood we could see every square foot of the empty basin of the pool.

And there was no sign of a body!

## 8. MYSTERIOUS FOOTPRINTS

(Sunday, August 12; 11.30 a.m.)

So extraordinary and unexpected was the result of the draining of the Dragon Pool, that none of us spoke for several moments.

I glanced at Markham. He was scowling deeply, and I detected in his expression a look of fear and bafflement, such as one might have in the presence of things unknown. Heath, as was usual whenever he was seriously puzzled, was chewing viciously on his cigar, and staring belligerently. Stamm, whose bulging eyes were focused on the lock in the dam through which the water had disappeared, was leaning rigidly forward, as if transfixed by a startling phenomenon.

Vance seemed the calmest of us all. His eyebrows were slightly elevated, and there was a mildly cynical expression in his cold gray eyes. Moreover, his lips held the suggestion of a smile of satisfaction, although it was evident from the tenseness of his attitude that he had not been entirely prepared for the absence of Montague's body.

Stamm was the first to speak.

"I'll be damned!" he muttered. "It's incredible—it's not possible!" He fumbled nervously in the pocket of his sport shirt and drew out a small black South American cigarette which he lit with some difficulty.

Vance shrugged almost imperceptibly.

"My word!" he murmured. He, too, reached in his pocket for a cigarette. "Now the search for footprints will be more fascinatin' than ever, Sergeant."

Heath made a wry face.

"Maybe yes and maybe no. . . . What about that rock that fell in the pool over there? Maybe our guy's under it."

Vance shook his head.

"No, Sergeant. The apex of that piece of rock, as it lies buried in the pool, is, I should say, barely eighteen inches in diameter. It couldn't possibly hide a man's body."

Stamm took his black cigarette from his mouth and turned in Vance's direction.

"You're right about that," he commented. "It's not a particularly pleasant subject for conversation, but the fact of the matter is, the bottom of the pool is too hard to have a body driven into it by a rock." He looked back toward the dam. "We'll have to find another explanation for Montague's disappearance."

Heath was both annoyed and uneasy.

"All right," he mumbled. Then he turned to Vance. "But there wasn't any footprints here last night—at least Snitkin and I couldn't find 'em."

"Suppose we take another peep," Vance suggested. "And it might be just as well to hail Snitkin, so that we can go about the task systematically."

Without a word Heath turned and trotted back down the cement path toward the roadway. We could hear him whistling to Snitkin who was on guard at the gate, a hundred feet or so down the East Road.

Markham moved nervously a few paces back and forth.

"Have you any suggestion, Mr. Stamm," he asked, "as to what might have become of Montague?"

Stamm, with a perplexed frown, again scrutinized the basin of the pool. He shook his head slowly.

"I can't imagine," he replied, after a moment, "—unless, of course, he deliberately walked out of the pool on this side."

Vance gave Markham a whimsical smile.

"There's always the dragon as a possibility," he remarked cheerfully.

Stamm wheeled about. His face was red with anger, and his lips trembled as he spoke.

"For the love of Heaven, don't bring that up again!" he pleaded. "Things are bad enough as they are, without dragging in that superstitious hocus-pocus. There simply must be a rational explanation for everything."

"Yes, yes, to be sure," sighed Vance. "Rationality above all else."

At this moment I happened to look up at the third-floor balcony of the house, and I saw Mrs. Schwarz and Doctor Holliday step up to Mrs. Stamm and lead her gently back into the house.

A few seconds later Heath and Snitkin joined us.

The search for footprints along the level area between us and the high-water mark of the pool took considerable time. Beginning close to the filter on the left, Vance, Snitkin and Heath worked systematically across the level space to the perpendicular edge of the cliff that formed the north wall of the pool, on our right. The area was perhaps fifteen feet square. The section lying nearest to the pool was of encrusted earth, and the strip nearest to where Markham, Stamm and I were standing, at the end of the cement path, was covered with short, irregular lawn.

When, at length, Vance turned at the edge of the cliff and walked back toward us, there was a puzzled look on his face.

"There's no sign of a footprint," he remarked. "Montague certainly didn't walk out of the pool at this point."

Heath came up, solemn and troubled.

"I didn't think we'd find anything," he grumbled. "Snitkin and I made a pretty thorough search last night, with our flashlights."

Markham was studying the edge of the cliff.

"Is there any way Montague might have crawled up on one of those ledges and hopped over to the walk here?" he asked of no one in particular.

Vance shook his head unhappily.

"Montague might have been an athlete, but he was no inyala."

Stamm stood as if in hypnotized reflection.



"If he didn't get out of the pool at this end," he said, "I don't see how the devil he got out at all."

"But he did get out, don't y' know," Vance returned. "Suppose we do a bit of prying around."

He led the way toward the filter and mounted its broad coping. We followed him in single file, hardly knowing what to expect. When he was half-way across the filter he paused and looked down at the water-line of the pool. It was fully six feet below the coping of the filter and eight feet below the top of the gates. The filter was of small galvanized wire mesh, backed by a thin coating of perforated porous material which looked like very fine cement. It was obvious that no man could have climbed up the side of the filter to the coping without the aid of an accomplice.

Vance, satisfied, continued across the filter to the *cabañas* on the far side of the pool. A cement retaining wall about four feet above the water-level of the pool ran from the end of the filter to the dam.

"It's a sure thing Montague didn't climb over this wall," Heath observed. "Those flood-lights play all along it, and some one would certainly have seen him."

"Quite right," agreed Stamm. "He didn't escape from the pool on this side."

We walked down to the dam, and Vance made a complete inspection of it, testing the strength of the wire mesh over the lock and making sure there was no other opening. Then he went down to the stream bed below the dam, where all the water had now flowed off, and wandered for a while over the jagged, algae-covered rocks.

"There's no use looking for his body down there," Stamm called to him at length. "There hasn't been enough flow here for the last month to wash as much as a dead cat over the dam."

"Oh, quite," Vance returned abstractedly, climbing back up the bank to where we stood. "I really wasn't looking for the corpse, d' ye see. Even if there had been a strong flow over the dam, Montague wouldn't have been carried over with it. It would take at least twenty-four hours for his body to come to the surface if he had been drowned."

"Well, just what were you looking for?" Markham demanded testily.

"I'm sure I don't know, old dear," Vance replied. "Just sightseein'—and hopin'! . . . Suppose we return to the other side of the pool. That little square of ground over there, without any footprints, is dashed interestin'."

We retraced our steps, along the retaining wall and over the coping of the filter, to the small tract of low ground beyond.

"What do you expect to find here, Vance?" Markham asked, with a show of irritation. "This whole section has already been gone over for footprints."

Vance was serious and reflective.

"And still, don't y' know, there should be footprints here," he returned with a vague gesture of hopelessness. "The man didn't fly out of the pool. . . ." Suddenly he paused. His eyes were fixed dreamily on the small patch of bare grass at our feet, and a moment later he moved forward several paces and knelt down. After scrutinizing the earth at this point for a few seconds he rose and turned back to us.

"I thought that slight indentation might bear closer inspection," he explained. "But it's only a right-angle impression which couldn't possibly be a footprint."

Heath snorted.

"I saw that last night. But it don't mean anything, Mr. Vance. Looks as if somebody set a box or a heavy suit-case there. But that might have been weeks or months ago. Anyway, it's at least twelve feet from the edge of the pool. So even if it had been a footprint, it wouldn't help us any."

Stamm threw his cigarette away and thrust his hands deep in his pockets. There was a baffled look on his pale face.

"This situation has me dumbfounded," he said; "and to tell you the truth, gentlemen, I don't like it. It means more scandal for me, and I've had my share of scandal with this damned swimming pool."

Vance was looking upward along the cliff before us.

"I say, Mr. Stamm, would it have been possible, do you think, for Montague to have scaled those rocks? There are several ledges visible even from here."

Stamm shook his head with finality.

"No. He couldn't have gone up there on the ledges. They aren't connected and they're too far apart. I got stranded on one of them when I was a kid—couldn't go back and couldn't go on—and it took the pater half a day to get me down."

"Could Montague have used a rope?"

"Well . . . yes. It might have been done that way. He was a good athlete, and could have gone up hand over hand. But, damn it, I don't see the point. . . ."

Markham interrupted him.

"There may be something in that, Vance. Going up over the cliff is about the only way he could have got out of the pool. And you remember, of course, Leland's telling us how Mrs. McAdam was staring across the pool toward the cliff after Montague had disappeared. And later, when she heard about the splash, she was pretty much upset. Maybe she had some inkling of Montague's scheme—whatever it was."

Vance pursed his lips.

"Sounds a bit far-fetched," he observed. "But, after all, the johnny *has* disappeared, hasn't he? . . . Anyway, we can verify the theory." He turned to Stamm. "How does one get to the top of the cliff from here?"

"That's easy," Stamm told him. "We can go down to the East Road, and turn up the slope from the Clove. You see, the cliff is highest here, and the plateau slopes quickly away through the Clove and the Indian Life Reservation, till it hits the water-level at Spuyten Duyvil. Ten minutes' walk 'll get us there—if you think it worth while going up."

"It might be well. We could easily see if there are any footprints along the top of the cliff."

Stamm led the way back to the East Road, and we walked north toward the gate of the estate. A hundred yards or so beyond the gate we turned off to the west, along a wide footpath which circled northward and swung sharply toward the foot of the Clove. Then the climb up the steep slope to the cliff began. A few minutes later we were standing on the rocks, looking down into the empty basin of the pool, which was about a hundred feet below us. The old Stamm residence, on the hill opposite, was almost level with us.

One topographical feature of the spot that facilitated matters in looking for footprints was the sheer drop of rocks on either side of a very narrow plateau of earth; and it was only down this plateau—perhaps ten feet across—that any one, even had he scaled the cliff from the pool, could have retreated down the hill to the main road.

But, although a thorough inspection of the surrounding terrain was made by Vance and Heath and Snitkin, there were no evidences whatever of any footprints, or disturbances, on the surface of the earth that would indicate that anybody had been there since the heavy rains of the night before. Even to my untrained eye this fact was only too plain.

Markham was disappointed.

"It's obvious," he admitted hopelessly, "that this method of exit from the pool is eliminated."

"Yes, I fear so." Vance took out a cigarette and lighted it with studious deliberation. "If Montague left the pool by way of this cliff he must have flown over."

Stamm swung round, his face pale.

"What do you mean by that, sir? Are you going back to that silly story of the dragon?"

Vance raised his eyebrows.

"Really now, my figure of speech bore no such intimation. But I see what you mean. The *Piasa*, or *Amangemokdom*, did have wings, didn't he?"

Stamm glowered at him, and then gave a grim, mirthless laugh.

"These dragon stories are getting on my nerves," he apologized. "I'm fidgety today, anyway."

He fumbled for another cigarette and stepped toward the edge of the cliff.

"There's that rock I was telling you about." He pointed to a low boulder just at the apex of the cliff. "It was the top of it that fell into the pool last night." He inspected the sides of the boulder for a moment, running his hand under the slight crevasse on a line with the plateau. "I was afraid it would break off at this point, where the strata overlap. This is where Leland and I tried to pry it loose yesterday. We didn't think the top would fall off. But the rest seems pretty solid now, in spite of the rains."

"Very interestin'." Vance was already making his way down the slope toward the Clove and the East Road.

When we had reached the narrow cement footpath that led from the road to the pool, Vance, to my surprise, turned into it again. That little section of low ground between the filter and the cliff seemed to fascinate him. He was silent and meditative as he stood at the end of the walk, looking out again over the empty basin of the pool.

Just behind us, and a little to the right of the walk, I had noticed a small stone structure, perhaps ten feet square and barely five feet high, almost completely covered with English ivy. I had paid scant attention to it and had forgot its existence altogether until Vance suddenly addressed Stamm.

"What is that low stone structure yonder that looks like a vault?"

"Just that," Stamm replied. "It's the old family vault. My grandfather had the idea he wanted to be buried here on the estate, so he had it built to house his remains and those of the other members of the family. But my father refused to be buried in it—he preferred cremation and a public mausoleum—and it has not been opened during my lifetime. However, my mother insists that she be placed in it when she dies." Stamm hesitated and looked troubled. "But I don't know what to do about it. All this property will some day be taken over by the city—these old estates can't go on forever, with conditions what they are today. Not like Europe, you know."

"The curse of our commercial civilization," murmured Vance. "Is there any one besides your grandfather buried in the vault?"

"Oh, yes." Stamm seemed uninterested. "My grandmother is in one of the crypts. And a couple of aunts are there, I believe, and my grandfather's youngest brother—they died before I was born. It's all duly recorded in the family Bible, though I've never taken the trouble to verify the data. The fact is, I'd probably have to dynamite the iron door if I wanted to get in. I've never known where the key to the vault is."

"Perhaps your mother knows where the key is," Vance remarked casually.

Stamm shot him a quick look.

"Funny you should say that. Mother told me years ago she had hidden the key, so that no one could ever desecrate the vault. She has queer ideas like that at times, all connected with the traditions of the family and the superstitions of the neighborhood."

"Anything to do with the dragon?"

"Yes, damn it!" Stamm clicked his teeth. "Some silly idea that the dragon guards the spirits of our dead and that she's assisting him in caring for the dusty remains of the Stammers. You know how such notions possess the minds of the old." (He spoke with irritation, but there was an undercurrent of apology in his voice.) "As for the key, if she ever really did hide it, she's probably forgotten by now where it is."

Vance nodded sympathetically.

"It really doesn't matter," he said. "By the by, was the vault ever mentioned, or discussed, before any of your guests?"

Stamm thought a moment.

"No," he concluded. "I doubt if any of them even knows it's on the estate. Excepting Leland, of course. You see, the vault's hidden from the house by the trees here, and no one ever comes over to this side of the pool."

Vance stood looking up contemplatively at the old Stamm house; and while I was conjecturing as to what was going on in his mind he turned slowly.

"Really, y' know," he said to Stamm, "I could bear to have a peep at that vault. It sounds rather romantic." He moved off the path through the trees, and Stamm followed him with an air of resigned boredom.

"Isn't there a path to the vault?" Vance asked.

"Oh, yes, there's one leading up from the East Road, but it's probably entirely overgrown with weeds."

Vance crossed the ten or twelve feet between the path and the vault and stood looking at the squat stone structure for several moments. Its tiled roof was slightly peaked, to allow for drainage, but the ivy had long since climbed up to the low cornice. The stone of its walls was the same as that of the Stamm house. On the west elevation was a nail-studded door of hammered iron which, despite its rust and appearance of antiquity, still gave forth an impression of solid impregnability. Leading down to the door were three stone

steps, overgrown with moss. As Stamm explained to us, the vault had been built partly underground, so that at its highest point it was only about five feet above the level of the ground.

Beside the vault, on the side nearest the walk, lay a pile of heavy boards, warped and weather-stained. Vance, after walking round the vault and inspecting it, halted beside the pile of boards.

"What might the lumber be for?" he asked.

"Just some timber left over from the water-gates above the filter," Stamm told him.

Vance had already turned away and started back toward the cement walk.

"Amazin'," he commented when Stamm had come up to him. "It's difficult to realize that one is actually within the city limits of Manhattan."

Markham, up to this point, had refrained from any comment, though it was evident to me that he was annoyed at Vance's apparent digressions. Now, however, he spoke with an irritation which reflected his impatience.

"Obviously there's nothing more we can do here, Vance. Even though there are no footprints, the irresistible inference is that Montague got out of the pool some way—which will probably be explained later, when he's ready to show up. . . . I think we'd better be getting along."

The very intensity of his tone made me feel that he was arguing against his inner convictions—that, indeed, he was far from satisfied with the turn of events. None the less, there was a leaven of common sense in his attitude, and I myself could see little else to do but to follow his suggestion.

Vance, however, hesitated.

"I admit, Markham, that your conclusion is highly rational," he demurred; "but there's something deuced irrational about Montague's disappearance. And, if you don't mind, I think I'll nose about the basin of the pool a bit." Then, turning to Stamm: "How long will the pool remain empty before the stream above the gates overflows?"

Stamm went to the filter and looked over into the rising water above.

"I should say another half-hour or so," he reported. "The pool has now been empty for a good hour and a half, and two hours is about the limit. If the gates aren't opened by that time, the stream overflows its banks and runs all over the lower end of the estate and down on the property beyond the East Road."

"Half an hour will give me ample time," Vance returned. . . . "I say, Sergeant, suppose we fetch those boards from the vault and stretch them out there in the silt. I'd like to snoop at the basin between this point and the place where Montague went in."

Heath, eager for anything that might lead to some explanation of the incredible situation that confronted us, beckoned Snitkin with a jerk of the head, and the two of them hastened off to the vault. Within ten minutes the boards had been placed end to end, leading from the low land where we stood to the centre of the pool. This had been accomplished by laying one board down first, and then using that as a walk on which to carry the next one which was placed beyond the first board, and so on, until the boards had all been used up. These boards, which were a foot wide and two inches thick, thus formed a dry wooden passage along the floor of the pool, as the muddy silt was not deep enough at any point to overrun the timber.

During the operation Markham had stood resignedly, his head enveloped in a cloud of cigar smoke.

"This is just another waste of time," he complained, as Vance turned up the cuffs of his trousers and stepped down the first gently sloping plank. "What, in Heaven's name, do you expect to find out there? You can see the entire bottom of the pool from here."

Vance gave him a puckish look over the shoulder.

"To be scrupulously truthful, Markham, I don't expect to find anything. But this pool fascinates me. I really couldn't endure to hobble away without visiting the very seat, so to speak, of the mystery. . . . Come, the Sergeant's bridge is quite dry—or, as you lawyers would say in a legal brief, anhydrous."

Reluctantly Markham followed him.

"I'm glad you admit you don't expect to find anything," he mumbled sarcastically. "For a moment I thought you might be looking for the dragon himself."

"No," smiled Vance. "The *Piasa*, according to all the traditions, was never able to make himself invisible, although some of the dragons of Oriental mythology were able to change themselves into beautiful women at will."

Stamm, who was walking just in front of me down the planks, halted and brushed his hand across his forehead.

"I wish you gentlemen would drop these damnable allusions to a dragon," he objected, in a tone of mingled anger and fear. "My nerves won't stand any more of it this morning."

"Sorry," murmured Vance. "Really, y' know, we had no intention of upsettin' you."

He had now come to the end of the last board, a little beyond the centre of the pool, and stood looking about him, shading his eyes with his hand. The rest of us stood in a row beside him. The sun poured down on us unmercifully, and there was not a breath of air to relieve the depressing stagnation of the heat. I was looking past Stamm and Markham at Vance, as his gaze roved over the muddy basin, and I wondered what strange whim had driven him to so seemingly futile an escapade. Despite my respect for Vance's perspicacity and instinctive reasoning, I began to feel very much as I knew Markham felt; and I went so far as to picture a farcical termination to the whole adventure. . . .

As I speculated I saw Vance suddenly kneel down on the end of the plank and lean forward in the direction of the spring-board.

"Oh, my aunt!" I heard him exclaim. "My precious doddering aunt!"

And then he did an astonishing thing. He stepped off the board into the muddy silt and, carefully adjusting his monocle, leaned over to inspect something he had discovered.

"What have you found, Vance?" called Markham impatiently.

Vance held up his hand with a peremptory gesture.

"Just a minute," he returned, with a note of suppressed excitement. "Don't step out here."

He then walked further away, while we waited in tense silence. After a moment he turned slowly about, toward the cliffs, and came back, following a line roughly parallel with the improvised boardwalk on which we stood. All the time his eyes were fixed on the basin

of the pool, and, instinctively, we kept pace with him along the boards as he walked nearer and nearer to the small plot of low ground at the end of the cliff. When he had come within a few feet of the sloping bank he halted.

"Sergeant," he ordered, "throw the end of that board over here."

Heath obeyed with alacrity.

When the board was in place, Vance beckoned to us to step out on it. We filed along the narrow piece of timber in a state of anticipatory excitement; there could be no doubt, from the strained look on Vance's face and the unnatural tone of his voice, that he had made a startling discovery. But none of us could visualize, even at that moment, how grisly and uncanny, how apparently removed from all the sane realities of life, that discovery was to prove.

Vance leaned over and pointed to a section of the muddy basin of the pool.

"That's what I've found, Markham! And the tracks lead from beyond the centre of the pool, near the spring-board, all the way back to this low embankment. Moreover, they're confused, and they go in opposite directions. And they circle round in the centre of the pool."

At first the thing at which Vance pointed was almost indistinguishable, owing to the general roughness of the silt; but as we looked down in the direction of his indicating finger, the horror of it gradually became plain.

There before us, in the shallow mud, was the unmistakable imprint of what seemed to be a great hoof, fully fourteen inches long, and corrugated as with scales. And there were other imprints like it, to the left and to the right, in an irregular line. But more horrible even than those impressions were numerous demarcations, alongside the hoof-prints, of what appeared to be the three-taloned claw of some fabulous monster.

## 9. A NEW DISCOVERY

(Sunday, August 12; 12.30 p.m.)

So appalling and stupefying was the sight of those hideous hoof-prints, that it was several seconds before the actual realization of their significance was borne in upon us. Heath and Snitkin stood like petrified men, their eyes fixed upon them; and Markham, despite his customary capacity to absorb the unusual, gazed down in speechless bewilderment, his hands opening and shutting nervously as if he had received a physical shock and was unable to control his reflex twitching. My own feeling was one of horror and unbelief. I strove desperately to throw off the sense of hideous unreality which was creeping over me and making every nerve in my body tingle.

But the man most affected was Stamm. I had never seen any one so near a state of complete collapse from sheer terror. His face, already pale from the excesses of the night before, turned an ugly ashen yellow, and his taut body swayed slightly. Then his head jerked back as if he had been struck by an unseen hand, and he drew in a long, rasping breath. Blood suddenly suffused his cheeks, turning them almost crimson; and there was a spasmodic twitching of the muscles about his mouth and throat. His eyes bulged like those of a man afflicted with exophthalmic goitre.

It was Vance's cool, unemotional voice that brought us out of our trance of horror and helped to steady us.

"Really now," he drawled, "these imprints are most fascinatin'. They have possibilities—eh, what? . . . But suppose we return to dry land. My boots are a beastly mess."

We filed back slowly along the diverted board, and Heath and Snitkin replaced it as it had been set down originally, so that we could walk back to the shore without following Vance's example of stepping off into the mud.

When we were again on the little patch of low ground Stamm plucked at Vance's sleeve nervously.

"What—do you make of it?" he stammered. His voice sounded strangely flat and far-away, like the unmodulated voice of a deaf man.

"Nothing—yet," Vance answered carelessly. Then, addressing Heath: "Sergeant, I'd like some copies of those footmarks—just as a matter of record. The gates will have to be opened pretty soon, but I think there'll be time enough."

The Sergeant had partly regained his self-control.

"You bet I'll get the drawings." He addressed Snitkin officiously. "Copy those footprints in your notebook, and measure 'em. And make it snappy. When you're through, get the boards back out of the pool and pile 'em up. Then have the men open the gates and close the lock in the dam. Report to me when you're finished."

Vance smiled at the Sergeant's businesslike seriousness.

"That being capably settled," he said, "I think we'll toddle along back to the house. There's nothing more we can do here. . . . The short route this time, what?"

We proceeded across the coping of the filter toward the *cabañas* opposite. The water in the stream above the pool had risen considerably and was within a foot of the top of the closed gates. As I looked back I saw Snitkin kneeling on two of the boards, with his notebook spread before him, diligently transcribing those astounding markings Vance had found on the basin of the pool. There was no better man in the New York Police Department for such a task, and I recalled that Snitkin had been especially chosen by the Sergeant to make the measurements of the mysterious footprints in the snow outside the old Greene mansion in East 53rd Street.<sup>[11]</sup>

As we passed the *cabañas* on our way to the steps leading up to the house, Vance halted abruptly.

"I say, Sergeant, have you rescued the departed Montague's garments from his *cabaña*? If not, we might take them along with us. They may hold secrets . . . a suicide note, or a threatening letter from a lady, or some other jolly clue such as the newspapers adore." Despite his jocular tone I knew that he was troubled and was reaching out in every direction for some light on the incredible situation.

Heath grunted assent and began searching through the several *cabañas*. Presently he emerged with Montague's attire over one arm; and we proceeded to the house.

As we reached the top of the steps, Doctor Emanuel Doremus, the Medical Examiner, drove up to the front of the house. Seeing us, he stepped jauntily across the lawn to where we stood. He was a short, dapper man, breezy and petulant in manner, who suggested the stock-broker rather than the shrewd physician that he was. He was dressed in a pale gray sport suit, and his straw hat was set at a rakish angle. He greeted us with a familiar wave of the hand, planted himself with his feet wide apart, thrust his hands in his pockets, and fixed a baleful eye on the Sergeant.

"A fine time," he complained waspishly, "to drag me out into the country. Don't you think I ever need any rest—even on Sunday? . . . Well, where's the body? Let's get the business over with, so I can get back in time for lunch." He teetered a moment on his toes while Heath cleared his throat and looked embarrassed.

"The fact is, doc,"—Heath spoke apologetically—"there ain't no body. . . ."

Doremus squinted, settled down on his heels, and studied the Sergeant maliciously.

"What's that!" he snapped. "No corpse?" He pushed his hat further back on his head and glowered. "Whose clothes are those you're holding?"

"They belong to the guy that I wanted you to report on," Heath returned sheepishly. "But we can't find the guy himself."

"Where was he when you phoned me?" Doremus demanded irritably. "I suppose the corpse said 'too-dle-oo' to you and walked off. . . . Say, what is this—a practical joke?"

Markham stepped diplomatically into the breach.

"We're sorry for the trouble we've caused you, doctor. But the explanation is simple. The Sergeant had every reason to believe that a man had been drowned, under suspicious circumstances, in the swimming pool down the hill. But when the pool was drained there was no body in it, and we're all a bit mystified."

Doctor Doremus nodded curtly in acknowledgment of Markham's explanation, and turned back to the unhappy Sergeant.

"I don't head the Bureau of Missing Persons," he grumbled. "I happen to be the Chief Medical Examiner. . . ."

"I thought—" Heath began, but the doctor interrupted him.

"Good Gad!" He glared at the Sergeant in mock astonishment. "You 'thought'! Where did the members of the Homicide Bureau get the idea that they could think? . . . Sunday! The day of rest. Hot, too! And I'm dragged out of my easy chair into this God-forsaken part of the country, because you had a thought. . . . I don't want thoughts—I want bodies. And when there aren't any bodies I want to be let alone."

The Sergeant was piqued, but his many experiences with the peppery Medical Examiner had taught him not to take the other too seriously; and he finally grinned good-naturedly.

"When I have a corpse for you," he retorted, "you complain about it. Now when I haven't got one and there's nothing for you to do, you complain anyway. . . . Honest, doc, I'm sorry I got you up here, but if you'd been in my place—"

"Heaven forbid!" Doremus fixed a commiserating look on the Sergeant and shook his head dolefully. "A homicide sleuth without a corpse!"

Markham was, I thought, a little annoyed at the Medical Examiner's frivolous manner.

"This is a serious situation, doctor," he said. "The man's body should logically have been in the pool, and the case is enough to upset any one's nerves."

Doremus sighed exaggeratedly, and extended his hands, palms upward.

"But, after all, Mr. Markham, I can't perform an autopsy on a theory. I'm a doctor—not a philosopher."

Vance exhaled a long ribbon of smoke.

"You can still have your luncheon on time, don't y' know. Really, doctor, you should be deuced grateful to the Sergeant for not detaining you."

"Huh! I suppose you're right, though." Doremus grinned and wiped his brow with a blue silk handkerchief. "Well, I'll be running along."

"If we find the body—" Heath began.

"Oh, don't consider my feelings," the doctor returned. "I don't care if you never find another body. But, if you do, for Gad's sake, don't make it at mealtime." He waved a cheery farewell, which included all of us, and hurried back across the lawn to his car.

"The Sergeant having been duly chastened for his precipitancy," smiled Vance, "suppose we proceed on our way."

Stamm opened the side door for us with his key, and we entered the dingy hallway that led from the main stairs to the rear of the house. Even in the daytime, the depressing musty atmosphere of a bygone age enveloped us, and the sunlight that filtered into the hall from the main entrance appeared dead and dusty, as if it too had been vitiated by the stagnation of accumulated decay.

As we approached the library we heard the low murmur of several voices within, and it was evident that most of the household had gathered in that room. There was a sudden lull in the conversation, and Leland came out into the hallway to greet us.

Despite his inherent calm, he appeared drawn and restless. After the brief greetings, he asked in a voice that struck me as somewhat strained:

"Have you discovered anything new?"

"Oh, a number of things," Vance answered cheerfully. "But Montague himself has eluded us in the most amazin' fashion."

Leland shot Vance a swift, quizzical look.

"He was not in the pool?"

"Oh, not at all," said Vance blandly. "He was entirely absent, don't y' know. Mystifyin', what?"

Leland frowned, studied Vance a moment, and then glanced quickly at the rest of us. He started to say something but refrained.

"By the by," Vance continued, "we're going up to Montague's room for a bit of sartorial inspection. Would you care to limp along?"

Leland seemed confused for a moment; then he caught sight of the wearing apparel the Sergeant was carrying.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "I had quite forgotten the poor chap's clothes. I should have brought them to the house last night. . . . You think they may contain something that will explain his disappearance?"

Vance shrugged, and proceeded to the front entrance hall.

"One never knows, does one?" he murmured.

Stamm summoned Trainor, who was standing near the main door, and told him to fetch a pair of slippers for Vance to wear while his shoes were being cleaned. As soon as the butler had made the exchange we went up-stairs.

The bedroom that had been assigned to Montague was far down on the north side of the second-story hallway, directly under, as I figured it, the bedroom of Mrs. Stamm. It was not as large a room as hers, but it had a similar window overlooking the Dragon Pool. The room was comfortably furnished, but it possessed none of the air of having been lived in, and I surmised that it was used merely as an overflow guest-chamber.

On a low table by the chest of drawers was a black sealskin travelling bag, its cover thrown back against the wall. It was fitted with silver toilet articles, and appeared to contain only the usual items of male attire. Over the foot of the colonial bed hung a suit of mauve silk pajamas, and on a chair nearby had been thrown a purple surah silk dressing-gown.

Heath placed the clothes he had found in the *cabaña* on the centre-table and began a systematic search of the pockets.

Vance walked leisurely to the open window and looked out across the pool. Four men were busily engaged in the operation of opening the stream gates, and Snitkin, his drawings evidently completed, was dragging the last board up the bank toward the vault. Vance stood for several moments gazing out, smoking thoughtfully, his eyes moving from the filter to the dam and then to the cliff opposite.

"Really, y' know," he remarked to Stamm, "that fallen piece of rock should be removed before the water is let in."

Stamm, for some reason, seemed disconcerted by the suggestion.

"There wouldn't be time," he answered. "And, anyway, the water's shallow at that point. I'll get the rock out in a day or so."

Vance appeared hardly to have heard him and turned back to the room, walking slowly toward the centre-table where the Sergeant had made a small heap of the contents of Montague's dinner clothes.

Heath turned one more pocket inside out, and then spread his hands in Vance's direction.

"That's the total," he said, with patent disappointment. "And there's nothing here that will tell us anything."

Vance glanced cynically at the various objects on the table—a platinum watch and chain, a small pocket-knife, a gold cigarette-case and lighter, a fountain-pen, several keys, two handkerchiefs, and a small amount of silver and paper money. Then he walked to the suit-case and made an inspection of its contents.

"There's nothing helpful here either, Sergeant," he said at length.

He glanced about him, examined the top of the dressing-table, opened the two drawers, looked under the pillows on the bed, and finally felt in the pockets of the pajamas and the dressing-gown.

"Everything's quite conventional and in order," he sighed, dropping into a chair by the window. "I fear we'll have to look elsewhere for clues."

Stamm had gone to the clothes-closet and opened the door; and Leland, as if animated by the spirit of the search, had followed him. Stamm reached up and turned on the light in the closet.

Leland, looking over the other's shoulder, nodded approvingly.

"Of course," he murmured, without any great show of enthusiasm. "His day suit."

Vance rose quickly.

"Pon my soul, Mr. Leland, I'd quite forgot it. . . . I say, Sergeant, fetch the johnny's other togs, will you?"

Heath hastened to the closet and brought Montague's sport suit to the centre-table. An examination of its pockets failed to reveal anything of importance until a leather wallet was removed from the inside coat pocket. Within the wallet were three letters, two in envelopes and one merely folded, without a covering. The two in envelopes were a circular from a tailor and a request for a loan.

The letter without an envelope, however, proved to be one of the most valuable clues in the dragon murder. Vance glanced through it, with a puzzled expression, and then, without a word, showed it to the rest of us. It was a brief note, in characteristically feminine chirography, on pale blue scented note-paper. It was without an address, but it was dated August 9th (which was Thursday, the day before the house-party began) and read:

Dearest Monty—

I will be waiting in a car, just outside the gate on the East Road, at ten o'clock. Ever thine,  
Ellen.

Stamm was the last to read the note. His face went pale, and his hand trembled as he gave it back to Vance.

Vance barely glanced at him: he was gazing with a slight frown at the signature.

"Ellen . . . Ellen," he mused. "Wasn't that the name, Mr. Stamm, of the woman who said she wasn't able to join your house-party because she was sailing for South America?"

"Yes—that's it." Stamm's tone was husky. "Ellen Bruett. And she admitted she knew Montague. . . . I don't get it at all. Why should she be waiting for him with a car? And even if Montague was in love with her, why should he join her in such an outlandish fashion?"

"It strikes me," Leland put in grimly, "that Montague wanted to disappear in order to join this woman. The man was a moral coward, and he did not have the courage to come out and tell Bernice he wanted to break his engagement with her because he was in love with another woman. Moreover, he was an actor and would concoct just such a dramatic episode to avoid his obligations. The fellow was always spectacular in his conduct. Personally, I am not surprised at the outcome."

Vance regarded him with a faint smile.

"But, Mr. Leland, really, don't y' know, there isn't any outcome just yet. . . ."

"But surely," protested Leland, with mild emphasis, "that note explains the situation."

"It explains many things," Vance conceded. "But it doesn't explain how Montague could have emerged from the pool to keep his rendezvous without leaving the slightest sign of footprints."

Leland studied Vance speculatively, reaching in his pocket for his pipe.

"Are you sure," he asked, "that there are no footprints whatever?"

"Oh, there are footprints," Vance returned quietly. "But they couldn't have been made by Montague. Furthermore, they are not on the plot of ground at the edge of the pool which leads out to the East Road. . . . The footprints, Mr. Leland, are in the mud on the bottom of the pool."

"On the bottom of the pool?" Leland drew in a quick breath, and I noticed that he spilled some of the tobacco as he filled his pipe. "What kind of footprints are they?"

Vance listlessly shifted his gaze to the ceiling.

"That's difficult to say. They looked rather like marks which might have been made by some gigantic prehistoric beast."

"*The dragon!*" The exclamation burst almost explosively from Leland's lips. Then the man uttered a low nervous laugh and lighted his pipe with unsteady fingers. "I cannot admit, however," he added lamely, "that Montague's disappearance belongs in the realm of mythology."

"I'm sure it does not," Vance murmured carelessly. "But, after all, d' ye see, one must account for those amazin' imprints in the pool."

"I should like to have seen those imprints," Leland returned dourly. "But I suppose it is too late now." He went to the window and looked out. "The water is already flowing through the gates. . . ."

Just then came the sound of heavy footsteps in the hall, and Snitkin appeared at the door, with several pieces of paper in his hand.

"Here are the copies, Sergeant." The detective spoke in a strained tone: it was evident that our morning's adventure on the basin of the pool had had a disquieting effect on him. "I've got the men working on the gates, and the lock in the dam is about closed. What's the orders now?"

"Go back and boss the job," Heath told him, taking the sketches. "And when it's done send the boys home and take up your post at the road gate."

Snitkin saluted and went away without a word.

Vance walked over to Heath and, taking out his monocle, studied the drawings.

"My word!" he commented admiringly. "They're really clever, don't y' know. The chap is a natural draughtsman. . . . I say, Mr. Leland, here are copies of the footprints we found in the pool."

Leland moved—somewhat hesitantly, I thought—to the Sergeant's side and looked at the drawings. I watched him closely during his examination of the sketches, but I was unable to detect the slightest change of expression on his face.

At length he looked up, and his calm eyes slowly turned to Vance.

"Quite remarkable," he said, and added in a colorless voice: "I cannot imagine what could have made such peculiar imprints in the pool."



## 10. THE MISSING MAN

(Sunday, August 12; 1 p.m.)

It was now one o'clock. Stamm insisted on ordering lunch for us, and Trainor served it in the drawing-room. Stamm himself and Leland ate with the others in the dining-room. We were no sooner alone than Markham turned a troubled gaze on Vance.

"What do you make of it all?" he asked. "I can't understand those marks on the bottom of the pool. They're—they're frightful."

Vance shook his head despairingly: there could be no doubt that he too was troubled.

"I don't like it—I don't at all like it." There was discouragement in his tone. "There's something dashed sinister about this case—something that seems to reach out beyond the ordin'ry every-day experiences of man."

"If it were not for all this curious dragon lore surrounding the Stamm estate," said Markham, "we'd probably have dismissed those large imprints with the simple explanation that the water draining over the mud had tended to enlarge or distort ordinary footmarks."

Vance smiled wearily.

"Yes, quite so. But we'd have been unscientific. Some of the footprints were pointed in the direction of the flow of the water, while others were at right-angles to it; yet their character was not changed at any point. Moreover, the receding water flowed very gently, and the shallow mud on the bottom of the pool is rather tenacious,—even the scale-like formations on the imprints were not washed away. . . But even if one could account reasonably for the larger impressions, what about those astonishing claw-like imprints—?"

Suddenly Vance leapt to his feet and, going swiftly to the door, drew one of the portières aside. Before him stood Trainor, his pudgy face a ghastly white, his eyes staring like those of a man in a trance. In one hand he held Vance's shoes.

Vance regarded him ironically and said nothing; and the man, with a quiver that ran over his entire body, made an effort to draw himself together.

"I'm—I'm sorry, sir," he stammered. "I—I heard you talking and—didn't wish to disturb you . . . so I waited. I have your boots, sir."

"That's quite all right, Trainor." Vance returned to his chair. "I was merely curious as to who was hoverin' outside the portières. . . . Thanks for the boots."

The butler came forward obsequiously, knelt down and, removing the slippers from Vance's feet, replaced them with the oxfords. His hands trembled perceptibly as he tied the laces.

When he left the room with the tray of luncheon dishes Heath glared after him belligerently.

"Now, what was that baby snooping around for?" he snarled. "There's something on his mind."

"Oh, doubtless." Vance smiled moodily. "I'd say it was the dragon."

"See here, Vance,"—Markham spoke with acerbity—"let's drop this poppycock about a dragon." There was a certain desperation in his tone. "How do you account for that note in Montague's pocket—and what does it mean?"

"My word, Markham, I'm no Chaldean." Vance leaned back in his chair and lighted another *Régie*. "Even if the whole affair was a spectacular plot in which the histrionic Montague was to make his exit in the approved dramatic manner, I still can't imagine how he joined his inamorata without leaving some evidence as to his means of departure from the pool. It's mystifyin' no end."

"Hell!" The forthright Sergeant cut into the discussion. "The bird got away somehow, didn't he, Mr. Vance? And if we can't find the evidence, he out-foxed us."

"Tut, tut, Sergeant. You're far too modest. I'll admit the explanation should be simple, but I've a feelin' that it's going to prove dashed complex."

"Nevertheless," Markham argued, "that note from the Bruett woman and Montague's disappearance complement each other perfectly."

"Granted," nodded Vance. "Too perfectly, in fact. But the imprints in the pool and the absence of any kind of footprints on the opposite bank, are two conflictin' elements."

He got to his feet and walked the length of the room and back.

"Then there's the car in which the mysterious lady waited. . . . I say, Markham, I think a brief chat with Miss Stamm might prove illuminatin'. . . . Fetch the quakin' butler, will you, Sergeant?"

Heath went swiftly from the room, and when Trainor came in Vance requested him to ask Miss Stamm to come to the drawing-room. A few minutes later she appeared.

Bernice Stamm was not exactly a beautiful girl, but she was unquestionably attractive, and I was amazed at her air of serenity, after the reports of her hysterical condition the night before. She had on a sleeveless white crêpe-de-Chine tennis dress. Her legs were bare, but she wore orange-colored woollen socks, rolled at the ankles, and white buckskin sandals. Though not exactly an athletic type, she gave one the same impression of strength and vitality as did her brother.

Vance offered her a chair. But she declined it courteously, saying that she preferred to stand.

"Perhaps you'll have a cigarette," he suggested, proffering her his case.

She accepted one with a slight bow, and he held his lighter for her. Her manner seemed strangely detached, as if both her thoughts and her emotions were far away from her immediate surroundings; and I remembered the Sergeant's criticism of her to the effect that she had not seemed as much concerned about the tragedy itself as about something indirectly connected with it. Perhaps Vance received the same impression, for his first question was:

"Exactly how do you feel, Miss Stamm, about the tragedy that took place here last night?"

"I hardly know what to say," she answered, with apparent frankness. "Of course, I was tremendously upset. I think we all were."

Vance studied her searchingly a moment.

"But surely your reaction must have been deeper than that. You were engaged to Mr. Montague, I understand."

She nodded wistfully.

"Yes—but that was a great mistake. I realize it now. . . . If it had not been a mistake," she added, "I'm sure I would feel much more deeply about the tragedy than I do."

"You think this tragedy was accidental?" Vance asked with sudden bluntness.

"Of course it was!" The girl turned on him with blazing eyes. "It couldn't have been anything else. I know what you mean—I've heard all the silly chatter round this house—but it's quite impossible to attribute Monty's death to anything but an accident."

"You don't put any stock, then, in these tales of a dragon in the pool?"

She laughed with genuine amusement.

"No, I don't believe in fairy-tales. Do you?"

"I still believe in tales of Prince Charming," Vance returned lightly; "though I've always rather suspected the chap. He was much too good to be true."

The girl let her eyes rest on Vance calmly for several moments. Then she said:

"I haven't the slightest idea what you mean."

"It really doesn't matter," he returned. "But it's a bit disconcertin' not to have found the body of the gentleman who dived into the pool last night."

"You mean—"

"Yes—quite. Mr. Montague has disappeared completely."

She gave him a startled look.

"But—at lunch—my brother—he didn't tell me. . . . You're quite sure that Monty has disappeared?"

"Oh, yes. We drained the pool, don't y' know." Vance paused and regarded the girl mildly. "All we found were some fantastic footprints."

Her eyes widened and the pupils dilated.

"What kind of footprints?" she asked, in a tense, hushed voice.

"I've never seen any like them before," Vance returned. "If I believed in mythical submarine monsters, I might conclude that some such creature had made them."

Bernice Stamm was standing near the portières, and involuntarily she reached out and clutched one of them with her hand, as if to steady herself. But her sudden loss of composure was only momentary. She forced a smile and, walking further into the room, leaned against the mantelpiece.

"I am afraid"—she spoke with obvious effort—"I'm too practical to be frightened by any seeming evidences of the dragon's presence here."

"I'm sure you are, Miss Stamm," Vance replied pleasantly. "And since you are so practical, perhaps this missive will interest you." He took from his pocket the blue, scented note that had been found in Montague's day suit, and handed it to her.

The girl read it without change of expression, but when she gave it back to Vance I noticed that she sighed deeply, as if the implication of its contents had brought her peace of mind.

"That note is far more reasonable than the footprints you speak of," she remarked.

"The note in itself is reasonable enough," Vance admitted. "But there are correlative factors which make it appear most unreasonable. For one thing, there's the car in which the ever-thine Ellen was to have waited. Surely, in the night-time silence of Inwood, the sound of an automobile could have been heard at a distance of a few hundred yards."

"It was—it was!" she exclaimed. "I heard it!" The color rushed back to her cheeks, and her eyes glistened. "I didn't realize it until this minute. When Mr. Leland and the others were in the pool searching for Monty—ten minutes or so after he had dived in—I heard a car starting and the hum of the motor picking up as when the gears are being shifted—you know the sort of noise I mean. *And it was down on the East Road.* . . ."

"The car was going away from the estate?"

"Yes—yes! It was going away—toward Spuyten Duyvil. . . . It all comes back to me now. I was kneeling there, at the edge of the pool, frightened and dazed. And the sound of this car drifted in on me, mixed with the sound of splashing in the water. But I didn't think about the car at the time—it seemed so unimportant . . . the suspense of those few minutes—I think you understand what I am trying to say. I completely forgot such a trivial thing as the sound of a car, until that note brought it back to me." The girl spoke with the intensity of unassailable veracity.

"I understand exactly," Vance assured her consolingly. "And your remembering the sound of the car has helped us no end."

He had been standing by the centre-table during the interview, and he now came forward toward the girl and held out his hand in an attitude of friendly sympathy. With a spontaneous gesture of gratitude, she put her hand in his; and he led her to the door.

"We sha'n't bother you any more now," he said gently. "But will you be good enough to ask Mr. Leland to come here?"

She nodded and walked away toward the library.

"Do you think she was telling the truth about hearing an automobile?" Markham asked.

"Oh, undoubtedly." Vance moved back to the centre-table and smoked for a moment in silence: there was a puzzled look on his face. "Curious thing about that girl. I doubt if she thinks Montague escaped in a car—but she unquestionably did hear a car. I wonder . . . she may be trying to shield some one. . . . A nice gel, Markham."

"You think perhaps she knows or suspects something?"

"I doubt if she *knows* anything," Vance turned and sought a nearby chair. "But, my word! she certainly has suspicions. . . ."

At this moment Leland entered the drawing-room. He was smoking his pipe, and, though he tried to appear cheerful, his expression belied his manner.

"Miss Stamm told me you wished to see me," he said, taking his stand before the fireplace. "I hope you have said nothing to upset her."

Vance watched him intently for a moment.

"Miss Stamm," he said, "did not seem particularly upset by the fact that Montague has departed this *milieu*."

"Perhaps she has come to realize—" Leland began, and then stopped abruptly, busying himself with repacking his pipe. "Did you show her the note?"

"Yes, of course." Vance kept his eyes on the other.

"That note reminds me of something," Leland went on. "The automobile, you know. I have been thinking about that ever since I saw the note, trying to recall my impressions last night, after Montague had disappeared under the water. And I remember quite distinctly now that I did hear a motor-car on the East Road when I came to the surface of the pool, after having looked for the chap. Naturally, I thought nothing of it at the time—I was too intent on the task in hand; that is probably why it went out of my mind until that note recalled it."

"Miss Stamm also remembers hearing a car," Vance informed him. "By the by, how long would you say it was, after Montague's mysterious dive, that you heard the car on the East Road?"

Leland thought a moment.

"Perhaps ten minutes," he said finally, but he added: "However, it is rather difficult to gauge the passage of time in a situation of that kind."

"Quite so," Vance murmured. "But you are certain it was not merely two or three minutes?"

"It could not possibly have been as soon as that," Leland answered with a slight show of emphasis. "You see, we all waited a couple of minutes for the chap to show up after his dive, and I had already gone into the water and made a fairly thorough search for him before I was aware of the sound of the car."

"That being the case," submitted Vance, "it is far from conclusive to connect the sound of the car with the absent Ellen; for it would not have taken Montague more than a minute or so to reach his waiting Juliet at the gate. Certainly he wouldn't have tarried en route; nor would he have lingered for a loving tête-à-tête in the parked car."

"I see what you mean," Leland inclined his head and looked troubled. "Still, he might have decided there was no need for haste and gotten into some togs before driving off."

"Quite so," Vance admitted carelessly. "There are various possibilities, don't y' know. . . ."

The conversation was interrupted by Doctor Holliday and Stamm descending the stairs. They crossed the hall and came into the drawing-room.

"I'm sorry to trouble you again, gentlemen." The doctor, his face clouded, addressed us apologetically. "When I first came here this morning, I found Mrs. Stamm markedly improved, and I expected she would soon be her normal self again. But when I returned, a little later, she had relapsed. The events of last night seem to have upset her strangely, and she is now in a most unusual mood. She insisted on watching the draining of the pool, and the result threw her into a state of unprecedented excitement. There is, I believe, some fixed idea in her mind, which she will not confide to me or to her son."

Doctor Holliday shifted his position awkwardly and cleared his throat.

"I'm inclined to think," he went on, "in view of the fact that her interview with you last night seemed to relieve somewhat the tension of this pent-up hallucination, it might be helpful if you gentlemen would see her again. She may be willing to talk about this suppressed idea to you. It is worth trying, at any rate—if you don't mind. I suggested the interview to her, and she seemed more than willing—quite anxious for it, in fact."

"We would be very glad to see Mrs. Stamm, doctor," Vance returned. "Shall we go up alone?"

Doctor Holliday hesitated, and then nodded jerkily.

"I think that might be best. It may be that this supposed secret of hers is being withheld, for some irrational reason, only from members of the family and those she knows."

We went immediately to Mrs. Stamm's quarters, leaving Doctor Holliday, with Stamm and Leland, in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Schwarz was waiting for us at the door: evidently the doctor had told her we were coming. Mrs. Stamm was seated near the window, her hands folded in her lap. She appeared quite calm, and there was none of the sardonic tenseness about her that we had encountered the night before; instead, there was a look of almost humorous satisfaction on her wizened face.

"I thought you'd be back," she greeted us, with a low cackle of triumph. "I told you that the dragon had killed him. And I told you that his body would not be found in the pool. But you didn't believe me. You thought it was the ravings of an old woman's cracked mind. But now you know that I told you the truth, and so you've come back to learn more. That's why you're here— isn't it? Your foolish science has failed you."

She chuckled, and something in the sound of that hideous nasal laughter brought back to me the witches' cavern scene in "Macbeth," with the dragon's scale that was added to the cauldron.

"I saw you looking for the young man's footprints on the bank opposite and on the cliffs," she continued, in a gloating tone. "But the dragon rises to the surface of the water and flies away with his victims. I've seen him too often! . . . And I stood here, at the window, when the water was running out of the pool, and saw you waiting . . . waiting, and watching for the thing that was not there. And then I saw you walk out across the boards, as if you could not believe your eyes. Didn't I tell you last night that there would be no body in the pool? Yet you thought that you could find something." She unfolded her hands and placed them on the arms of the chair, her fingers flexing and unflexing like great talons.

"But we did find something, Mrs. Stamm," Vance said gently. "We found strange imprints in the mud."

She smiled at him, like an older person humoring a child.

"I could have told you that too," she said. "They were the imprints of the dragon's claws. Didn't you recognize them?" (The matter-of-fact simplicity of this astounding statement sent a chill up my spine.)

"But where," asked Vance, "did the dragon take the body of this man he killed?"

A sly look came into the woman's eyes.

"I knew you would ask me that question," she answered, with a satisfied, tight-lipped smile. "But I shall never tell you! That's the dragon's secret—the dragon's and mine!"

"Has the dragon a home other than the pool?"

"Oh, yes. But this is his real home. That's why it is called the Dragon Pool. Sometimes, though, he flies away to the Hudson and hides in its waters. At other times he lies beneath the surface of Spuyten Duyvil. And on cold nights he flies down the valley and seeks shelter in the Indian caves. But he doesn't put his victims in any of those places. He has a different hiding-place for them. It is older than history—older even than man. It is a cavern made for him when the world was young. . . ." Her voice trailed out, and a fanatical look came into her eyes—a look such as I imagine shone in the eyes of the old religious martyrs when they were led to the rack.

"That's all most interestin'," Vance remarked. "But I am afraid it is not very helpful to us in our present dilemma. You are sure you could not be persuaded to tell us where the dragon took young Montague's body?"

"Never!" The woman sat up rigidly in her chair and glared straight ahead.

Vance regarded her sympathetically for a moment; then terminated the distressing interview.

When we had again descended to the drawing-room he explained briefly to Doctor Holliday the result of his conversation, and the doctor and Stamm took leave of us and went up-stairs.

Vance smoked in moody silence for a while.

"Queer about her prognostications," he mused. "I wonder. . . ." He moved restively in his chair, and then, glancing up, questioned Leland regarding the superstition connected with the dragon's various abodes.

But Leland, though obviously frank in his answers, was unable to throw any light on Mrs. Stamm's fanciful remarks.

"The old tales of the dragon," he said, "contained references to his visits to neighboring waters, such as the Hudson and Spuyten Duyvil, and even Hell Gate. And I remember hearing, when I was a child, that he occasionally was seen in the Indian caves. But he was generally supposed to make his home in the pool here."

"There was one thing Mrs. Stamm said," Vance persisted, "that struck me as unusually fantastic. In speaking of the place where the dragon hides his victims she mentioned that it was older than both history and man, and that it was shaped for him when the world was young. Have you any idea what she could have meant by that?"

Leland frowned thoughtfully for a moment. Then his face lighted up, and he took his pipe from his mouth.

"The pot-holes, of course!" he exclaimed. "Her description fits them perfectly. The glacial potholes, you know—there are several of them at the foot of the rocks near the Clove. They were fashioned in the ice age—the result of glacial gyrations, I believe—but they are really nothing but small cylindrical cavities in the rocks. . . ."[\[12\]](#)

"Yes, yes, I know what pot-holes are," Vance interrupted, with a note of suppressed excitement. "But I didn't know there were any in Inwood. How far are they from here?"

"Ten minutes' walk, I should say, toward the Clove."

"Near the East Road?"

"Just to the west of it."

"A car would be quicker, then." Vance walked hurriedly into the hall. "Come, Markham, I think we'll take a bit of a ride. . . . Will you be our guide, Mr. Leland?" He was already headed for the front door. We followed, wondering at this new whim that had suddenly animated him.

"What wild-goose chase is this, Vance?" Markham protested, as we went through the vestibule and down the front steps.

"I don't know, old dear," Vance admitted readily. "But I have a cravin' just now to see those potholes."

He stepped into his car and we climbed in after him, as if led irresistibly by the tenseness of his decision. A moment later we were circling the house on the south and turning into the East Road. At the boundary of the estate Snitkin opened the gate for us; and we drove rapidly past the Bird Refuge and on toward the Clove.

We had gone perhaps five hundred yards, when Leland gave the signal to stop. Vance drew up at the side of the road and stepped down. We were about fifty feet from the base of a precipitous rocky ridge which was an extension of the cliff that formed the north boundary of the Dragon Pool.

"And now for a bit of geological reconnoitring." Though he spoke lightly, there was, beneath his words, a sombre intentness.

"There are several large glacial pot-holes here," Leland offered, leading the way toward the cliff. "There's an oak tree growing in one of them; and one of the others is not as clearly marked as the rest. But there's one excellent deep-cut example of glacial activity—there, just ahead."

We had now come to the foot of the cliff. Before us, as if chiselled in the steep rock, was a great irregular, oval scar, perhaps twenty feet long and spreading outward toward the bottom to a width of about four feet—it was as if some falling meteor had dropped perpendicularly and cut its pathway along the rock and down into the earth. Across the bottom of this upright tunnel was the projection of the frontal rock, about five feet high, which formed a sort of wall across the lower section of the pothole, making of it a miniature well.[\[13\]](#)

"That is the most interesting of the pot-holes," Leland explained. "You can see the three successive borings which indicate, no doubt, the advance and retreat of the ice during the long glacial period. The striæ and polish have been well preserved, too."

Vance threw away his cigarette and approached it.

Markham was standing behind him.

"What, in the name of Heaven, do you expect to find here, Vance?" he asked irritably. "Surely, you're not taking Mrs. Stamm's maunderings seriously."

Vance, by this time, had climbed on the low wall and was looking over into the depths of the pot-hole.

"It might interest you, nevertheless, to see the interior of this pot-hole, Markham," he said, without turning his eyes from the depths beyond.

There was an unwonted note of awe in his voice, and we quickly came to the edge of the narrow stone wall and looked over into the ancient rock cavity.

And there we saw the huddled, mangled body of a man in a bathing suit. On the left side of his head was a great ragged gash; and the blood that had run down over his shoulder was black and clotted. The jersey of his suit had been torn down over the chest, and three long gaping wounds on his body marked the line of the tear. His feet were drawn up under him in a hideous distorted posture; and

his arms lay limply across his torso, as if detached from his body. The first impression I got was that he had been dropped into the pot-hole from a great height.

"That is poor Montague," said Leland simply.

## 11. A SINISTER PROPHECY

(Sunday, August 12; 2.30 p.m.)

Despite the horror of the sight that confronted us in the pot-hole, the discovery of Montague's mangled body did not come altogether as a shock. Although Markham had shown evidences, throughout the investigation, of discounting Heath's strong contentions that there had been foul play, he was, nevertheless, prepared for the finding of the body. My impression was that he had battled against the idea as a result of his mental attitude toward the absence of any logical indications pointing to murder. Vance, I knew, had harbored grave suspicions of the situation from the very first; and I myself, in spite of my skepticism, realized, upon my first glimpse of Montague's body, that there had long been, in the back of my mind, definite doubts as to the seemingly fortuitous facts behind Montague's disappearance. The Sergeant, of course, had, from the beginning, been thoroughly convinced that there was a sinister background to the superficially commonplace disappearance of the man.

There was a grim look on Leland's face as he stared down into the pot-hole, but there was no astonishment in his expression; and he gave me the impression of having anticipated the result of our short ride. After identifying the body as that of Montague he slid down from the wall and stood looking thoughtfully at the cliffs at the left. His eyes were clouded, and his jaw was set rigidly as he reached in his pocket for his pipe.

"The dragon theory seems to be working out consistently," he commented, as if thinking aloud.

"Oh, quite," murmured Vance. "Too consistently, I should say. Fancy finding the johnny here. It's a bit rococo, don't y' know."

We had stepped away from the wall of the pothole and turned back toward the parked car.

Markham paused to relight his cigar.

"It's an astonishing situation," he muttered between puffs. "How, in the name of Heaven, could he have got into that pot-hole?"

"Anyhow," observed Heath, with a kind of vicious satisfaction, "we found what we've been looking for, and we've got something that we can work on. . . . If you don't mind, Mr. Vance, I wish you'd drive me up to the gate, so as I can get Snitkin on guard down here before we return to the house."

Vance nodded and climbed into his place behind the wheel. He was in a peculiarly abstracted frame of mind; and I knew there was something about the finding of Montague's body that bothered him. From his manner throughout the investigation I realized that he had been expecting some definite proof that a crime had been committed. But I knew now that the present state of affairs did not entirely square with his preconceived idea of the case.

We drove to the gate and brought Snitkin back to the pot-hole, where Heath gave him orders to remain on guard and to let no one approach that side of the cliff from the road. Then we drove back to the Stamm house. As we got out of the car Vance suggested that nothing be said for a while regarding the finding of Montague's body, as there were one or two things he wished to do before apprising the household of the gruesome discovery we had just made.

We entered the house by the front door, and Heath strode immediately to the telephone.

"I've got to get Doc Doremus—" He checked himself suddenly and turned toward Markham with a sheepish smile. "Do you mind calling the doc for me, Chief?" he asked. "I guess he's sort of sore at me. Anyhow, he'll believe *you* if you tell him we've got the body for him now."

"Phone him yourself, Sergeant," Markham returned in an exasperated tone. He was in a bad frame of mind; but the Sergeant's hesitancy and appealing look softened him, and he smiled back good-naturedly. "I'll attend to it," he said. And he went to the telephone to notify the Medical Examiner of the finding of Montague's body.

"He's coming right out," he informed us as he replaced the receiver.

Stamm had evidently heard us come in, for at this moment he came down the front stairs, accompanied by Doctor Holliday.

"I saw you driving down the East Road a while ago," he said, when he had reached us. "Have you learned anything new?"

Vance was watching the man closely.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "We've unearthed the *corpus delicti*. But we wish the fact kept from the other members of the household, for the time being."

"You mean—you found Montague's body?" the other stammered. (Even in the dim light of the hall I could see his face go pale.) "Where, in God's name, was it?"

"Down the road a bit," Vance returned in a casual voice, taking out a fresh *Régie* and busying himself with the lighting of it. "And not a pretty picture, either. The chap had an ugly wound on his head, and there were three long gashes down the front of his chest—"

"Three gashes?" Stamm turned vaguely, like a man with vertigo, and steadied himself against the newel post. "What kind of gashes? Tell me, man! Tell me what you mean!" he demanded in a thick voice.

"If I were superstitious," Vance replied, smoking placidly, "I'd say they might have been made by the talons of a dragon—same like those imprints we saw on the bottom of the pool." (He had dropped into a facetious mood—for what reason I could not understand.)

Stamm was speechless for several moments. He swayed back and forth, glaring at Vance as if at a spectre from which he could not tear his eyes. Then he drew himself up, and the blood rushed back into his face.

"What damned poppycock is this?" he burst out in a half-frenzied tone. "You're trying to upset me." When Vance did not answer, he shifted his frantic gaze to Leland and thrust out his jaw angrily. "You're to blame for this nonsense. What have you been up to? What's the truth about this affair?"

"It is just as Mr. Vance has told you, Rudolf," Leland replied calmly. "Of course, no dragon made the gashes on poor Montague's body—but the gashes are there."

Stamm seemed to quiet down under Leland's cool regard. He gave a mirthless laugh in an effort to throw off the horror that had taken possession of him at Vance's description of Montague's wounds.

"I think I'll have a drink," he said, and swung quickly down the hallway toward the library.

Vance had seemed indifferent to Stamm's reaction, and he now turned to Doctor Holliday.

"I wonder if we might see Mrs. Stamm again for a few moments?" he asked.

The doctor hesitated; then he nodded slowly.

"Yes, I think you might. Your visit to her after lunch seems to have had a salutary effect. But I might suggest that you do not remain with her too long."

We went immediately up-stairs, and Leland and the doctor followed Stamm into the library.

Mrs. Stamm was seated in the same chair in which she had received us earlier in the day, and though she appeared more composed than she had been on our previous visit, she none the less showed considerable surprise at seeing us. She looked up with slightly raised eyebrows, and there was an ineluctable dignity in her mien. A subtle and powerful change had come over her.

"We wish to ask you, Mrs. Stamm," Vance began, "if, by any chance, you heard an automobile on the East Road last night, a little after ten."

She shook her head vaguely.

"No, I heard nothing. I didn't even hear my son's guests go down to the pool. I was dozing in my chair after dinner."

Vance walked to the window and looked out. "That's unfortunate," he commented; "for the pool can be seen quite plainly from here—and the East Road, too."

The woman was silent, but I thought I detected the suggestion of a faint smile on her old face.

Vance turned back from the window and stood before her.

"Mrs. Stamm," he said, with earnest significance, "we believe that we have discovered the place where the dragon hides his victims."

"If you have, sir," she returned, with a calmness that amazed me, "then you surely must know a great deal more than when you were last here."

"That is true," Vance nodded. Then he asked: "Weren't the glacial pot-holes what you had in mind when you spoke of the dragon's hiding-place?"

She smiled with enigmatic shrewdness.

"But if, as you say, you have discovered the hiding-place, why do you ask me about it now?"

"Because," Vance said quietly, "the pot-holes were discovered only recently—and, I understand, quite by accident."[\[14\]](#)

"But I knew of them when I was a child!" the woman protested. "There was nothing in this whole countryside that I did not know. And I know things about it now that none of you will ever know." She looked up quickly, and a strange apprehensive light came into her eyes. "Have you found the young man's body?" she asked, with new animation.

Vance nodded.

"Yes, we have found it."

"And weren't the marks of the dragon on it?" There was a gleam of satisfaction in her eyes.

"There are marks on the body," said Vance. "And it lies in the large pot-hole at the foot of the cliff, near the Clove."

Her eyes flashed and her breath came faster, as if with suppressed excitement; and a hard, wild look spread over her face.

"Just as I told you, isn't it!" she exclaimed in a strained, high-pitched voice. "He was an enemy of our family—and the dragon killed him, and took him away and hid him!"

"But after all," Vance commented, "the dragon didn't do a very good job of hiding him. We found him, don't y' know."

"If you found him," the woman returned, "it was because the dragon intended you to find him."

Despite her words, a troubled look came into her eyes. Vance inclined his head and made a slight gesture with his hand, which was both an acceptance and a dismissal of her words.

"Might I ask, Mrs. Stamm,"—Vance spoke with casual interest—"why it was that the dragon himself was not found in the pool when it was drained?"

"He flew away this morning at dawn," the woman said. "I saw him when he rose into the air, silhouetted against the first faint light in the eastern sky. He always leaves the pool after he has killed an enemy of the Stamms—he knows the pool will be drained."

"Is your dragon in the pool now?"

She shook her head knowingly.

"He comes back only at dusk when there are deep shadows over the land."

"You think he will return tonight?"

She lifted her head and stared past us inscrutably, a tense, fanatical look on her face.

"He will come back tonight," she said slowly, in a hollow, sing-song tone. "His work is not yet completed." (She was like the rapt priestess of some ancient cult pronouncing a prophecy; and a shiver ran over me at her words.)

Vance, unimpressed, studied the strange creature before him for several seconds.

"When will he complete his work?" he asked.

"All in good time," she returned with a cold, cruel smirk; then added oracularly: "Perhaps tonight."

"Indeed! That's very interestin'." Vance did not take his eyes from her. "And, by the by, Mrs. Stamm," he went on, "in what way is the dragon concerned with the family vault across the pool yonder?"

"The dragon," the woman declared, "is the guardian of our dead as well as our living."

"Your son tells me that you have the key to the vault, and that no one else knows where it is."

She smiled cunningly.

"I have hidden it," she said, "so that no one can desecrate the bodies that lie entombed there."

"But," pursued Vance, "I understand that you wish to be placed in the vault when you die. How, if you have hidden the key, can that wish of yours be carried out?"

"Oh, I have arranged for that. When I die the key will be found—but only then."

Vance asked no further questions, but took his leave of this strange woman. I could not imagine why he had wanted to see her. Nothing seemed to have been gained by the interview: it struck me as both pathetic and futile, and I was relieved when we returned down-stairs and went into the drawing-room.

Markham evidently felt as I did, for the first question he put to Vance, when we were alone, was:

"What was the sense of bothering that poor deluded woman again? Her babbling about the dragon is certainly not going to help us."

"I'm not so sure, old dear." Vance sank into a chair, stretched his legs, and looked up to the ceiling. "I have a feelin' that she may hold the key to the mystery. She is a shrewd woman, despite her hallucinations about a dragon inhabiting the pool. She knows much more than she will tell. And, don't forget, her window overlooks the pool and the East Road. She wasn't in the least upset when I told her we had found Montague in one of the pot-holes. And I received a distinct impression from her that, although she has built up a romantic illusion about the dragon, which has unquestionably unbalanced her mind, she is carrying the illusion much further than her own convictions—as if she wishes to emphasize the superstition of the dragon. It may be she is endeavorin', with some ulterior motive, to throw us off the track and, through a peculiar protective mechanism, to cover up a wholly rational fact upon which she thinks we may have stumbled."

Markham nodded thoughtfully.

"I see what you mean. I got that same impression from her myself during her fantastic recital of the dragon's habits. But the fact remains that she seems to harbor a definite belief in the dragon."

"Oh, quite. And she firmly believes that the dragon lives in the pool and protects the Stamms from all enemies. But another element has entered into her projection of the dragon myth—something quite human and intimate. I wonder. . . ." Vance's voice trailed off and, settling deeper in his chair, he smoked meditatively for several minutes.

Markham moved uneasily.

"Why," he asked, frowning, "did you bring up the subject of the key to the vault?"

"I haven't the faintest notion," Vance admitted frankly, but there was a far-away, pensive look on his face. "Maybe it was because of the proximity of the vault to the low ground, on the other side of the pool, to which the imprints led." He lifted himself up and regarded the ash on his cigarette for a moment. "That mausoleum fascinates me. It's situated at a most strategic point. It's like the apex of a salient, so to speak."

"What salient?" Markham was annoyed. "From all the evidence, no one emerged from the pool along that low stretch of ground; and the body was found far away—chucked into a pot-hole."

Vance sighed.

"I can't combat your logic, Markham. It's unassailable. The vault doesn't fit in at all. . . . Only," he added wistfully, "I do wish it had been built on some other part of the estate. It bothers me no end. It's situated, d' ye see, almost on a direct line between the house here and the gate down the East Road. And along that line is the plot of low ground which is the only means of egress from the pool."

"You're talking nonsense," Markham said hotly. "You'll be babbling next of relativity and the bending of light rays."

"My dear Markham—my very dear Markham!" Vance threw away his cigarette and stood up. "I emerged from the interstellar spaces long ago. I'm toddling about in a realm of mythology, where the laws of physics are abrogated and where unearthly monsters hold sway. I've become quite childlike, don't y' know."

Markham gave Vance a quizzical perturbed look. Whenever Vance took this frivolous attitude in the midst of a serious discussion, it meant only one thing: that his mind was operating along a very definite line of ratiocination—that he had, in fact, found some ray of light in the darkness of the situation and was avoiding the subject until he had penetrated its beams to their source. Markham realized this, and dropped the matter forthwith.

"Do you," he asked, "wish to pursue the investigation now, or wait until the Medical Examiner has made his examination of Montague's body?"

"There are various things I should like to do now," Vance returned, "I want to ask Leland a question or two. I crave verbal intercourse with young Tatum. And I'm positively longin' to inspect Stamm's collection of tropical fish—oh, principally the fish. Silly—eh, what?"

Markham made a wry face and beat a nervous tattoo on the arm of his chair.

"Which shall it be first?" he asked with ungracious resignation.

Vance rose and stretched his legs.

"Leland. The man is full of information and pertinent suggestions."

Heath rose with alacrity and went to fetch him.

Leland looked troubled when he came into the drawing-room.

"Greeff and Tatum almost came to blows a moment ago," he told us. "They accused each other of having something to do with Montague's disappearance. And Tatum intimated strongly that Greeff had not been sincere in his search for Montague in the pool last night. I do not know what he was driving at, but Greeff became livid with anger, and only the combined efforts of Doctor Holliday and myself prevented him from attacking Tatum."

"That's most revealin'," murmured Vance. "By the by, have Stamm and Greeff reconciled their differences?"

Leland shook his head slowly.

"I am afraid not. There has been bad blood between them all day. Stamm meant all the things he said to Greeff last night—he was just in the frame of mind to let down the barriers of his emotions and blurt the truth—or rather, what he believed to be the truth. I do not pretend to understand the relationship. Sometimes I feel that Greeff has a hold of some kind on Stamm, and that Stamm has reason to fear him. However, that is mere speculation."

Vance walked to the window and looked out into the brilliant sunlight.

"Do you happen to know," he asked, without turning, "what Mrs. Stamm's sentiments toward Greeff are?"

Leland started slightly and stared speculatively at Vance's back.

"Mrs. Stamm does not like Greeff," he returned. "I heard her warn Stamm against him less than a month ago."



"You think she regards Greeff as an enemy of the Stamms?"

"Undoubtedly—though the reason for her prejudice is something I do not understand. She knows a great deal, however, that the other members of the household little suspect."

Vance slowly turned from the window and walked back to the fireplace.

"Speaking of Greeff," he said, "how long was he actually in the pool during the search for Montague?"

Leland seemed taken aback by the question.

"Really, I could not say. I dived in first and Greeff and Tatum followed suit. . . . It might have been ten minutes—perhaps longer."

"Did Greeff keep within sight of every one during the entire time?"

A startled look came into Leland's face.

"No, he did not," he returned with great seriousness. "He dived once or twice, as I recall, and then swam across to the shallow water below the cliffs. I remember his calling to me from the darkness there, and telling me he had found nothing. Tatum remembered the episode a while ago—it was doubtless the basis for his accusing Greeff of having a hand in Montague's disappearance." The man paused and then slowly shook his head, as if throwing off an unpleasant conclusion that had forced itself upon him. "But I think Tatum is wrong. Greeff is not a good swimmer, and I imagine he felt safer with his feet on the ground. It was natural for him to go to the shallow water."

"How long after Greeff called to you did he return to this side of the pool?"

Leland hesitated.

"I really do not remember. I was frightfully upset, and the actual chronology of events during that time was confused. I recall only that when I eventually gave up the search and climbed back on the retaining wall, Greeff followed shortly afterwards. Tatum, by the way, was the first out of the water. He had been drinking a lot, and was not in the best condition. He seemed pretty well exhausted."

"But Tatum did not swim across the pool?"

"Oh, no. He and I kept in touch the whole time. I will say this for him—little as I like him: he showed considerable courage and stamina during our search for Montague; and he kept his head."

"I'm looking forward to talking with Tatum. Y' know, I haven't seen him yet. Your description of him rather prejudiced me against him, and I was hopin' to avoid him entirely. But now he has added new zest to the affair. . . . Battling with Greeff, what? Fancy that. Greeff is certainly no *persona grata* in this domicile. No one loves him. Sad . . . sad. . . ."

Vance sat down again and lighted another cigarette. Leland watched him curiously but said nothing. Vance looked up after a while and asked abruptly:

"What do you know of the key to the vault?"

I expected Leland to show some astonishment at this question, but his stoical expression did not change: he seemed to regard Vance's query as both commonplace and natural.

"I know nothing of it," he said, "except what Stamm told me. It was lost years ago, but Mrs. Stamm claims that she has hidden it. I have not seen it since I was quite a young man."

"Ah! You have seen it, then. And you would know it if you saw it again?"

"Yes, the key is quite unmistakable," Leland returned. "The bow was of curious scroll-work, somewhat Japanese in design. The stem was very long—perhaps six inches—and the bit was shaped like a large 'S.' In the old days the key was always kept hanging on a hook over Joshua Stamm's desk in the den. . . . Mrs. Stamm may or may not know where it is now. But does it really matter?"

"I suppose not," Vance murmured. "And I'm most grateful to you for your help. The Medical Examiner, as you know, is on his way here, and I'd jolly well like to have a few words with Tatum in the interim. Would you mind asking him to come here?"

"I am glad to do anything I can to help." Leland bowed and left the room.

## 12. INTERROGATIONS

(Sunday, August 12; 3 p.m.)

Kirwin Tatum was a man in his early thirties, slender, wiry and loose-jointed. His face was thin and skeleton-like, and, as he stood at the drawing-room door that Sunday afternoon, staring at us, there was a bloodless, haggard look in his expression, which may have been the result of fright or of the ravages of his recent dissipation. But there was a sullen craftiness in his eyes which was almost vulpine. His blond hair, heavily pomaded, was brushed straight back from a peaked forehead with sloping parietals. From one corner of his feral thin-lipped mouth a cigarette drooped. He was dressed in sport clothes of gay and elaborate design; and a heavy gold chain bracelet hung loosely on his left wrist. He stood in the doorway for several minutes, gazing at us shiftily, his long spatulate fingers moving nervously at his sides. That he was uneasy and afraid was apparent.

Vance regarded him with critical coldness, as he might have inspected some specimen in a laboratory. Then he waved his hand toward a chair beside the table.

"Come in and sit down, Tatum." His tone was at once condescending and peremptory.

The man moved forward with a shambling gait, and threw himself into the chair with affected nonchalance.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked, with a show of spirit, glancing about the room.

"I understand you play the piano," remarked Vance.

Tatum ceased fidgeting and looked up with smouldering anger.

"Say, what is this—a game of some kind?"

Vance nodded gravely.

"Yes—and a dashed serious game. You were a bit unsettled, we have been told, by the disappearance of your rival, Mr. Montague."

"Unsettled?" Tatum nervously relighted his cigarette which had gone out. Vance had thrown him off his guard, and his deliberate and prolonged pause patently indicated that he was endeavoring to readjust his equilibrium. "Well, why not? But I haven't been shedding crocodile tears over Monty, if that's what you mean. He was a rotter, and it's just as well, for everybody, that he is out of the way."

"Do you think he will ever return?" asked Vance casually.

Tatum made an unpleasant noise in his throat, which was probably intended to be a scornful laugh.

"No, he won't show up again—because he can't. You don't think he planned the disappearance himself, do you? He didn't have enough sense—or courage. It meant going out of the limelight; and Monty couldn't live or breathe unless he was in the limelight. . . . *Somebody got him!*"

"Who do you think it was?"

"How should I know?"

"Do you think it was Greeff?"

Tatum's eyes half closed, and a cold, hard look spread over his drawn face.

"It might have been Greeff," the man said between his teeth. "He had ample reason."

"And didn't you yourself have 'ample reason'?" Vance returned quietly.

"Plenty." A ferocious smile came to Tatum's lips, then faded immediately away. "But I'm in the clear. You can't pin anything on me." He leaned forward and fixed Vance with his eyes. "I'd hardly got into my bathing suit when the fellow jumped from the spring-board, and I even went into the pool myself and tried to find him when he failed to come up. I was with the rest of the party all the time. You can ask them."

"We shall, no doubt," Vance murmured. "But if you are so immaculately free from suspicion, how can you suggest that Greeff may have had a hand in Montague's mysterious fading from the scene? He seems to have followed very much the same course you did."

"Oh, yes?" Tatum retorted, with cynical scorn. "The hell he did! . . ."

"You refer, I take it," said Vance mildly, "to the fact that Greeff swam to the opposite side of the pool into the shallow water."

"Oh, you know that, do you?" Tatum looked up shrewdly. "But do you know what he was doing during the fifteen minutes when no one could see him?"

Vance shook his head.

"I haven't the groggiest notion. . . . Have you?"

"He might have been doing almost anything," Tatum returned, with a sly nod.

"Such as draggin' Montague's body out of the pool?"

"And why not?"

"But the only place where he could have emerged from the water was devoid of any footprints. That fact was checked both last night and this morning."

Tatum frowned. Then he said, with a certain aggressiveness:

"What of it? Greeff's as shrewd as they come. He may have found some way to avoid making footprints."

"It sounds a bit vague, don't y' know. But, even if your theory is correct, what could he have done with the body in so short a time?"

The ashes of Tatum's cigarette broke and fell on his coat: he leaned forward and shook them off.

"Oh, you'll probably find the body somewhere on the other side of the pool," he returned, readjusting himself in the chair.

Vance's gaze rested calculatingly on the man for several minutes.

"Is Greeff the only possibility you have to suggest?" he asked at length.

"No," Tatum answered, with a one-sided smile, "there are plenty of possibilities. But the point is to hook them up with the circumstances. If Leland hadn't been alongside of me the whole time I was in the pool, I wouldn't give him a clean bill of health for a split second. And Stamm had plenty of cause to bump Monty off; but he's out of the running because of all the liquor he'd poured into

himself. And the women here, too—the McAdam dame and Ruby Steele—they'd have welcomed an opportunity of getting rid of the handsome Monty. But I don't see how they could have managed it."

"Really, y' know, Tatum," Vance remarked, "you're simply bulging with suspects. How do you happen to have overlooked old Mrs. Stamm?"

Tatum sucked in his breath, and his face took on the expression of a death's-head. His long fingers closed over the arms of his chair.

"She's a devil—that woman!" he muttered huskily. "They say she's crazy. But she sees too much—she knows too much." He stared straight ahead blankly. "*She's capable of anything!*" There was something approaching abject fear in his manner. "I've seen her only twice; but she haunts this whole house like a ghost. You can't get away from her."

Vance had been watching Tatum closely, without appearing to do so.

"Your nerves are a bit on edge, I fear," he commented. Then he took a deep inhalation on his cigarette and, rising, walked to the mantelpiece, where he stood almost directly facing the other. "Incidentally," he said casually, dropping his ash into the fireplace, "Mrs. Stamm's theory is that a dragon in the pool killed Montague and hid his body."

Tatum gave a tremulous, cynical laugh.

"Oh, sure, I've heard that wild story before. Maybe a dodo trampled on him—or a unicorn gored him."

"It might interest you to know, however, that we have found Montague's body—"

Tatum started forward.

"Where?" he interrupted.

"In one of the sub-glacial pot-holes down the East Road. . . . And there were three long claw-marks down his chest, such as this mythical dragon might have made."

Tatum sprang to his feet. His cigarette fell from his lips, and he shook his finger hysterically at Vance.

"Don't try to frighten *me*—don't try to frighten *me*." His voice was high-pitched and shaky. "I know what you're trying to do—you're trying to break down my nerves and get me to admit something. But I won't talk—do you understand?—I won't talk. . . ."

"Come, come, Tatum," Vance spoke mildly but sternly. "Sit down and calm yourself. I'm telling you the exact truth. And I'm only endeavorin' to find some solution to Montague's murder. It merely occurred to me that you might be able to help us."

Tatum, soothed and reassured by Vance's manner, sank back into his chair and lit another cigarette.

"Did you," Vance asked next, "notice anything peculiar about Montague last night before he went to the pool? Did he, for instance, appear to you like a man who might have been drugged?"

"He was drugged with liquor, if that's what you mean," Tatum replied rationally. "Although—I'll say this for Monty—he carried his liquor pretty well. And he hadn't had any more than the rest of us—and much less than Stamm, of course."

"Did you ever hear of a woman named Ellen Bruett?"

Tatum puckered his brow.

"Bruett? . . . The name sounds familiar. . . . Oh, I know where I've heard it. Stamm told me, when he asked me to come here, that there was an Ellen Bruett coming to the party. I imagine I was to be paired with her. Thank God she didn't come, though." He looked up shrewdly. "What's she got to do with it?"

"She's an acquaintance of Montague's—so Stamm told us," Vance explained carelessly. Then he asked quickly: "When you were in the pool, last night, did you hear an automobile on the East Road?"

Tatum shook his head.

"Maybe I did, but I certainly don't remember it. I was too busy diving round for Monty."

Vance dismissed the subject and put another query to Tatum.

"After Montague's disappearance, did you feel immediately that there had been foul play of some kind?"

"Yes!" Tatum compressed his lips and nodded ominously. "In fact, I had a feeling all day yesterday that something was going to happen. I came pretty near leaving the party in the afternoon—I didn't like the set-up."

"Can you explain what gave you that impression of impending disaster?"

Tatum thought a moment, and his eyes shifted back and forth.

"No, I can't say," he muttered at length. "A little of everything, perhaps. But especially that crazy woman up-stairs. . . ."

"Ah!"

"She'd give any one the heebie-jeebies. Stamm makes a habit, you know, of taking his guests to see her for a few moments when they arrive—to pay their respects, or something of the kind. And I remember when I got here, Friday afternoon, Teeny McAdam and Greeff and Monty were already upstairs with her. She seemed pleasant enough—smiled at all of us and bid us welcome—but there was a queer look in her eyes as she studied each one of us individually—something calculating and ill-omened, if you know what I'm trying to get at. I had the feeling that she was making up her mind which one of us she disliked the most. Her eyes rested a long time on Monty—and I was glad she didn't look at me the same way. When she dismissed us she said, 'Have a good time'—but she was like a cobra grinning at her victims. It took three shots of whisky to bring me back to normal."

"Did the others feel the same way about it?"

"They didn't say much, but I know they didn't like it. And of course the whole party here has been one continual round of back-biting and underhand animosity."

Vance rose and waved his hand toward the door.

"You may go now, Tatum. But I warn you, we want nothing said yet about the finding of Montague's body. And you're to stay indoors with the rest, until further orders from the District Attorney."

Tatum started to say something, checked himself, and then went out.

When the man had gone Vance moved back and forth between the fireplace and the door several times, smoking, his head down. Slowly he looked up at Markham.

"A shrewd, unscrupulous lad, that. . . . Not a nice person—not at all a nice person. And as ruthless as a rattlesnake. Moreover, he knows—or, at least, he seriously suspects—something connected with Montague's death. You recall that, even before he knew we had

found the body, he was quite sure it would be discovered somewhere on the other side of the pool. That wasn't altogether guesswork on his part—his tone was far too casual and assured. And he was pretty certain regarding the time Greeff spent in the shallow water. Of course, he ridiculed the dragon idea—and did it cleverly. . . . His comments on Mrs. Stamm were rather interestin', too. He thinks she knows and sees too much—but, after all, why should he care? Unless, of course, he has something to hide. . . . And he told us he didn't hear any car last night, though others heard it. . . ."

"Yes, yes." Markham made a vague gesture with his hand, as if to dismiss Vance's speculations. "Everything here seems contradictory. But what I'd like to know is: was it possible for Greeff to have manipulated the whole thing from his position at the shallow side of the pool?"

"The answer to that question," returned Vance, "seems to lie in the solution of the problem of how Montague got out of the pool and into the pot-hole. . . . Anyway, I think it would be a bully idea, while we're waiting for Doremus, to have another brief parley with Greeff.—Will you please fetch him, Sergeant?"

Greeff entered the drawing-room a few minutes later, dressed in a conventional light-weight business suit, and wearing a small gardenia in his buttonhole. Despite his rugged healthy complexion, he showed unmistakable signs of strain, and I imagined that he had done considerable drinking since we had interviewed him the night before. Much of his aggressiveness was gone, and his fingers shook slightly as he moved his long cigarette holder to and from his lips.

Vance greeted him perfunctorily and asked him to sit down. When Greeff had chosen a chair, Vance said:

"Both Mr. Leland and Mr. Tatum have told us that when you were in the pool, helping them search for Montague, you swam immediately across to the shallow water below the cliffs."

"Not immediately." There was the suggestion of indignant protestation in Greeff's voice. "I made several efforts to find the chap. But, as I've already told you, I am not a good swimmer, and it occurred to me that perhaps his body had drifted across the pool, since he had dived in that direction; and I thought I might be of more help by looking about over there than by interfering with Leland and Tatum with my clumsy splashing about." He shot a quick look at Vance. "Was there any reason why I shouldn't have done it?"

"No-o," Vance drawled. "We were just interested in checkin' the whereabouts of the various members of the party during that particular period."

Greeff squinted, and the color deepened on his cheeks.

"Then what's the point of the question?" he snapped.

"Merely an attempt to clarify one or two dubious items," Vance returned lightly, and then went on, before the other could speak again: "By the by, when you were in the shallow water at the other side of the pool, did you, by any chance, hear a motor-car along the East Road?"

Greeff stared at Vance for several moments in startled silence. The color left his face, and he rose to his feet with jerky ponderance.

"Yes, by Gad! I did hear one." He stood with hunched shoulders, emphasizing his words with his long cigarette holder which he held in his right hand, like a conductor's baton. "And I thought at the time it was damned queer. But I forgot all about it last night, and didn't think of it again until you mentioned it just now."

"It was about ten minutes after Montague had dived in, wasn't it?"

"Just about."

"Both Mr. Leland and Miss Stamm heard it," Vance remarked. "But they were a trifle vague about it."

"I heard it, all right," Greeff muttered. "And I wondered whose car it was."

"I'd jolly well like to know that myself." Vance contemplated the tip of his cigarette. "Could you tell which way the car was going?"

"Toward Spuyten Duyvil," Greeff answered, without hesitation. "And it started somewhere to the east of the pool. When I got over into the shallow water everything was quiet—too damned quiet to suit me. I didn't like it. I called to Leland, and then made some further efforts to see if Montague's body had drifted over to the shoal at that side of the pool. But it was no go. And as I stood there, with my head and shoulders above the surface of the water, on the point of swimming back, I distinctly heard some one starting the motor of a car—"

"As if the car had been parked in the road?" interrupted Vance.

"Exactly. . . . And then I heard the gears being shifted; and the car went on down the East Road—and I swam back across the pool, wondering who was leaving the estate."

"According to a billet-doux we found in one of Montague's coats, a lady was waiting for him in a car, down near the east gate, at ten o'clock last night."

"So?" Greeff gave an unpleasant laugh. "So that's the way the wind blows, is it?"

"No, no, not altogether. There was some miscalculation somewhere, I opine. . . . The fact is, d' ye see," Vance added, with slow emphasis, "we found Montague's body just beyond the Clove—in one of the pot-holes."

Greeff's mouth sagged open, and his eyes contracted into small, shining discs.

"You found him, eh?" he iterated. "How did he die?"

"We don't know yet. The Medical Examiner is on his way up here now. But he wasn't a pleasant sight—a bad gash on the head and great claw-like scratches down his chest—"

"Wait a minute—wait a minute!" There was a tense huskiness in Greeff's demand. "Were there three scratches close together?"

Vance nodded, scarcely looking at the man.

"Exactly three—and they were a uniform distance apart."

Greeff staggered backward toward his chair and fell into it heavily.

"Oh, my God—oh, my God!" he muttered. After a moment he moved his thick fingers over his chin and looked up abruptly, fixing his eyes on Vance in furtive inquiry. "Have you told Stamm?"

"Oh, yes," Vance replied abstractedly. "We gave him the glad tidings as soon as we returned to the house, less than an hour ago." Vance appeared to reflect; then he put another question to Greeff. "Did you ever accompany Stamm on any of his treasure hunts or fishing expeditions in the tropics?"

Obviously Greeff was profoundly puzzled by this change of subject.

"No—no," he spluttered. "Never had anything to do with such silly business—except that I helped Stamm finance and equip a couple of his expeditions. That is," he amended, "I got some of my clients to put up the money. But Stamm paid it all back after the expeditions had fizzled. . . ."

Vance arrested the other's explanations with a gesture.

"You're not interested in tropical fish yourself, I take it?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say I'm not interested in them," Greeff returned in a matter-of-fact voice; but his eyes were still narrowed, like those of a man deeply perplexed. "They're nice to look at—grand colors and all that. . . ."

"Any Dragonfish in Stamm's collection?"

Greeff sat up again, his face paling.

"My God! You don't mean—"

"Purely an academic question," Vance interrupted, with a wave of the hand.

Greeff made a throaty noise.

"Yes, by Gad!" he declared. "There are some Dragonfish here. But they're not alive. Stamm has two of them preserved some way. Anyway, they're only about twelve inches long—though they're vicious-looking devils. He has some long name for them—"

"*Chauliodus sloanei*?"

"Something like that. . . . And he's also got some Sea-horses and a coral-red Sea-dragon. . . . But see here, Mr. Vance, what have these fish got to do with the case?"

Vance sighed before answering.

"I'm sure I don't know. But I'm dashed interested in Stamm's collection of tropical fish."

At this moment Stamm himself and Doctor Holliday crossed the hall to the drawing-room.

"I'm going, gentlemen," Doctor Holliday announced quietly. "If you want me for anything, Mr. Stamm knows where to reach me." Without further ado he went toward the front door, and we heard him go out and drive away in his little coupé.

Stamm stood for several moments, glowering at Greeff.

"Adding more fuel to the fire?" he asked, with an almost vicious sarcasm.

Greeff shrugged hopelessly and extended his hands in a futile gesture, as if unable to cope with the other's unreasonable attitude.

It was Vance who answered Stamm.

"Mr. Greeff and I have just been discussing your fish."

Stamm looked skeptically from one to the other of them, then turned on his heel and went from the room. Vance permitted Greeff to go also.

He had no sooner passed the portières than there came the sound of a car on the front drive; and a few moments later Detective Burke, who had been stationed at the front door, ushered in the Medical Examiner.

### 13. THREE WOMEN

(Sunday, August 12; 3.30 p.m.)

Doctor Doremus looked us over satirically, then fixed his gaze on Sergeant Heath.

"Well, well," he said, with a commiserating shake of the head. "So the corpse has returned. Suppose we have a look at it before it eludes you again."

"It's down the East Road a bit." Vance rose from his chair and went toward the door. "We'd better drive."

We went out of the house and, picking up Detective Burke, got into Vance's car. Doremus trailed us in his own car. We swung round to the south of the house and turned down the East Road. When we were opposite the pot-holes, where Snitkin was waiting, Vance drew up and we got out.

Vance led the way to the cliff and pointed to the rock wall of the pot-hole in which Montague's body lay.

"The chap's in there," he said to Doremus. "He hasn't been touched."

Doremus made a grimace of annoyed boredom.

"A ladder would have helped," he grumbled, as he climbed up to the low parapet and seated himself on its rounded top. After leaning over and inspecting the huddled body cursorily, he turned back to us with a wry face and mopped his brow.

"He certainly looks dead. What killed him?"

"That's what we're hoping you can tell us," answered Heath.

Doremus slid down from the wall. "All right. Get him out of there and put him down on the ground."

It was not an easy matter to move Montague's body from the pot-hole, as *rigor mortis* had set in, and it required several minutes for Heath and Snitkin and Burke to accomplish the task. Doremus knelt down and, after straightening out the dead man's distorted limbs, began to make an examination of the wound in his head and the gashes down the breast. After a while he looked up and, pushing his hat back, shook his head in obvious uncertainty.

"This is a queer one," he announced. "The man's been struck on the head with a blunt instrument of some kind, which has ripped his scalp open and given him a linear fracture of the skull. It could easily have been the cause of death. But, on the other hand, he's been strangled—look at the ecchymosis on either side of the thyroid cartilage. Only, I'd swear those discolorations are not the marks of a human hand, or even of a rope or cord. And look at those bulging eyes, and the thick black lips and tongue."

"Could he have been drowned?" asked Heath.

"Drowned?" Doremus cocked a pitying eye at the Sergeant. "I've just finished telling you he was bashed over the head and also strangled. If he couldn't get air in his lungs, how could he get water in 'em?"

"What the Sergeant means, doctor," put in Markham, "is whether it's possible that the man was drowned before he was mutilated."

"No." Doremus was emphatic. "In that case he wouldn't show the same type of wound. There wouldn't have been the hemorrhage in the surrounding tissues; and the contusions on the throat would be superficial and circumscribed and not of such a deep color."

"What about those marks on his chest?" asked Vance.

The doctor pursed his lips and looked puzzled. Before replying he studied the three gashes again, and then rose to his feet.

"They're nasty wounds," he said. "But the lacerations are not very serious. They laid open the pectoralis major and minor muscles without penetrating the chest walls. And they were made before he died: you can tell that by the condition of the blood on them."

"He certainly had rough handling." Heath spoke like a man caught in a wave of wonder.

"And that's not all," Doremus went on. "He has some broken bones. The left leg is bent on itself below the knee, showing a fracture of both the tibia and the fibula. The right humerus is broken, too. And from the depressed look of the right side of his chest, I'd say a couple of the lower ribs are smashed."

"That might be the result of his having been thrown into the pot-hole," Vance suggested.

"Possibly," agreed Doremus. "But there are also dull open abrasions—made after death—on the posterior surfaces of both heels, as if he'd been dragged over a rough surface."

Vance took a long, deliberate inhalation on his cigarette.

"That's most interestin'," he murmured, his eyes fixed meditatively ahead of him.

Markham shot him a quick glance.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked, almost angrily.

"Nothing cryptic," Vance returned mildly. "But the doctor's comment opens up a new possibility, don't y' know."

Heath was staring raptly at Montague's body, and I detected something of both awe and fright in his attitude.

"What do you think made those scratches on his chest, doc?" he asked.

"How should I know?" snapped Doremus. "Haven't I already told you I'm a doctor and not a detective? They might have been made by any kind of a sharp instrument."

Vance turned with a smile.

"It's very distressin', doctor, but I can explain the Sergeant's uneasiness. There's a theory hereabouts that this johnny was killed by a dragon that lives in the pool."

"A dragon!" Doremus was bewildered for a moment; then he looked at Heath, and laughed derisively. "And I suppose the Sergeant is figuring out just how the naughty dragon scratched him with his claws—is that it?" He shook his head and chuckled. "Well, well! That's one way of solving a murder:—*cherchez le dragon*. Good Gad, what's the world coming to!"

Heath was piqued.

"If you'd been up against what I have the last coupla days, doc," he growled, "you'd believe anything, too."

Doremus lifted his eyebrows ironically.

"Have you thought of leprechawns?" he asked. "Maybe they did the fellow in. Or the satyrs may have butted him to death. Or the gnomes may have got him. Or perhaps the fairies tickled him to death with pussy-willows." He snorted. "A sweet-looking medical report it'd be if I put down death due to dragon scratches. . . ."

"And yet, doctor," said Vance with unwonted seriousness, "a sort of dragon did kill the chap, don't y' know."

Doremus raised his hands and let them fall in a hopeless gesture.

"Have it your own way. But, as a poor benighted medico, my guess is this guy was first hit over the head and ripped open down the front; then he was strangled, dragged to this rock hole, and dumped into it. If the autopsy shows anything different, I'll let you know."

He took out a pencil and a pad of blanks, and wrote for a moment. When he had finished he tore off the top sheet and handed it to Heath.

"Here's your order for removal, Sergeant. But there's going to be no *post mortem* till tomorrow. It's too blooming hot. You can play Saint George and go dragon hunting till then."

"That's precisely what we're going to do," Vance smiled.

"Just as a matter of record—" began Heath; but the doctor interrupted him with an impatient gesture.

"I know, I know!—How long has he been dead?" . . . When I die and go to hell, along with the rest of the medical fraternity, that's the query that'll be eternally drummed into my ears. . . . All right, Sergeant: he's been dead over twelve hours and less than twenty-four. Satisfactory?"

"We have reason to believe, doctor," said Markham, "that the man was killed around ten o'clock last night."

Doremus looked at his watch.

"That would make eighteen hours. Just about right, I'd say." He turned and walked toward his car. "And now I'm on my way—back to a mint julep and an easy chair. Gad, what a day! I'll be having a sunstroke and a brain-storm, like the rest of you, if I don't hurry back to town." He got into his car. "But I'm going home by way of Spuyten Duyvil and Payson Avenue. Taking no chances on going back past the pool." He leered at Heath. "I'm afraid of running into that dragon!" And, with a cheerful wave of the hand, he shot down the East Road.

Heath ordered Snitkin and Burke to remain with Montague's body until it was called for, and the rest of us returned to the Stamm residence, where Heath telephoned to the Department of Public Welfare to send a wagon to the pot-holes.

"And where are we now?" asked Markham hopelessly, when we were again seated in the drawing-room. "Every discovery seems to throw this case deeper into the realm of impenetrable mystery. There's apparently no line of investigation that leads anywhere except into a blank wall."

"I wouldn't say that," Vance replied cheerfully. "Really, y' know, I thought things were shaping up rather well. Doremus gave us many revealin' items. The technique of the murder was unique,—the very brutality and insanity of it holds amazin' possibilities. Y' know, Markham, I've an idea we weren't expected to find the body. Otherwise, why should it have been so carefully hidden? The murderer wanted us to think Montague merely chose to disappear from his present haunts."

Heath nodded ponderously.

"I get what you mean, Mr. Vance. That note in Montague's clothes, for instance. My idea is that this dame who wrote the note had an accomplice in the car at the gate, who did the dirty work and threw the bird in that pot-hole. . . ."

"That won't do, Sergeant," Vance interrupted in a kindly but firm voice. "Were that the case, we'd have found Montague's footprints leading out of the pool."

"Well, why didn't we find them?" demanded Markham with exasperation. "Montague's body was found down the East Road. He must have got out of the pool some way."

"Yes, yes; he got out some way." Vance frowned at his cigarette: something was troubling him deeply. "That's the devilish part of it. . . . Somehow I think, Markham, that Montague didn't leave any footprints *because he wasn't able to*. He may not have wanted to escape from the pool—he may have been carried out. . . ."

"My God!" Markham rose nervously and took a deep breath. "You're not reverting to that hideous flying-dragon theory, are you?"

"My dear fellow!" Vance spoke in soothing reprimand. "At least not the kind of dragon you imagine. I was merely intimatin' that the hapless Montague was killed in the pool and carried to the pothole."

"But that theory," protested Markham, "only involves us in deeper complications."

"I'm aware of that fact," sighed Vance. "But, after all, the chappie *did* travel, in some manner, from the pool to the pot-hole. And it's obvious he didn't go voluntarily."

"What about the car that was heard on the East Road?" The practical Sergeant projected himself again into the discussion.

"Quite." Vance nodded. "That car puzzles me no end. It may have been Montague's means of transportation. But, dash it all! how did he get from the pool to the car? And why was he mutilated in such shockin' fashion?"

He smoked a while in silence, and then turned to Markham.

"Y' know, there are several persons here who have not yet heard of the finding of Montague's body—Ruby Steele, and Mrs. McAdam, and Bernice Stamm. I think the time has come to inform them. Their reactions may be helpful. . . ."

The three women were sent for, and when they had joined us Vance told them briefly of the circumstances surrounding the discovery and examination of the dead man. He spoke in a matter-of-fact manner, but I noticed he was watching his listeners closely. (At the time I could not understand his reason for the procedure, but it was not long before I realized why he had chosen this means of apprising the various members of the household of our gruesome find in the pot-hole.)

The three women listened intently; and there was a short silence following the conclusion of his information. Then Ruby Steele said, in a low, sententious voice:

"It really bears out what I told you last night. The fact that there were no footprints leading from the pool means nothing. A man like this half-breed, Leland—with all his hidden powers—could accomplish seeming miracles. And he was the last person to return to the house here!"

I expected Bernice Stamm to resent these remarks, but she merely smiled musingly and said with troubled dignity:

"I'm not surprised that poor Monty has been found; but I doubt if miracles are needed to explain his death. . . ." Then the pupils of her eyes dilated, and her breast rose and fell with accelerated respiration. "But," she went on, "I don't understand the marks on Monty's chest."

"Do you understand the other features of the case, Miss Stamm?" Vance asked quietly.

"No—no!" Her voice became almost hysterical. "I don't understand any of it." Tears came into her eyes, and she was unable to continue.

"Don't let it worry you," Vance consoled her. "You're frightfully wrought up, don't y' know."

"May I go now?" she asked pleadingly.

"Of course." Vance rose and escorted her to the door.

When he returned to his chair Teeny McAdam spoke. She had been smoking with tense abstractedness for some time; I doubt if she had even heard any of Bernice Stamm's remarks. Suddenly she wheeled toward Vance, her features contracted and set.

"Listen!" she began, with peremptory desperation. "I'm sick of this whole miserable affair. Monty's dead and you've found his body—and I've got something to tell you. Alex Greeff hated Monty. And he said to Monty Friday night—I heard him—'You're not going to marry Bernice if I can help it.' Monty laughed at him and retorted: 'What are you going to do about it?' Mr. Greeff said: 'Plenty—if *the dragon doesn't get you first*.' Then Monty called him a foul name and went up to bed. . . ."

"What do you think Mr. Greeff was referring to when he mentioned the dragon?"

"I don't know. But later that night it occurred to me he might have been referring to Mr. Leland."

"Was it because of these remarks you screamed when Montague failed to come up after his dive?"

"Yes! I'd been worrying all day yesterday. And when Mr. Greeff jumped into the pool and made a pretense of looking for Monty I kept my eyes on him. But he immediately swam out of sight toward the cliffs on the other side—"

"And you kept your eyes strained in that direction?"

Mrs. McAdam nodded jerkily.

"I didn't know what he was up to—and I didn't trust him. . . . Later, when he came back he whispered to me: 'Montague's gone—and good riddance.' Even then I couldn't see how he'd accomplished the thing. But now that you've found Monty's body in the pot-hole, I had to tell you what I know."

Vance nodded sympathetically.

"But why were you upset when I told you of the splash in the pool late last night?"

"I don't know—exactly." The woman spoke hurriedly and excitedly. "But I thought it might be part of the plot to kill Monty—or maybe Monty's body being thrown from the cliff—or some one in the water *doing dreadful things to him*. . . . Oh, I didn't know what it might be, but I was afraid . . . afraid—" Her voice died away, and she caught her breath.

Vance rose and regarded her rather coldly.

"Thank you for your information," he said, bowing. "I'm sorry, and all that, to have upset you. You and Miss Steele may return to the library now. There are a few other matters to be attended to. And if we need your assistance later I'm sure you'll both be good enough to give it."

When they had gone a brief discussion followed as to the best means of proceeding with the case. The greatest difficulty lay in the fact that there seemed to be nothing tangible to take hold of. Montague's murdered body was a reality, of course, and there were various suspects—that is, persons with a motive for killing the man. But there were no connecting links, no indicated lines of investigation, and no clues pointing in any specific direction. The actual *modus operandi* of the murder was in itself an incalculable mystery. And over the whole situation hung the sinister mythology of a dragon.

Routine police work was, however, in order; and the Sergeant, with his trained official mind, insisted on carrying this work through without further delay. Markham agreed with him; and Vance, who, for the solution of criminal problems, depended largely upon intuitive processes and psychological reasoning, finally acquiesced. The case had deeply impressed him: it held elements that profoundly appealed to his nature, and he was loath to spare even an hour for the Sergeant's routine activities. Moreover, he had, I knew, several definite, even if only vaguely formulated, ideas concerning the case.

"A very simple key," he said, "is all that's needed to unlock the door of this fantastic mystery. But without that key we're helpless. . . . My word, what an amazin' situation! There are any number of people who admit that they are delighted with Montague's translation into the Beyond, and each one accuses one of the others of having manipulated his transit. But, on the other hand, the circumstances surrounding Montague's death seem to preclude the possibility of his having been killed at all. It was he who suggested the swim, and he dived into the pool in sight of every one. . . . And yet, Markham, I'm thoroughly convinced the whole affair was carefully planned—deliberately enciphered with commonplace numerals to make it appear fortuitous."

Markham was weary and on edge.

"Granted all that, how would you propose going about deciphering the riddle other than by the usual measures which the Sergeant intends to take?"

"I have no suggestions at the moment." Vance was gazing meditatively into space. "I was hopin', however, to inspect Stamm's collection of tropical fish today."

Markham snorted with exasperation.

"The fish will keep till tomorrow. In the meantime, the Sergeant can clear up the routine matters."



## 14. AN UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENT

(Sunday, August 12; 5.30 p.m.)

It was nearly half-past five when Markham and Vance and I left the old Stamm mansion and drove back to Vance's apartment. All the guests and members of the household had been given instructions to remain until the following day and not to leave the grounds of the estate. Stamm had generously cooperated with us in this respect. Greeff had raised objections, and even threatened us with his lawyer; but finally he had agreed to remain another twenty-four hours, in view of the complications that had arisen with the finding of Montague's body. The other guests had accepted Markham's decision without protest.

All the main entrances to the grounds were to be guarded; and the servants in the house were to be questioned for any possible suggestions, although nothing of importance was expected from their testimony.

Heath had decided to remain at the Stamm estate during this investigation and direct the activities. Other members of the Homicide Bureau were to take a hand in the case. Montague's associations were to be looked into; an attempt was to be made to find Ellen Bruett; and a canvas of Inwood was planned, in the hope of unearthing some information about the automobile which had been heard on the East Road. In short, the usual police procedure was to be intensively followed, with Sergeant Heath in charge.

"I see no other way to handle the case," Markham said despondently, as we settled ourselves in the sprawling wicker chairs on Vance's roof-garden.

Vance was troubled and distraught.

"You may be right. But the factors of this case are far from ordin'ry. The answer to the whole problem lies somewhere in the Stamm residence. That's a strange place, Markham. It's full of infinite possibilities—with its distorted traditions, its old superstitions, its stagnant air of a dead and buried age, its insanity and decadence, and its folklore and demonology. Such a place produces strange quirks of the mind: even casual visitors are caught in its corroding atmosphere. Such an atmosphere generates and begets black and incredible crimes. You have seen, in the last two days, how every one with whom we talked was poisoned by these subtle and sinister influences."

For a moment Markham studied Vance intently.

"Have you any particular person in mind?" he asked.

Vance rose and rang for Currie.

"I wasn't thinking of individuals so much as of the perverted psychological combinations of the problem. And no explanation can be reached without a recognition and consideration of this fantastic dragon—"

"Vance! For the love of Heaven!"

"Oh, I'm quite serious. We'll go far afield if we do not recognize that fact." He looked up. "There are various types of dragons, don't y' know."

Currie appeared, and Vance ordered Moraine Coolers.<sup>[15]</sup>

"The dragon," Vance continued, "has always had a powerful hold on the imagination of man. We find the dragon, in some form, in most religions; and all folk-lore is peppered with dragons. The dragon goes deeper than a mere myth, Markham: it has become a part of man's inheritance from the earliest times; it has enhanced his fears; it has guided and shaped his symbolism; it has put strange notions in his head by coloring and distorting his imagination. Without the dragon the history of man would be a very different record from what it is today. None of us can entirely escape the dragon myth: it is too much an integral part of our deeper and more primitive natures. That's why I say that we cannot ignore the dragon in dealing with a criminal case which is, at bottom, dragonish. . . ."

Vance moved a little in his chair, and his eyes roamed dreamily over the hazy skyline of Manhattan.

"Where the conception of the dragon originated no one knows; but it is probably the most tenacious of all ancient superstitions. The Christian devil is nothing but a modified dragon of ancient folk-lore. There have, of course, been many speculations as to the origin of this supernatural monster, and Moncure Conway, in his 'Demonology and Devil-Lore,' says it is the result of a confused memory of prehistoric saurians. But other researchers—Sir James George Scott, for instance—take issue with Conway and attribute the conception of the dragon to the primitive imagination in connection with snakes. But whatever the origin, it is a persistent and varied superstition. The dragon has taken many forms in man's mind. It is a far cry, for example, from the Indian Vrtra and the Greek Hydra to the mild Burmese dragon and the *drakos* of the European Gipsies. And neither of these conceptions is comparable with the enormous tortoise which King Thai-to saw swimming toward his royal bark."

Vance sipped his drink, which Currie had just served.

"Every land and every people, Markham, has had its dragons. Even in ancient Egypt the dragon became more or less identified with Seth and fought against Horus in the form of water-monsters. And in the Papyrus of Ani—or Book of the Dead—we read of the fire-breathing dragon Apop, to whom the wicked were thrown. But the dragon was not always a monster. A dragon-horse brought Fu Hsi the Eight Diagrams nearly 3000 years B.C.; and whenever the Yellow Emperor saw dragons he knew that prosperity was at hand. Chinese mythology, in fact, is filled with dragons, both benevolent and malevolent. The Fifth Moon Feast in memory of Ch'ü Yüan's suicide is called the Dragon Festival; and Fei Ch'ang-fang's magic rod turned into a dragon and aided him in conquering the ogres of darkness. In the Buddhist myths we find many references to the dragon as associated with fish; and there is at least one instance where the Dragon King himself was carried off to sea in the body of a fish. . . ."

Markham looked up sharply.

"Are you insinuating—" he began; but Vance interrupted him.

"No, oh no," he said. "I am not referring to Stamm's collection of tropicals. It's the dragon myth itself that fascinates me. . . . In all the Indo-Chinese countries we find the snake—not the fish—as the basis of the dragon. Probably this conception was brought from China and Japan, where the water-snake was formerly worshipped as a god. In Indo-Chinese mythology there are any number of

dragon-myths, after the fashion of the Chutia Nagpur tradition. There is the Naga Min, who is at times represented with coils long enough to embrace an entire pagoda; and Galon, the Burmese dragon who appeared like the Indian Garuda; and Bilu, a dragon ogre who fed on human flesh and never cast a shadow. And you perhaps recall the myth of Hkun Ai and his Naga princess who was the daughter of the King of the Dragons, and how he spied upon her and her court one night, only to find that the entire countryside and all the lakes around were filled with these gigantic writhing creatures. . . . In the Han Dynasty the Spirit of the East was Thang-long, the Blue Dragon; and in the legends of the Karens we find the spirit of Satan symbolized as a dragon. The mythology of the Tongkingese abounds in dragons; and their secret hiding-places exist to this day. Buddhist and Taoist tales are filled with dragon lore. Even the great Temple of Linh-lanh was supposed to have been built on a dragon's head. There was a dragon guardian of the city of Hanoi; and in the Ly Dynasty King Thaiton named the capital Thanh-long, meaning the Dragon City. The protective idea of the dragon, d' ye see, is also well established in folk-lore. At Pokhar in Rajputana there is a sacred lake which, tradition tells us, was once inhabited by a dragon who guarded the Burmese Temple nearby. . . . And the dragon permeates the legends of Siam—he was probably brought from India along with Brahmanism and serpent worship. Siamese dragons lived in caves and under the water. . . ."

Vance gazed up meditatively at the sky.

"You will note how the water motif runs through these ancient superstitions," he continued. "Perhaps one of the most significant tales—this is from the Japanese—is that of Kobo Daishi, the founder of Shingon Buddhism in the ninth century, who drew the ideogram for dragon on the waters of a stream in the Kozuke district. When he had finished the ideogram it became an actual dragon which rose over the water; and it is supposed to have hovered there ever since—a superstition no doubt based on the dense vapors which constantly rise from this mountain stream. And similar to this tale is the one in which Le-loi's sword turned into a jade-colored dragon and disappeared in the waters of the sacred lake which, to this day, is called the Lake of the Great Sword. Then, there's the legend of the province of Izumo, in Japan, which tells of a water-dragon who demanded the sacrifice of a virgin each year, and of how Susa-no-wo slew him when he came up out of the river. The hero of course married the young lady he had thus saved. . . . Japanese mythology, like the Chinese, is filled with Dragon Kings: we find many tales of them in the Shinto chronicles. One of the most significant legends connected with the Dragon Kings was that of a Chinese emperor who sent a shipload of treasures to Japan. During a storm a priceless crystal, which perpetually held the image of Buddha, was lost. It was supposed to have been stolen by the Dragon King who lived in the deep waters off the coast of Sanuki. The crystal was recovered from the Dragon Palace by a poor fisher-woman who, as a reward, had her only child brought up by the noble Fujiwara family. The water motif again, Markham. . . . And do you recall how Toda saved the dragon folk in Lake Biwa by slaying the giant centipede with poisoned arrows?"

"No, I don't recall it," growled Markham. "And anyway, what's the point of all this?"

"The dragon myth, old dear—a most engagin' subject," Vance returned. Then he went on blandly: "Iranian mythology is filled with dragons, and they too are related, to a great extent, to water. In fact, the water of the earth was supposed to be the result of a god slaying a dragon who was hidden in the clouds. Indra, with his thunderbolt, slew the dragon of drought. Trita, the son of Aptya, also slew a tri-headed dragon named Visvarupa. And there's the story of Keresaspa who slew the dragon Srvara and for whom Zarathustra intervened. Saam, the vassal of Minucihir, met many a dragon, but his great battle was with the one that haunted the river Kashaf. Then there's the Iranian tale which relates of Ahura Mazda and the monster Azhi with the serpents springing from his shoulders. And in a Persian manuscript of the *Shahnamah*, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, there is a vivid picture of Gushtasp battling with a dragon."

"I do hope," sighed Markham, "you're not going to ask me to go to the Metropolitan Museum to inspect the manuscript."

Vance ignored Markham's sarcasm and continued his treatise.

"In Armenian mythology we have the Median king, Azdahak—a name which means 'dragon'—who fought Tigranes and who, after his defeat, was compelled to bring his family and settle in Armenia. Anush, who was the Mother of Dragons, was, we are told, Azdahak's first queen. And here we have, perhaps, the origin of the dragon children about whom the old songs were written. . . . Vahagn, the most popular of all the Armenian deities, was known far and wide as the 'dragon-reaper,' and in later syncretistic times he was identified with Heracles. Then there was the dragon of the Macedonians, closely related to the Indian Vrtra and the Armenian Vishap. This dragon was a gigantic and terrible monster. But in all Armenian mythology the dragon was, as with other primitive peoples, associated with meteorology and was supposed to represent the whirlwind, the water spout, thunder and lightning, and heavy rain; and often the meteorological and the eschatological dragon were confused. . . . The water idea connected with the dragon is found also in the records of the Mayas. The great ceremonial monolith at Quirigua is known as the Great Turtle or the Dragon, and played an important part in the Mayan religion."

Vance sipped his drink and glanced up at Markham.

"Am I borin' you horribly?" he asked.

Markham compressed his lips and said nothing; and Vance, with a sigh, settled himself more comfortably in his chair.

"In Semitic mythology," he went on, "the dragon played an important and sinister part. In the Babylonian Epic of Creation we read of the dragons which issued from the belly of Tiamat, released by Bêl and the Imhullu wind. These eleven dragons became gods of the lower regions and were later identified by the astrologers with various constellations. The Assyrian fish-man was one of the dragons of Chaos and represented the constellation Aquarius; and Ninurta, in the creation myth, was commanded by Anu and Enlil to conquer the *ushumgal*, or Great Sea Serpent. . . ."

Vance smoked a while in silence.

"The Greeks, and also the Romans, had their dragons. The Chimera, with her devastating breath of fire, whom Bellerophon slew, was part lion, part goat, and part dragon. The Golden Apples of the Hesperides were guarded by a hydra-headed deathless dragon; and, of course, there was the dragon that Cadmus destroyed and whose teeth he strewed over the earth. . . . And throughout Celtic mythology we find dragons called *péist* or *béist*—probably from the Latin *bestia*—living in lochs in various reptilian forms. The saints destroyed many of these monsters; and if a dragon shrieked on May-Eve the land was barren until Lludd buried him alive. And there were the dragons which encircled the oaks in the grove of which Lucan wrote; and the two dragons of Merlin, who slept in hollow stones and, when dug up, did battle with each other. Also there's the dragon who issued from the earth at the sound of Cliach's harp playing. . . ."

"But we have no harps," protested Markham wearily.

Vance shook his head sadly.

"My dear Markham! I fear you have no soul for classical lore. But we are dealing with a dragon of some sort, and the dragon superstition should not be entirely ignored. The conception of the dragon 5000 years ago, for instance, was that he could change his aspect whenever he chose. The five-clawed dragon of the Manchus was benevolent and symbolic of power, but the three-clawed dragon was inimical to man—the symbol of death and destruction."

"Come, come!" Markham looked up alertly. "Are you trying to get me stirred up by that imprint with the three claws?"

"Not at all. I'm simply borin' you with a few historical details which may, or may not, prove illuminatin' in our investigation. There are, however, many variations in the pattern of the dragon: some are depicted with bearded heads, some with scaly bodies, some with horns; but all with claws not unlike the marks we have found on the basin of the pool."

Vance shifted his position a little and went on.

"And there were many winged dragons in mythology, Markham. Though they lived in lonely pools and lakes and beneath the waters, they nevertheless could fly, and they often bore their victims incredible distances. For instance, there were the winged dragons who bore the chariot of Triptolemus through the skies. And Medea, as you remember, after slaying her children, fled to Athens in a chariot hitched to winged dragons which had been sent to her by Helios."

Markham rose and paced back and forth for a moment.

"What has all this dragon lore to do with Montague's death?" he asked at length.

"Really, y' know, I haven't the vaguest notion," Vance sighed. "But the myths of the Algonkian Indians are quite in line with the classical dragon myths; and it was these Indians who named the Dragon Pool in Inwood and are responsible for the superstition that attaches to it. The important character of the Algonkian myths is the Great Hare, whose name was Manabozho, and he did valiant battle with giants and cannibals and witches. But his outstanding vict'ry was when he slew the Great Fish or Snake that preyed on man. This monster was a water-dragon—*Amangemokdom*. He ruled the Powers of the Deep, and one of his favorite pastimes was to destroy and devour fishermen. . . . You see how interestin' the parallel is? And, Markham, we're dealing not only with cold-blooded practical facts, but with a sinister superstition; and we cannot afford to ignore either one."

Markham was restless and disturbed. He walked to the parapet of the roof and looked out over the city for several moments. Then he returned and stood facing Vance.

"Well," he said with a hopeless gesture, "granted what you say is true, what procedure do you suggest?"

"Really now," answered Vance sombrely, "I have no definite plans. But I do intend to go to the Stamm estate early tomorrow morning."

Markham nodded grimly.

"If you think it necessary, go by all means," he said. "But you'll have to go alone, for I have a busy day at the office tomorrow."

But Vance did not go alone. Strange and uncanny things happened on the Stamm estate that night. Shortly after nine o'clock the next morning Markham telephoned to Vance. Heath, it seemed, had called the District Attorney's office and reported that Greeff had mysteriously disappeared.

## 15. NOISES IN THE NIGHT

(Monday, August 13; 9.30 a.m.)

We arrived at the Stamm estate before ten o'clock. Immediately after calling Vance Markham had left his office and stopped in 38th Street to pick him up. The murder of Montague had taken a powerful hold on Markham's imagination, and the news of Greeff's disappearance had made an irresistible demand on his activities. As he explained to us, driving out in the car, he saw in this new development the first tangible element in the whole affair; and he had now put all his other work aside to take personal charge of the case.

"I've had my suspicions about Greeff from the first," he said. "There is something sinister in the man; and he has impressed me all along as being involved in Montague's death. Now that he has escaped we can go forward with the investigation with something like a definite aim."

"I'm not so sure," Vance demurred. He was frowning and smoking thoughtfully. "The case is not going to be so simple even now. Why should Greeff attract suspicion to himself by taking leave of the party? We had no evidence against him; and he must have known that by bolting he would put in operation all the police machinery in the city. Very silly of him, Markham—distressingly silly. And Greeff does not strike me as a silly man."

"Fear—" Markham began.

"The man is fearless," Vance interrupted. "It would have been more logical for any other member of the party to have run away. . . . It's most confusin'."

"The fact remains he's gone," Markham retorted testily. "However, we'll know more when we get there."

"Oh, quite." And Vance lapsed into silence.

When we reached the Stamm house Heath greeted us sourly at the entrance.

"A sweet mess," he complained. "The only guy I had my eye on has made his get-away."

"Sad . . . sad," sighed Vance. "But console yourself, Sergeant, and unfold your story."

Heath led the way into the drawing-room and planted himself aggressively before the mantelpiece.

"First," he said, addressing Markham, "I'd better report on what's been done since yesterday afternoon.—We checked up as best we could on this Bruett woman, but haven't got a trace of her. Furthermore, there hasn't been a boat to South America for four days; so I guess her story to Stamm about sailing was phony. We've checked on all the likely hotels, without any result. And here's a funny one:—she wasn't on the passenger lists of the boats that've arrived from Europe during the past two weeks. Think that over. There's something wrong about that dame, and she'll have a lot of explaining to do when my men locate her."

Vance smiled tolerantly.

"I don't wish to dampen your official ardor, Sergeant; but I fear you're not going to find the lady. She's far too sketchy."

"What do you mean?" snapped Markham. "The automobile on the East Road at the time stated in the note—"

"It's wholly possible, don't y' know," returned Vance mildly, "that the lady in question wasn't at the wheel. . . . Really, Sergeant, I wouldn't wear my nerves out about her."

"I'm looking for her, and I'm going to keep on looking for her," Heath asserted with a show of belligerence. Then he turned back to Markham. "We didn't find out anything about Montague except what we already know. Always mixed up with some woman—but what good-looking actor isn't? He always seemed to have money—lived high and spent a lot—but he didn't have many jobs, and no one seems to know where his money came from."

"Any news about the car on the East Road Saturday night?" asked Markham.

"Nothing." Heath was disgusted. "We couldn't find any one in Inwood who'd seen it or heard it. And the officer on duty on Payson Avenue says no car came out of Inwood after nine o'clock that night. He was patrolling from eight o'clock on, and could have seen any car that came down the hill. . . . Anyway," Heath added, "it may have coasted down the hill with the lights out."

"Or," suggested Vance vaguely, "it may never have left Inwood."

Markham shot him a quick look.

"What's back of that remark?" he demanded.

Vance made a slight gesture and shrugged.

"Oh, I say! Must there be hidden meanings in all my observations? . . . I was merely offering a counter supposition regarding the elusive vehicle."

Markham grunted.

"Anything else, Sergeant?"

"Well, we put the servants here on the carpet—the cook and the maid; and I went over that pasty-faced butler again." Heath made a wry face. "But all I got was the same line of gossip that we've been hearing for a coupla days. They don't know anything, and we can check 'em off the list."

"The butler," put in Vance, in a quiet tone, "is not without possibilities, Sergeant. He may not know anything, but no one with eyes like his can be devoid of suspicions."

Heath looked at Vance with a canny squint.

"You said something, Mr. Vance," he remarked. "But he's too slippery for me. And he's not giving anything away if he can help it."

"I didn't want to infer, Sergeant," Vance amended, "that you are to pin your faith on him for a solution to the case. I was merely implyin' that the fish-loving Trainor is full of ideas. . . . But, I say, what about the amazin' disappearance of Alex Greeff? His truancy fascinates me."

Heath drew himself up and took a deep breath.

"He sneaked away some time during the night. And he was damn slick about it. I stayed here till eleven o'clock, after everybody had gone to their rooms. Then I went home, leaving Snitkin in charge. There was a man at the east gate and one at the front gate all night. Hennessey covered the south border of the estate, and another man from the Bureau was down below the dam watching Bolton Road. I got back here at eight-thirty this morning; and Greeff was gone. I've been in touch with his apartment and his office; but he hasn't showed up at either place. Skipped out clean. . . ."

"And who," asked Vance, "apprised you of his disappearance?"

"The butler. He met me at the door—"

"Ah! The butler—eh, what?" Vance thought a moment. "Suppose we let him chant his own rune."

"Suits me."

Heath went from the room, and returned a few minutes later with Trainor. The man's face was ashen. There were deep hollows under his eyes, as if he had not slept for nights; and the flabbiness of his face was like a plastic mask.

"Was it you, Trainor," asked Vance, "who first discovered Mr. Greeff's absence?"

"Yes, sir—in a manner of speaking, sir." (He did not meet Vance's direct gaze.) "When Mr. Greeff did not appear for breakfast, Mr. Stamm sent me up-stairs to call him. . . ."

"What time was that?"

"About half-past eight, sir."

"Was every one else down at the time?"

"Every one, sir. They were all in the dining-room. It was unusually early—if you understand me—but I surmise that no one slept very well last night. Mr. Leland and Miss Stamm were downstairs before seven; and the others followed shortly afterward. Every one but Mr. Greeff, you understand, sir."

"And they all retired to their rooms early last night?"

"Yes, sir. Quite early. I put out the down-stairs lights about eleven."

"Who was the last to retire?"

"Mr. Stamm, sir. He had been drinking heavily again—if you will forgive me for saying so. But this is no time for reticence—is it, sir?"

"No, Trainor." Vance was studying the other closely. "Any little detail may be of vital help to us; and I'm sure Mr. Stamm would not construe your information as disloyalty."

The man seemed relieved.

"Thank you, sir."

"And now, Trainor," continued Vance, "tell us about this morning. At half-past eight Mr. Stamm sent you to call Mr. Greeff. And then?"

"I went to his room, sir—it is just down the hall from Mr. Stamm's—and I knocked. I got no answer, and I knocked again. After I had knocked several times, I got a little worried,—strange things have been happening around here, sir—"

"Yes, yes. Very strange things, Trainor. But continue. What did you do then?"

"I—I tried the door, sir." The man's eyes rolled, but he did not look at any one of us. "It was unlocked; and I opened it and looked into the room. . . . I noticed the bed had not been slept in; and I felt a most peculiar sensation—"

"Spare us your symptoms, Trainor." Vance was becoming impatient. "Tell us what you did."

"I entered the room, sir, and made sure that Mr. Greeff was not there. Then I returned to the dining-room and indicated to Mr. Stamm that I wished to speak to him alone. He came into the hall, and I informed him of Mr. Greeff's absence."

"What did Mr. Stamm say?"

"He didn't say anything, sir. But he had a very queer look on his face. He stood at the foot of the stairs frowning. Then, after a few moments, he pushed me to one side and ran up-stairs. I went back into the dining-room and continued serving the breakfast."

Heath took up the story at this point.

"I was in the front hall when Stamm came down," he said. "He was looking queer, all right. But when he saw me he came right up to me and told me about Greeff's being gone. I did a little looking around, and questioned the men on post duty; but they hadn't seen any one leave the estate. Then I phoned to Mr. Markham."

Vance, for some reason, appeared deeply troubled.

"Amazin'," he murmured, busying himself with a cigarette. When it was lighted he turned back to the butler. "What time did Mr. Greeff go up-stairs last night?" he asked.

"I couldn't say exactly, sir." The man was growing noticeably more nervous. "But Mr. Greeff was one of the last to retire."

"And what time did you yourself go to your quarters?"

The butler moved forward, thrust out his head, and swallowed with difficulty.

"Shortly after eleven, sir," he replied in a strained voice. "I closed up the house as soon as this gentleman"—indicating Heath—"had gone. Then I went to my room—"

"Where is your room?"

"At the rear of the house, sir, on this floor—next to the kitchen." There was a peculiar intonation in his voice that puzzled me.

Vance sank deeper into his chair and crossed his knees.

"I say, Trainor," he drawled, "what did you hear last night, after you had gone to your room?"

The butler gave a start and sucked in his breath, and his fingers began to twitch. It was several moments before he answered.

"I heard"—he spoke with a curious mechanical precision—"some one slide the bolt on the side door."

"The door that leads out to the steps to the pool?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear anything else? Any footsteps?"

Trainor shook his head.

"No, sir—nothing else." The man's eyes moved vaguely about the room. "Nothing, sir, until an hour or so later—"

"Ah! And what did you hear then?"

"I heard the bolt being thrown—"

"What else?" Vance had risen and was confronting the man sternly.

Trainor retreated a step or two, and the twitching of his fingers increased.

"I heard some one go up-stairs—very softly."

"To which room?"

"I—I couldn't say, sir."

Vance gazed at the man indifferently for several seconds; then he turned and walked back to his chair.

"Who did you think it was?" he asked lazily.

"It occurred to me that perhaps Mr. Stamm had gone out for a little walk."

Vance smiled indulgently.

"Really, y' know, Trainor, if you thought it was Mr. Stamm you wouldn't be so frightfully upset."

"But who else could it have been, sir?" the man protested weakly.

Vance was silent for a while.

"That will be all, Trainor," he said at length. "Tell Mr. Leland we're here and would like to see him."

"Yes, sir."

The butler went out, obviously relieved to have the interrogation over; and shortly afterward Leland entered the drawing-room. He was smoking his pipe calmly, and greeted us with more than his usual reserve.

"You know, of course, Mr. Leland," Vance began, "that Greeff isn't around this morning. Can you suggest any possible explanation for this?"

Leland appeared worried and sank into a chair by the table.

"No," he said, "I can see no reason why he should have run off. He is not the kind to run away from anything."

"Exactly my impression," nodded Vance. "Have you spoken to any of the other persons in the house about it?"

Leland nodded slowly.

"Yes, we all discussed it at breakfast and afterwards. Every one seems to be mystified."

"Did you hear anything during the night that might have indicated when he left the house?"

Leland hesitated before answering.

"Yes," he replied finally. "But I also heard something that would indicate that it was not Greeff who went out."

"You mean the rebolting of the side door an hour or so after it had been unbolted?"

Leland looked up in mild surprise.

"Yes," he said. "Just that. Shortly after midnight some one went out the side door, but later some one re-entered the house. I had not been able to go to sleep—and my hearing is particularly keen. . . ."

"Trainor, too, heard some one go out and come in last night," Vance told him. "But he couldn't tell to what room the midnight prowler returned. Perhaps you are able to enlighten us on that point?"

Again Leland hesitated, and shook his head slowly.

"No, I am afraid not," he said. "My room is on the third floor, and several people were moving about below me. I will say this, however: whoever it was that came back to the house was very careful not to make any unnecessary noise."

Vance had scarcely looked at Leland during the questioning, and he now rose and walked to the front window and back.

"Is the room you occupy," he asked, "on the side of the house facing the pool?"

Leland took his pipe leisurely from his mouth and moved uneasily in his chair.

"Yes, it is just across the side passageway from Mrs. Stamm's quarters."

"Did you hear any one outside the house after the side door had been opened?"

"Yes, I did!" Leland sat upright in his chair and carefully repacked his pipe. "I heard voices, as if two people were talking in low tones. But it was only the merest murmur, and I could not distinguish what they were saying or who it was."

"Could you tell whether it was a man or woman speaking?"

"No. It seemed to me that they were deliberately pitching their voices to a whisper, to avoid being overheard."

"How long did this whispered conversation last?"

"Only a few seconds. Then it faded away."

"As if the two holding converse were walking away from the house?"

"Exactly."

Vance swung about quickly and faced Leland.

"What else did you happen to hear last night, Mr. Leland?"

Once again Leland hesitated, and busied himself with relighting his pipe.

"I am not sure," he answered reluctantly. "But there was a scraping sound at the far side of the pool, toward the East Road."

"Most interestin'." Vance did not relax his steady gaze. "Will you describe, as nearly as possible, just what you heard."

Leland looked down at the floor, and smoked intently for a moment.

"First," he said, "I heard a faint grating noise, as of one piece of metal being rubbed against another—at least, such was my impression. Then all was silence for several minutes. A little later the same sound was repeated and, still later, I could distinguish a low, continuous noise, as of something heavy being dragged over a sandy surface. This noise became fainter and fainter, until finally it died away altogether. . . . I heard nothing more until perhaps half an hour later, when some one re-entered the house through the side door and replaced the bolt."

"Did these noises strike you as peculiar in any way?"

"No, I cannot say that they did. We had all been told we had access to the grounds, and I took it for granted, when I heard the side

door open, that some one was going out for a walk in the air. The other noises—those on the other side of the pool—were very indistinct and might have been explained in various ways. I knew, of course, that a man had been stationed at the gate on the East Road, and I suppose I assumed—without giving the matter any particular thought—that it was he whom I heard across the pool. It was not until this morning, when I learned of the disappearance of Greeff, that I attached any importance to what I had heard during the night."

"And now, knowing that Mr. Greeff is gone, can you offer any explanation for the noises you heard?"

"No, I cannot." Leland thought a moment. "They were not familiar sounds; and while the metallic noise might have been the creaking of the hinges of the gate, there would have been no point in Greeff's opening the gate to make his escape, for he could very easily have climbed over, or walked round it. Moreover, the sound seemed to be much nearer to the house than the gate is. In any event, there was some one guarding the gate, and Greeff would not have chosen that avenue of escape—there are too many other ways of leaving the estate, if he really wished to do so."

Vance nodded as if satisfied, and again strolled toward the front window.

"Did you, by any chance," he asked casually, "hear an automobile on the East Road last night?"

"No." Leland shook his head with emphasis. "I can assure you no car traversed the East Road in either direction up to the time I fell asleep—which, I should say, was about two o'clock in the morning."

Vance turned leisurely at the window.

"Did Mr. Greeff," he asked, "by any action or any remark, give you the impression that he contemplated leaving the estate?"

"Quite the contrary," Leland returned. "He did grouse a bit about being detained here. He said it might mean the loss of some business at his office this morning; but he seemed resigned to seeing the affair through."

"Did he have any words with any one last night?"

"No, he was in unusually good humor. He drank a bit more than is his custom, and spent most of the evening, after dinner, discussing financial matters with Stamm."

"Any evidences of animosity between them?"

"None whatever. Stamm seemed to have forgotten completely his outburst of the night before."

Vance walked back and stood before Leland.

"What of the other members of the party?" he asked. "How did they disport themselves after dinner?"

"Most of them went out on the terrace. Miss Stamm and I walked down to the pool, but we returned immediately—a pall seemed to hang over it. When we came back to the house, Mrs. McAdam and Miss Steele and young Tatum were sitting on the steps of the terrace, drinking some sort of punch that Trainor had made for them."

"Where were Greeff and Stamm?"

"They were still in the library. I doubt if they had gone outdoors at all."

Vance smoked a moment in thoughtful silence; then he resumed his chair and lay back languidly.

"Thanks awfully," he said. "That will be all for the present."

Leland rose.

"If I can be of any help—" he began, and then contemplated his pipe. Without finishing the sentence he went from the room.

"What do you make of it, Vance?" Markham asked with a puzzled frown, when we were alone.

"I don't like it," Vance returned, his eyes on the ceiling. "Too many strange things have been happening in these ancient purloes. And it's not like Greeff to walk out in the middle of the night. . . ."

At this moment some one came hurrying down from up-stairs, and a few seconds later we heard Stamm telephoning to Doctor Holliday.

"You'd better come as soon as you can," he was saying nervously. Then, after a pause, he hung up the receiver.

Vance had risen and gone to the door.

"May we see you a moment, Mr. Stamm." His request was practically a command.

Stamm crossed the hall and entered the drawing-room. It was obvious that he was laboring under some suppressed excitement. The muscles of his face were twitching, and his eyes were staring and restless.

Before he could speak Vance addressed him.

"We heard you phoning to the doctor. Is Mrs. Stamm ill again?"

"The same trouble," Stamm answered. "And it's probably my own fault. I went up to see her a while ago, and I mentioned that Greeff was missing. Then she started in with her pet hallucination. Said he was missing because the dragon had got him. Insisted she saw the dragon rise out of the pool last night and fly down toward Spuyten Duyvil."

"Most interestin'." Vance leaned against the edge of the table and looked at Stamm through half-closed eyes. "Have you yourself any more rational explanation of Greeff's disappearance?"

"I can't—understand it." Stamm appeared nonplussed. "From what he said last night he had no intention of leaving the place till you gentlemen gave him permission to go. Seemed quite content to remain here."

"By the by, did you happen to go outdoors late last night?"

Stamm looked up with considerable surprise.

"Didn't leave the house after dinner," he said. "Greeff and I sat in the library chatting till he went up-stairs. I had a nightcap and went to bed very soon after he did."

"Some one," mused Vance, "let himself out by the side door around midnight."

"Good God! That must have been when Greeff walked out."

"But it seems some one came back through the side door an hour or so later."

Stamm stared with glassy eyes, and his lower lip sagged.

"You—you're sure?" he stammered.

"Both Mr. Leland and Trainor heard the bolt being opened and closed," Vance returned.

"Leland heard it?"

"So he told us a few minutes ago."

A change came over Stamm. He drew himself up and made a deprecatory gesture.

"Probably some one went out for an airing."

Vance nodded indifferently.

"That's quite reasonable. . . . Sorry to have bothered you. I presume you want to return to your mother."

Stamm nodded gratefully.

"If you don't mind. Doctor Holliday is coming right over. If you want me I'll be up-stairs." And he hurried from the room.

When the sound of his footsteps had died out up the stairs, Vance suddenly rose and threw his cigarette into the grate.

"Come, Markham," he said with animation, moving toward the door.

"Where are you going now?" Markham demanded.

Vance turned at the portières. His eyes were cold and hard.

"To the pot-holes," he said quietly.



## 16. BLOOD AND A GARDENIA

(Monday, August 13; 10.15 a.m.)

Markham sprang to his feet.

"Good God! What do you mean?"

But Vance was already on his way to the front door, and without answering, he ran quickly down the steps and took his place at the wheel of his car. Markham and Heath, silent and, I thought, a little dazed, got into the tonneau, and I followed. Something in Vance's manner when he mentioned the pot holes sent a chill up my spine, and I wondered vaguely—without admitting to myself the hideous suspicion that had been roused in me by his sudden decision—what it was that he hoped to learn at the scene where he had discovered Montague's body.

We sped down the East Road, through the gate, and on toward the Clove. When we were opposite the pot-holes Vance threw on the brakes and sprang down to the ground. We followed him as he hastened to the foot of the rocks and drew himself up to the top of the low wall of the hole where Montague's remains had been found.

He gazed over the edge a moment and then turned back to us, his face grave. He said nothing but merely made a gesture toward the hole. Heath was already climbing to the top of the wall, and Markham and I were close behind him. Then came a tense moment of silence: we were all too horrified at the sight to speak.

Heath slid down from the wall, a look of combined anger and fear on his grim face.

"Mother of God!" he mumbled, and crossed himself.

Markham stood at the foot of the wall with a faraway look of horror and bafflement. And I found it difficult, in the peaceful atmosphere of that calm summer morning, to adjust my mind and emotions to the hideous thing I had just beheld.

There, in the depths of the pot-hole, lay the crumpled dead body of Alex Greeff. His position, like that of Montague, was unnatural and distorted, as if he had been dropped from a height into this narrow rock grave. Across the left side of his head ran a gaping wound, and there were black bruises on his neck. He wore no waistcoat, and his coat was open, exposing his breast. His shirt had been ripped down the front, like the jersey of Montague's bathing suit, and there were three long gashes in the flesh, as if a monster's claw had torn him downward from the throat. The moment I looked at him, mutilated in exactly the same manner as Montague, all the wild stories of the dragon of the pool came back to me and froze my blood.

Markham had brought his gaze back from the distance and looked wonderingly at Vance.

"How did you know he was here?" he asked huskily.

Vance's eyes were focused on the tip of his cigarette.

"I didn't know," he answered softly. "But after Stamm told us of his mother's comment when she heard Greeff had disappeared, I thought it best to come down here. . . ."

"The dragon again!" Markham spoke angrily, but there was an undertone of awe in his voice. "You're not trying to intimate, are you, that the ravings of that crazy woman are to be taken seriously?"

"No, Markham," Vance returned mildly. "But she knows a great many things, and her predictions thus far have all been correct."

"That's sheer coincidence," Markham protested. "Come, come, let's be practical."

"Whoever killed Greeff was certainly practical," observed Vance.

"But, good Heavens! where do we stand now?" Markham was both baffled and irritable. "Greeff's murder only complicates the case. We now have two hideous problems instead of one."

"No, no, Markham." Vance moved slowly back to the car. "I wouldn't say that, don't y' know. It's all one problem. And it's clearer now than it was. A certain pattern is beginning to take shape—the dragon pattern."

"Don't talk nonsense!" Markham fairly barked the reprimand.

"It's not nonsense, old dear." Vance got into the car. "The imprints on the bed of the pool, the talon-like marks on Montague and now on Greeff, and—above all—the curious prognostications of old Mrs. Stamm—these must all be accounted for before we can eliminate the dragon theory. An amazin' situation."

Markham lapsed into indignant silence as Vance started the car. Then he said with sarcasm:

"I think we'll work this case out on anti-dragon lines."

"That will depend entirely on the type of dragon you have in mind," Vance returned, as he guided the car round and started back up the East Road to the Stamm estate.

When we reached the house Heath went immediately to the telephone and notified Doctor Doremus of our second gruesome find. As he hung up the receiver he turned to Markham with a look of hopeless desperation.

"I don't know how to handle this job, Chief," he admitted in an appealing tone.

Markham looked at him a moment and slowly nodded his head appreciatively.

"I know just how you feel, Sergeant." He took out a cigar, carefully clipped the end, and lighted it. "The usual methods don't seem to get us anywhere." He was profoundly perplexed.

Vance was standing in the middle of the hall, gazing at the floor.

"No," he murmured, without looking up. "The usual methods are futile. The roots of these two crimes go down much deeper than that. The murders are diabolical—in more than one sense; and they are closely related, in some strange way, to all the sinister factors which go to make up this household and its influences. . . ." He ceased speaking and turned his head toward the staircase.

Stamm and Leland were descending from the second floor, and Vance immediately approached them.

"Will you gentlemen please come into the drawing-room," he said. "We have a bit of news for you."

A breath of air stirred in the room: the sun had not yet reached that side of the house. Vance turned to the west window and gazed

out a few moments. Then he turned back to Stamm and Leland who were standing just inside the portières.

"We have found Greeff," he said. "He is dead—in the same pot-hole where Montague's body was chucked."

Stamm paled perceptibly and caught his breath. But Leland's expression did not change. He took his pipe from his mouth.

"Murdered, of course." His remark was half question and half statement.

"Murdered, of course." Vance repeated the words, nodding. "A messy affair. The same sort of wounds we found on Montague. A perfect duplication of the technique, in fact."

Stamm wavered on his feet, as if he had been struck a physical blow.

"Oh, my God!" he muttered, with a sucking intake of breath.

Leland grasped him quickly by the arm and led him to a chair.

"Sit down, Rudolf," he said kindly. "You and I have been expecting this ever since we knew that Greeff was missing."

Stamm slumped into the chair and sat glaring before him with unseeing eyes. Leland turned back to Vance.

"I feared all morning," he said simply, "that Greeff did not absent himself voluntarily. . . . Have you learned anything else?"

Vance shook his head.

"No—nothing else. But I think we'll take a look around Greeff's room. Do you know which one it is?"

"Yes," Leland answered quietly. "I will be very glad to show you."

We had barely passed over the threshold of the drawing-room door when Stamm's strained, husky voice halted us.

"Wait a minute—wait a minute!" he called, struggling forward in his chair. "There's something I should have told you. But I was afraid—God help me, I was afraid!"

Vance regarded the man quizzically.

"What is it?" he asked, in a curiously stern voice.

"It's about last night," Stamm's hands clutched the arms of the chair, and he held himself rigid as he spoke. "After I had gone to my room Greeff came and tapped on my door. I opened it and let him in. He said he did not feel like sleeping and thought he would join me in another drink, if I did not mind. We talked for an hour or so—"

"About what, for instance?" interrupted Vance.

"Nothing of importance—generalities about finance, and the possibilities of a new expedition to the South Seas next spring. . . . Then Greeff looked at his watch. 'It's midnight,' he said. 'I think I'll take a stroll before I turn in.' He went out and I heard him go down to the lower hall, unbolt the side door—my room, you know, is just at the head of the stairs. I was tired and I got into bed, and—and—that's all."

"Why were you afraid to tell us this before?" Vance asked coldly.

"I don't know—exactly," Stamm relaxed and settled back in his chair. "I didn't think anything of it last night. But when Greeff failed to put in an appearance this morning, I realized that I was the last person to see him and talk to him before he went out. I saw no reason for mentioning the fact this morning, but after what you've just told us—about his body being found in the pot-hole—I felt that you ought to know—"

"It's quite all right," Vance assured him, in a somewhat softened tone. "Your feelings are quite natural in the circumstances."

Stamm lifted his head and gave him a grateful look.

"Would you mind asking Trainor to bring me some whisky?" he asked weakly.

"Not at all." And Vance turned and walked into the hall.

After sending the butler to Stamm we went up-stairs. Greeff's room was the second one from Stamm's on the same side of the hall. The door was unlocked and we went in. As Trainor had told us, the bed had not been slept in; and the window shades were still drawn. The room was somewhat similar to Montague's, but it was larger and more luxuriously furnished. A few toilet articles lay neatly on the dressing-table; a pongee robe and a pair of pajamas were thrown over the foot of the bed; and on a chair near the window lay Greeff's dinner suit, in a rumpled heap. On the floor, near an end-table, was a gaping Gladstone bag.

The inspection of Greeff's belongings took but a short time. Vance went first to the clothes-closet and found there a brown business suit and a sport suit; but the pockets held nothing of any importance. The dinner suit was then investigated, without any enlightening result: its pockets contained merely an ebony cigarette holder, a cigarette case of black moiré silk, and two elaborately monogrammed handkerchiefs. There was nothing belonging to Greeff in the drawers of the dressing-table; and in the cabinet of the bathroom were only the usual toilet accessories—a toothbrush and paste, a shaving outfit, a bottle of toilet water and a shaker of talcum powder. Nor did the Gladstone bag yield anything significant or suggestive.

Vance had said nothing during the search, but there was an intent eagerness in his attitude. He now stood in the middle of the room, looking down, his eyes half closed in troubled thought. It was patent that he was disappointed.

Slowly he lifted his head, shrugged slightly, and started toward the door.

"I'm afraid there's nothing here that will help us," he said; and there was something in his voice that made me feel that he was referring to some specific, but unnamed, object which he had hoped to find.

Markham, too, must have caught the undertone in Vance's voice which had conveyed this impression to me, for he asked crisply:

"Just what, Vance, were you expecting to discover in this room?"

Vance hesitated and turned slowly back to us.

"I am not quite sure. . . . There should have been something here. But don't ask me to say what—there's a good fellow. I wouldn't know exactly how to answer." He smiled ingratiatingly and, turning, went out into the hall. The rest of us followed him.

As we reached the head of the stairs Doctor Holliday was just coming up from the main floor. He greeted us with reserved cordiality, and we were about to start down the stairs when, with what seemed a sudden impulse, Vance halted.

"I say, doctor," he asked, "would you mind if we went up with you? There's something of vital importance I would like to ask Mrs. Stamm. I sha'n't disturb her. . . ."

"Come along," Doctor Holliday nodded, as he turned on the landing and swung his bulky frame up toward the third floor.

When Mrs. Schwarz opened the door for us Mrs. Stamm was standing at the open window overlooking the pool, her back to us. As

we entered the room she turned slowly until her fiery eyes rested on us. There seemed to be a new glittering quality in her gaze, but there was no smile on her lips: her mouth was at once grim and placid.

Vance walked directly toward her, halting only when he was within a few feet of her.

His expression was severe; his eyes were determined.

"Mrs. Stamm," he said, in a stern, quiet tone, "terrible things have happened here. And more terrible things are going to happen—*unless you help us*. And these other terrible things will not be of a nature that will please you. They will befall those who are not enemies of the Stammers; and, therefore, your dragon—that protector of your household—could not be held responsible."

A frightened look came into the woman's eyes as she stared raptly at Vance.

"What can I do to help you?" Her voice was a hollow monotone, as if she had merely thought the words and her lips had automatically articulated them.

"You can tell us," Vance answered, without relaxing his severity of tone, "where you have hidden the key to the family vault."

The woman's eyes closed slowly, as if from some great physical reaction, and she took a long, deep breath. I may have imagined it, but I received the strong impression that Vance's words had brought her a sense of relief. Then her eyelids went up quickly: a certain calm had come into her gaze.

"Is that all you wish to know?" she asked.

"That is all, madam—but it is vitally important. And I give you my word that the tomb of your dead will not be desecrated."

The woman studied Vance appraisingly for several moments. Then she moved to the large chair by the window and sat down. With slow but resolute determination she reached into the bosom of her black lace dress and drew forth a small rectangular scapular on which I could see the faded image of a saint. The stitching, which held the linen and chamois-skin together, was open at the top, so that the scapular was in actuality a small bag. Turning it upside down, she shook it; and presently there fell out into her hand a small flat key.

"Mrs. Schwarz," she commanded dictatorially, "take this key and go to my old steamer trunk in the clothes-closet."

Mrs. Schwarz took the key, turned stoically and, opening the small door in the east wall of the room, disappeared into the semi-darkness beyond.

"Ja, Frau Stamm," she called from within.

"Now unlock the trunk and lift out the tray," Mrs. Stamm instructed her. "Carefully turn up all the old linen you see there. In the right-hand back corner there is an old jewel box, wrapped in a damask tablecloth. Bring out the box."

After a few moments, during which Vance stood in silence looking out the window at the cliffs beyond the pool, Mrs. Schwarz emerged from the closet, carrying a beautiful Venetian box, about eight inches long and six inches wide, with a rounded top. It was covered in faded mauve brocade velvet, surmounted with hammered-metal scroll-work.

"Hand it to this gentleman," Mrs. Stamm made an awkward gesture toward Vance. "The vault key is inside."

Vance came forward and took the box. He threw the catch and opened the lid. Markham had stepped up to him and stood looking over his shoulder. After a moment's inspection Vance closed the box and handed it back to Mrs. Schwarz.

"You may put it away again," he said, in a tone and with a look which constituted a command. Then he turned to Mrs. Stamm and, bowing, said: "You have helped us no end. And I want you to know that we deeply appreciate your confidence."

A faint smile of cynical gratification distorted the contour of Mrs. Stamm's mouth.

"Are you entirely satisfied?" she asked. (There was an undertone of both sarcasm and triumph in her voice.)

"Quite," Vance assured her.

He took his leave at once. Doctor Holliday remained with his patient. When we were again in the hallway and Mrs. Schwarz had closed the door behind us, Markham took Vance by the arm.

"See here," he said, frowning deeply; "what was the idea? Are you going to let her put you off with an empty box?"

"But she hasn't, don't you know," Vance returned dulcetly. "She didn't know the box was empty. She thought the key was there. Why upset her by telling her the box is empty?"

"What has the key got to do with it, anyway?" Markham demanded angrily.

"That's what I'm trying to ascertain." And before Markham could say anything more, Vance turned to Leland, who had watched the entire proceeding in puzzled silence. "Can you show us where Tatum's room is?" he asked.

We had now reached the second-story landing, and Leland drew himself up with a curious start: his habitual air of cool reserve momentarily deserted him.

"Tatum's room?" he repeated, as if he doubted that he had heard Vance correctly. But immediately he recovered himself and turned. "His room is just here, across the hall," he said. "It is the one between Stamm's room and Greeff's."

Vance crossed the hall to the door Leland indicated. It was unlocked, and he opened it and stepped inside the room. We followed him, puzzled and silent. Markham appeared even more surprised than Leland had been at Vance's sudden and unexpected query about Tatum's room. He now gave Vance a searching, inquisitive look, and was about to say something but checked himself and waited.

Vance stood in the middle of the room, glancing about him and letting his gaze rest for a moment on each piece of furniture.

Heath's expression was hard and determined. Without waiting for Vance to speak, he asked:

"Do you want me to get the guy's clothes out and make a search?"

Vance shook his head in a slow, thoughtful negative.

"I don't think that will be necessary, Sergeant. But you might look under the bed and on the floor of the clothes-closet."

Heath drew out his flashlight and went down on his hands and knees. After a brief inspection, he stood up with a grunt.

"Nothing there but a pair of slippers." He went to the clothes-closet and made another inspection.

"Just some shoes, that's all," he announced upon emerging.

Vance, in the meantime, had gone to the low-boy beside the window and opened the drawers, examining them carefully. He then went to the dressing-table and repeated the operation. There was a look of disappointment on his face as he turned away from the table and slowly lit a cigarette. Again his eyes roamed about the room and finally came to rest on a Queen Anne night-table beside the bed.

"One more chance," he murmured, as he crossed the room and drew out the small drawer of burl walnut.

"Ah, quite!"

He reached into the drawer and withdrew some object which we could not see. Then he approached Leland and held out his hand.

"Is that the key to the vault, Mr. Leland?" he asked.

"That is the key," said Leland simply.

Markham strode forward, his face an ugly red.

"How did you know the key was here?" he demanded angrily. "And what does it mean?"

"I didn't know it was here, old dear," Vance returned with exaggerated sweetness. "And I don't know what it means. . . . But I think we'll take a peep at the vault—eh, what?"

When we were again in the lower hall Vance turned to Leland with a serious and stern gaze.

"You will remain here, please," he said. "And you're to make no mention, to any one, of the fact that we have found the key to the vault."

Leland appeared nettled at Vance's tone. He bowed with considerable dignity.

"I will, of course, respect your wishes," he replied, and turned toward the library.

Vance went immediately to the front door. We circled the house to the north, descended the steps to the pool, traversed the coping of the filter, and turned into the narrow tree-lined cement walk which led to the East Road. When we had reached a point where we were entirely hidden from observation, Vance led the way through the shrubbery toward the ivy-covered vault. Taking the key from his pocket, he inserted it in the keyhole and turned it. I was astonished to see how easily the tumblers swung back and operated the bolt. Vance leaned against the heavy door, and it moved slowly inward, rasping and creaking on its rusty iron hinges.

A musty dead odor assailed us from the dimness within.

"Let's have your flashlight, Sergeant," Vance said, as he passed over the threshold.

Heath complied with alacrity, and we stepped into the ancient vault of the Stamms. Then Vance cautiously closed the door and played the beam of the flashlight about the walls and ceiling and floor. Even on that hot summer day there was a damp and chilling atmosphere in this gruesome half-buried tomb, with its encrusted walls of dank mortar, its age-discolored marble floor, and its tiers of wooden coffins, which stretched across the entire south side of the vault, from the floor to the ceiling.

After a casual inspection Vance knelt down and examined the floor carefully.

"Some one's been walking round here recently," he remarked. He moved the circle of light along the marble tiles, toward the coffins. On one of the tiles were two small dark spots.

Stepping toward them, Vance leaned over. Then he moistened a finger and touched one of them. When he moved his finger directly into the light there was visible a dark red smudge.

"That will be blood, Markham," he commented dryly, as he stood up.

Again he moved the flashlight back and forth across the floor, systematically traversing each of the large marble tiles. Suddenly he stepped forward, toward the north wall of the vault and, reaching swiftly down, picked up something which I had not even noticed, although my eyes had been following the sweep of the light.

"Oh, my aunt! That's interestin'." He extended his hand in the circle of intense illumination cast by the flashlight.

We beheld there a small gardenia, still white and fresh-looking, with only the edges of the petals curled and browning.

"Greeff's gardenia, I imagine." Vance's tone was low and held a faint undercurrent of sinister awe. "You remember he wore one yesterday afternoon when we talked with him. And there was no gardenia in his coat lapel when we found him in the pot-hole this morning!"

## 17. THE DUPLICATED DEATH

(Monday, August 13; 11.15 a.m.)

We came out of the chilly dank vault into the hot sunlight, and there was something benign and steadying in the vista of trees and shrubbery and the intimate, familiar objects of the outdoors.

"I think that will be all for the present," Vance said, in a curiously hushed voice, as he locked the ponderous iron door and dropped the key into his pocket. He turned, a deep frown on his forehead, and started back toward the house. "Bloodstains and a gardenia! My word!"

"But, Vance," protested Markham, "those marks on Greeff's body:—surely Greeff wasn't in the pool last night. His clothes were perfectly dry and showed no signs of having been wetted—"

"I know what's in your mind," Vance interrupted. "And you're quite right. Even if Greeff was murdered in the vault, the same cannot be said of Montague. That's the confusin' part of it. . . . But let's wait a bit before we speculate." He made a slight gesture, as if to request silence, and continued his way across the coping of the filter.

When we had reached the south side of the pool and were about to mount the steps leading to the house, I happened to glance up. On the third-floor balcony sat old Mrs. Stamm, her elbows on the railing and her head buried between her hands. Behind her stood the imperturbable Mrs. Schwarz, gazing down at her.

Then suddenly there came drifting out of the library windows the blurred, cacophonic strains of a popular dance tune played *fortissimo* on the piano; and I assumed that Tatum was endeavoring to throw off the depressing pall that hung over the old house. But as suddenly as the raucous music had begun, it ceased; and at this moment Vance, who was leading the way up the steps, turned and spoke, with the air of one who had made a final decision on some moot and difficult problem.

"It would be best to say nothing to any one about our visit to the vault. The right time has not come yet." His eyes were troubled as they rested on Markham. "I can't fit the pattern together yet. But something horrible is going on here, and there's no telling what might happen if what we have just discovered became known."

He gazed at his cigarette speculatively, as if trying to make another decision. At length he added:

"I think, however, we had better speak to Leland about it. He knows we found the key to the vault. . . . Yes, we had better tell Leland. And there's always the chance that he may have some explanation that will help us."

When we entered the house Leland was standing in the front hall, near the stairs. He turned quickly and looked at us uneasily.

"I had to leave the library," he explained, as if his presence in the hall required an apology. "Tatum started playing the piano. I am afraid I was a bit rough with him."

"He can endure it, I imagine," Vance murmured. "Anyway, I'm glad you're here. I wanted to ask you something about Tatum."

He led the way into the drawing-room.

"Did Tatum, by any chance," he inquired when we were seated, "accompany Stamm on any of his fishing or treasure-hunting expeditions?"

Leland looked up slowly, and there was a flicker of astonishment in his eyes.

"Funny you should ask that." His voice, though drab, was pitched a little higher than usual. "The truth is, Tatum did ship along with us to Cocos Island—an uncle of his, I believe, helped finance the trip. But he could not stick it out. He went all to pieces in the deadly climate there—too much alcohol, I imagine. We tried him on under-sea work for a while, but it was no go. He was just a burden to the expedition. We finally hailed a whaler and sent him to Costa Rica, where he picked up a liner back to the States."

Vance nodded abstractedly and dropped the subject. Slowly he took his cigarette case from his pocket, chose a *Régie* with intent deliberation, and lighted it.

"We've been to the Stamm vault, Mr. Leland," he remarked, without looking up.

Leland glanced at Vance sideways, took his pipe from his mouth, and said indifferently: "I imagined as much. I have never been inside it myself. The usual thing, I suppose?"

"Quite the usual thing," Vance concurred. He looked up casually and smoked for a moment. "One or two little points of interest, however. There was a bit of blood on the floor—and the gardenia Greeff wore yesterday. Otherwise quite conventional."

Leland stiffened in his chair and then leaned forward. Presently he rose to his feet—it was obvious that he was deeply perturbed. He stood for several moments, gazing down at the floor.

"You found nothing else of an unusual nature?" he asked at last in a strained tone, without lifting his head.

"No," Vance replied, "nothing else. Do you feel that we overlooked something? There are no hidden nooks, y' know."

Leland glanced up quickly and shook his head with unwonted vigor.

"No, no, of course not. My query had no significance. I was merely shocked by what you told me. I cannot imagine what your discoveries portend."

"Could you not offer some explanation?" Vance asked quietly. "We would be most grateful for a suggestion."

Leland appeared bewildered.

"I have nothing to suggest," he said, in a low colorless tone. "I would be only too glad. . . ." His voice trailed off and he stared again at the floor, as if weighing the possibilities of the situation.

"By the by," Vance went on, "that creaking noise you heard last night—as of one piece of metal against another I believe you expressed it:—might that have been the creaking of the iron hinges of the vault door?"

"It is quite possible," Leland returned, without taking his troubled gaze from the carpet. Then he added: "The sound certainly seemed to come from just that point."

Vance studied the man for some time without speaking. Then he said:

"Thanks awfully. . . . I'd like to have a bit of a chat with Tatum. Would you mind asking him to come here? . . . Oh, and please don't make any mention to him—or to any of the others—for the present, of what you have just learned."

Leland moved uneasily, drew himself together, and studied Vance inquisitively.

"As you wish," he answered, and hesitated. "You found the key to the vault in Tatum's room:—do you think, perhaps, it was he who went to the vault last night?"

"I really couldn't say," Vance replied coldly.

Leland turned and started from the room; but he halted at the portières and looked round.

"May I inquire," he asked, "whether you left the vault door unlocked?"

"I took the precaution of relocking it," Vance informed him, in an offhand manner. After a slight pause he added: "I have the key in my pocket. I intend to keep it until this investigation is brought to a satisfactory close."

Leland regarded him for a moment in silence. Then he nodded slowly.

"I am glad of that. I think that is wise." He turned and walked across the hall toward the library.

When Tatum entered the drawing-room it was obvious that he was in a sullen, defiant mood. He did not greet any of us, but stood inside the door, looking us over with smouldering, cynical eyes.

Vance rose as he entered the room and, moving to the centre-table, beckoned to him peremptorily. When the man had swaggered to the table Vance took the vault key from his pocket and laid it down before the other's gaze.

"Did you ever see that key?" he asked.

Tatum looked at the key with a smirk, studied it for a few moments, and shrugged.

"No, I never saw it before," he replied flatly. "Any mystery attached to it?"

"A bit of a mystery," Vance told him, picking up the key and resuming his seat. "We found it in your room this morning."

"Maybe it's the key to the situation," Tatum sneered, with cold, half-closed eyes.

"Yes, yes, of course. . . . Quite." Vance smiled faintly. "But, as I've said, it was found in your room."

The man smoked a minute, without moving. Then he raised his hand and took his cigarette from his lips. (I particularly noted that his fingers were as steady as steel.)

"What of it?" he asked, with exaggerated indifference. "You will probably find plenty of junk in the rooms of this rotting old house." He turned to Vance with a hard mirthless smile which barely contorted the corners of his mouth. "You know, I don't live here—I'm only a guest. Am I supposed to be frightened, or have the jitters, or go into hysterics, because you found an old rusty key in my room upstairs?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that," Vance assured him lightly. "You're acting in the most highly approved manner."

"Well, where do we go from here?" Tatum's tone was contemptuous.

"Figuratively speaking, we go to the vault." Vance spoke with unusual mildness.

Tatum appeared puzzled. "What vault?"

"The ancestral vault of the Stamms."

"And where might that be?"

"Just the other side of the pool, hidden in the spruce trees, beyond the little cement walk."

Again Tatum's eyes narrowed, and the contours of his face formed into a rigid defensive mask.

"Are you trying to spoof me?" he asked, in a metallic voice.

"No, no," Vance assured him. "I'm merely answering your question. . . . I say, don't you know about the vault?"

Tatum shifted his eyes and grinned.

"Never saw it and never heard of it." Suddenly he wheeled round, crushed out his cigarette, and glared truculently at Vance. "What's the idea?" he demanded. (His nerves seemed to have snapped.) "Are you trying to pin something on me?"

Vance studied the man indifferently for a while and then shook his head.

"Not even a gardenia," he replied sweetly.

Tatum started, and his eyes closed to mere slits.

"I know what you mean by that!" His face paled, and his long flat fingers began to twitch. "Greeff was wearing a gardenia last night, wasn't he? Maybe you're going to tell me that you also found a gardenia in my room."

Vance seemed puzzled for a moment at the man's words, but in an instant his face cleared.

"No," he said, "the gardenia was not in your room. But really, y' know, the possible presence of Greeff's posy in your boudoir shouldn't be so upsetting—unless, of course, Greeff has met with foul play."

Another grim, ironic smile moved the muscles of Tatum's mouth.

"He met with foul play all right—the same as Montague. Greeff didn't run away; and there are too many people round here that would be glad to see him smeared out."

"And you're one of those people, aren't you?" Vance returned dulcetly.

"Sure I am." Tatum thrust out his jaw, and his eyes became venomous. "But that doesn't mean that I did it."

"No, that doesn't mean that you did it." Vance rose and waved his hand in dismissal. "That will be all for the present. But, if I were you, I would control my musical impulses. Leland might decide that you too were due for a bit of killin'."

Tatum grinned viciously.

"That half-breed!" And, with an awkward gesture of contempt, he went from the room.

"A hard-bitten character," Markham commented when the man was out of hearing.

"True," Vance nodded. "But shrewd."

"It seems to me," said Markham, rising, and pacing nervously up and down, "that if we could learn who managed to get the vault key from old Mrs. Stamm's trunk, we'd know a lot more about the devilry that went on here last night."

Vance shook his head.

"I doubt if the key has been in the trunk for years. It may never have been there, Markham. The hiding of the key, and all the

secrecy, may be just another hallucination on Mrs. Stamm's part—an hallucination closely connected with the dragon. . . ."

"But why, in Heaven's name, was the key in Tatum's room? Tatum struck me as telling the truth when he said he'd never seen it before."

Vance gave Markham a quick, curious look.

"The chap was certainly convincing. . . ."

Markham halted and looked down at Vance.

"I can't see any way of tackling this case," he remarked despondently. "Every factor in it that we try to touch turns out to be a sort of *Fata Morgana*. There's nothing tangible to take hold of. The situation even precludes plausible theorizing."

"Don't give way to discouragement, old dear," Vance consoled him. "It's not as Cimmerian as it appears. The whole difficulty is that we've been attacking the problem from a too rational and ordin'ry point of view. We've been trying to make a conventional peg fit into a sinister and bizarre hole. There are extr'ordin'ry elements in this case. . . ."

"Damn it, Vance!" Markham uttered the expletive with unwonted passion. "You're not reverting to that incredible dragon theory, I hope."

Before Vance could reply there was the sound of a car swinging into the parking-space before the house; and a minute later Snitkin threw open the front door and led Doctor Doremus into the drawing-room.

"Another body, eh?" the Medical Examiner grumbled, with a casual wave of the hand in greeting.

"Can't you get all of your corpses together at one time, Sergeant? . . . Well, where is it? And what's all the excitement?" He grinned at Heath with sardonic good-humor. "Your dragon again?"

Vance rose.

"It looks that way," he said soberly.

"What!" Doremus was puzzled. "Well, where's the new victim?"

"In the same pot-hole." Vance took his hat and went into the hall.

Doremus squinted, and followed without a word.

The Sergeant ordered Snitkin to join us, and once again we drove round the house and down the East Road. At the pot-holes we stood back while Doremus looked over the wall into the shallow chasm beyond. After a cursory glance he slid back to the ground, and turned to us. There was a strange, startled look on his face: he had completely lost his cynicism and jauntiness.

"Good Gad! Good Gad!" he repeated. "What kind of a case is this?" He compressed his lips and made a jerky motion in Heath's direction. "Get him out," he ordered in a strained tone.

Snitkin and the Sergeant lifted Greeff's body from the pot-hole and laid it on the ground.

After a brief examination Doremus stood up and looked toward Markham.

"The same as that fellow yesterday," he said. "Same wounds exactly. Same fracture of the skull; same three scratches down his chest; same discoloration on his throat. Ripped wide open, bashed over the left side of the head, and strangled. . . . Only," he added, "he hasn't been dead as long as the other one." He made a grimace at Heath. "That's what you want to know, isn't it?"

"How would twelve o'clock last night fit?" asked Vance.

"Midnight, eh?" Doremus bent down over Greeff's body and again tested the *rigor mortis*. "That'd make it about twelve hours. . . . Right." He stood up and wrote out a removal blank. As he handed it to the Sergeant he said: "There was nothing found at the autopsy of the other fellow that changed what I told you yesterday, but you'd better get this one down to the morgue right away—I'll have time this afternoon to autopsy him." (I had never seen Doremus so serious.) "And I'm driving back again by Payson Avenue. I'm getting to believe in that dragon of yours, Sergeant. . . . Damn queer," he muttered, as he walked to the road and got into his car. "That's no way to kill a man. And two of 'em! . . . I saw that stuff in the morning papers about Dragonfish.<sup>[16]</sup> Good Gad, what a story!" He released the brakes, letting his car roll down the road, and drove off toward Spuyten Duyvil.

Leaving Snitkin to watch Greeff's body, we returned to the house.

"And now what's to be done?" Markham asked hopelessly, as we entered the front door.

"Oh, that's clearly indicated, don't y' know," Vance replied. "I'm going to take a peep at Stamm's fish collection. Really, you'd better come along. Tropicals are fascinatin', Markham." He turned to Trainor, who had taken Snitkin's place at the door. "Ask Mr. Stamm if we may see him."

Trainor glared at Vance fearfully; then drew himself up rigidly and went down the hall.

"See here, Vance," Markham protested irritably, "what's the point of this? We have serious work to do, and you talk of inspecting a fish collection! Two men have been murdered—"

"I'm sure," Vance interrupted, "that you'll find the fish highly educational. . . ."

At this moment Stamm came out from the library and strode toward us.

"Would you be so good as to act as our *cicerone*, among your aquaria?" Vance asked him.

Stamm evinced considerable surprise.

"Why, yes," he said, with an intonation of forced politeness. "Of course—of course. I'd be delighted. Come this way." And he turned and walked back toward the library.



## 18. PISCATORIAL LORE

(Monday, August 13; 12.15 p.m.)

The library was an unusually large room, severely but comfortably furnished in the Jacobean style, with great tiers of books reaching from the floor to the ceiling. There were windows to the east and west, and, in the north wall, facing us, was a large archway which led to the aquaria and terrarium beyond.

Leland was sitting on the davenport with one of the volumes of the Eumorphopoulos collection of ceramics on his knees. In one corner, at a small card-table, sat Mrs. McAdam and Tatum, a cribbage board between them. There was no one else in the room. All three looked up curiously as we entered, but made no comment.

Stamm led the way across the library and into the first aquarium. This room was even larger than the library, and had an enormous skylight as well as a row of high windows along both walls to the east and west. Beyond, through a second archway was still another aquarium, similar to the first; and beyond that was the terrarium with windows on three sides.

The aquarium in which we stood was lined with fish tanks of all sizes, reaching to the base of the high windows; and half-way between the walls, running the entire length of the room, were two double rows of additional tanks, set on a long metal rack.

There were more than a hundred such tanks in the room, ranging in capacity from five to one hundred gallons.

Stamm, beginning at the tank nearest the door, on the left, led us about the room commenting on his living treasures. He pointed out the various types of *Platyæcilus maculatus*—*pulcher*, *ruber*, *auratus*, *sanguineus*, and *niger*; various *Xiphophorus hellerii* (the Mexican Swordtail) and the Red Helleri (a cross between the Swordtail and the Red Platy); *Mollienisia latipinna*, with their dotted mother-of-pearl sides; and Black Mollies, perfectly line-bred to enhance their original black mottled coloring. His collection of the genus *Barbus* was extensive: he had beautiful specimens of the opalescent red-finned *oligolepis*; the rosy *conchonius*; the *lateristriga*, with its chameleon-like golden, black and carmine coloring; the black-banded *pentazona*; the silvery *ticto*; and many others. After these came the species of the genus *Rasbora*, especially *heteromorpha* and *tæniata*; and still further were beautiful specimens of the Characinidæ, particularly of the sub-family Tetragonopterinae—the Yellow, Red, Glass, Bronze, and Flag Tetras, and the *Hemigrammus ocellifer*, or Head and Tail Light fish.

In a series of tanks down the centre of the room Stamm pointed with pride to his specimens of the Cichlidæ—*Cichlasoma facetum*, *severum*, *nigrofasciatum*, *festivum* (the Flag Cichlid), *urophthalmus*, *aureum*, and so on. He also showed us several specimens of that enigmatical *Symphysodon discus*, about which so little is known, either as to its sex distinction or its habits.

"I'm working on this species," Stamm said, proudly indicating the blue-green brassy specimens. "They are closely related to the *Pterophyllum* and are the only one of their genus. I'll surprise the old-time aquarists yet."

"Have you succeeded in breeding any of the *Pterophyllum*?" Vance asked with interest.

Stamm chuckled.

"I was one of the first aquarists in the country to find out that secret. . . . Look here." He pointed to an enormous tank of at least one hundred gallons. "That's the explanation. Plenty of swimming space, with heavy-stemmed *Sagittaria* for the eggs, and a good warm temperature." (There were many beautiful specimens in the tank, some of them twelve inches from dorsal to anal fin.)

He moved along the west wall, talking proudly and fluently of his fish, with the enthusiasm of a fanatic. Before we had completed the circuit he had shown us specimens of the *Æquidens portalegrensis* (the Blue Acara); tiny transparent glass fish (*Ambassis lala*); many species of *Panchax*, especially *lineatus* and the rare Nigerian species, *grahami*; a pair of pike-like *Belonesox belizanus*; the usual *Danio malabaricus*; such mouthbreeders as *Haplochromis multicolor*, *Astatotilapia moffati*, *Tilapia heudeloti*, and *Etroplus maculatus*; labyrinthine fishes, such as *Osphromenus*, *Macropodus*, *Anabas*, and *Ctenopoma*; and hundreds of *Lebistes reticulatus*.

Stamm waved his hand at this last large tank contemptuously.

"Scalare fodder," he muttered.

"Still," said Vance, "despite their commonness, there aren't many fish among the tropicals more beautiful than the Guppies."

Stamm snorted and moved on toward the room beyond.

"In here are the fish that really count," he said.

This second aquarium was similar to the one we had just quitted and contained quite as many tanks, but they were arranged differently.

"Here, for instance," said Stamm, standing before a tank at the right, "is the *Monodactylus argenteus*."

"Brakish water, of course," Vance remarked.

"Oh, yes." Stamm shot him a curious look. "Many of the tanks in this room are really marine aquaria, and, of course, I use brakish water also for my *Toxotes jaculator*—the Shooting Fish—and the *Mugil oligolepis*."

Vance leaned over the tank that Stamm had indicated.

"The *Mugil oligolepis* resembles the Barb, but it has two dorsals instead of one," he observed.

"Quite right." Stamm again looked at him curiously. "You've spent some time with fish yourself, haven't you?"

"Oh, I've dabbled a bit," returned Vance, moving on.

"Here are some of my best," Stamm said, going to a series of tanks in the middle of the room. And he pointed out to us some *Colossoma nigripinnis*, *Mylossoma duriventris*, and *Metynnis roosevelti*.

"How do you manage to keep these rare Characins in such apparently good condition?" Vance asked.

"Ah, that's my secret," returned Stamm with a shrewd smile. "High temperatures, of course, and large tanks and live food . . . and other things," he added enigmatically, turning to another series of tanks along the west wall. "But here are a few fish about which even less is known." He put his hands in his pockets and regarded the tanks with satisfaction. "These are the Hatchet Fishes: the *Gasteropelecus sternicla*, the *Carnegiella strigata*, and the *Thoracocharax securis*. The so-called experts will tell you that the breeding



habits of these species are not known, and that they cannot be bred in aquaria. Tommy-rot! I've done it successfully." He moved further down the room. "Here's an interesting one." He tapped on the front wall of a particularly attractive tank. "The Blow Fish—*Tetrodon cucutia*. Watch this."

He took one of the fish out of the water in a small net, and it inflated itself into the shape of a ball.

"Curious idea," Stamm commented, "—blowing oneself up to keep from being swallowed."

"Oh, quite human, I should say," Vance returned dryly. "All our politicians do the same thing." Stamm grinned.

"I never thought of that," he chuckled. . . . "And right next door here," he went on, "is the *Pantodon buchholzi*. Just look at those large transparent pectoral fins. I brought these Butterfly Fish with me from West Africa. . . . And here are some beauties—the *Scatophagus*." He pointed to two tanks containing fairly large hexagonal fish—one tank of the spotted *argus* and the other of the striped *rubrifrons*. "And just here," Stamm continued, moving along the wall, "are a couple of *Luciocephalus pulcher*."

Vance looked at this fish closely and inquiringly.

"I've heard of them," he commented. "They are related to the Anabantidae, I believe. But I didn't know any one was versed in their habits and care."

"No one but me," Stamm boasted. "And I might add that they are not bubble-nest breeders, as many believe, but viviparous—live-bearers."

"Astonishin'," Vance murmured.

Stamm directed our attention to a series of small individual tanks on the shelf above.

"Piranhas," he said. "A rare species. And savage devils:—take a squint at those wicked teeth. I believe these are the first ever to come to the United States alive. Brought them back myself from Brazil—in separate cans, of course: they'd kill each other if they were put together. Damned cannibals—the *Serrasalmus*. I had a couple that were nearly twenty inches long,—not the *spilopleura*: they rarely grow over a foot in length. . . . And here," he went on, moving away, "is a nice collection of Sea-horses—the *Hippocampus punctulatus*. Better than those in the New York Aquarium. . . ."

Stamm moved a little further on.

"Here's an interesting fish—pugnacious and dangerous. The *Gymnotus carapo*. Have to be kept separately. Known as the 'Electric Eel'—*Electrophorus electricus*. But that's all wrong, really. Though they have eel-like bodies, they are not eels at all, but related to the Characinidae. These are only about eight inches long, but they grow to three feet."

Vance looked at the queer specimens closely: they were vicious-looking and repulsive.

"I have heard," he remarked, "that they are actually capable of electrocuting a man by a moment's contact."

Stamm pursed his lips.

"So they say, so they say."

At this point Tatum and Mrs. McAdam came into the room.

"How about a little battle?" Tatum asked of Stamm with a smirk. "Teeny and I are bored."

Stamm hesitated.

"I've wasted eight of my biggest Bettas on you now. . . . Oh, all right."

He went to a wide niche in the east wall, where there were numerous quart tanks each containing one Siamese Fighting Fish. From the ceiling hung a globe of water, on three slender chains, at a height of about five feet from the floor. He took up a small round Brussels net and transferred two veil-tail fish—a beautiful blue-green and a purple one—to the suspended globe.

The two fish appeared to look at each other cautiously before attacking. Then, with brilliantly heightened color and with fins and tails twitching and spreading furiously, they rushed about. Coming close together and nearly parallel, they slowly rose, side by side, to the surface. Soon they seemed to relax, and sank to the bottom of the globe. These preliminary manoeuvres continued for a few minutes. Then, with lightning swiftness, the fight was on. They dashed at each other viciously, ripping off scales, mutilating each other's tails and fins, and tearing bloody bits from the sides. Tatum was offering odds on the purple Betta, but no one paid any attention to him. The blue-green one fastened on the other's gill with a terrific grip, hanging on until he was compelled to rise to the surface for air. The other then attached himself savagely to his antagonist's mouth and relinquished his hold only when forced to go up for air himself. It was a terrible, but beautiful, sight.

Vance looked toward Tatum.

"You enjoy this sort of thing?" he asked.

"Too tame," Tatum complained, with an unpleasant laugh. "I prefer cock-fighting myself; but when there's nothing else to do. . . ."

Leland had entered the room without our hearing him. He stood just behind Vance.

"I think it is a brutal sport," he said, his smouldering eyes on Tatum. "It is beastly."

The purple Betta was now at the bottom of the globe, mutilated and almost entirely stripped of its scales; and the other was attacking it to give the *coup de grâce*. Leland quickly picked up a small net and, reaching into the globe, removed the wounded loser and placed him in a small tank of Mercurochrome water. Then he went back to the library.

Tatum shrugged and took Mrs. McAdam's arm.

"Come on, Teeny, we'll play tiddledywinks. I'm sure Leland would approve of that."

And the two of them left the room.

"A pleasant little household," Stamm remarked with a sneer. He continued his rounds of the tanks, talking volubly and lovingly of his rare assortment of fish. That he had a wide and varied knowledge of them, and that he had done much important experimentation, was obvious.

When he had come to the farther archway, he offered to show us his terrarium.

But Vance shook his head.

"Not today," he said. "Thanks awfully, and all that."

"I have some fascinating toads here—the *Alytes obstetricans*—the first ever to come from Europe," Stamm urged.

"We'll inspect the Midwives another time," Vance replied. "What I'm interested in at the moment are your bottled Devil Fish. I see

some allurin' specimens over there."

Below one of the large east windows there were several shelves lined with jars of strange preserved sea-monsters of varying sizes, and Stamm led us immediately to them.

"There's a jolly little fellow," he remarked, pointing to a specimen in a long conical jar. "The *Omosudis lowi*. Look at those sabre-like fangs!"

"A typical dragon's mouth," Vance murmured. "But not as vicious as it looks. A fish one-third its size can conquer and swallow it—the *Chiasmodon niger*, for instance."

"That's right." Once more Stamm glanced sharply at Vance. "Any implication in that observation?"

"Really now," Vance protested, and pointed to a large glass receptacle containing a preserved fish of the most hideous and formidable aspect I had ever seen. "Is this one of the *Chauliodus sloanei*?"

"Yes, it is," Stamm answered, without shifting his gaze from Vance. "And I have another one here."

"I believe Greeff did mention two."

"Greeff!" Stamm's face hardened. "Why should he have mentioned them?"

"I'm sure I don't know." Vance moved along the row of bottles. "And what might this be?"

Stamm turned reluctantly, and glanced at the jar on which Vance had placed his finger.

"Another so-called Dragonfish," he said. "The *Lamprotaxus flagellibarba*." It was a wicked-looking, greenish-black monster, with blazing emerald markings.

Stamm showed us other specimens: the *Idiacanthus fasciola*, a serpent dragon with a long eel-like body, almost black, and with a golden tail; the wolf-like *Linophryne arborifer*, with a very large mouth and strong teeth, and what appeared to be a fungus-like beard; the *Photocorynus spiniceps* which, though very small, possessed a head half the length of its body, with an enormous jaw and serrated teeth; the *Lasiognathus saceostoma*, known as the Angler Fish, with a jaw longer than the rest of its body, and equipped with a line and hooks for catching its prey; and other repulsive varieties of luminous Dragonfish. He also showed us a vermilion and yellow sea-dragon, with what appeared to be a coat of armor and waving plumes—a miniature dragon that looked as if it had been reconstructed from the imaginative pages of mythology. . . .

"A most fascinatin' collection," Vance commented, as he turned from the jars. "With such an array of Dragonfish round the place, it's no wonder the old superstition of the pool persists."

Stamm drew up short and scowled: it was patent that Vance's last remark had upset him. He started to make a reply, but evidently thought better of it, and walked back toward the inner room without a word.

As we came again into the library Vance gazed about curiously at various potted plants in the room.

"I see you have some unusual botanical specimens here," he remarked.

Stamm nodded indifferently.

"Yes, but I am not much interested in them. I brought them back with me on some of my trips, but only for the mater."

"Do they require any special care?"

"Oh, yes. And many of them have died. Too cold up here for tropical vegetation, though I keep the library pretty warm, and there's plenty of sunlight."

Vance paused beside one of the pots and studied it a moment. Then he moved on to another plant which looked like a dwarf evergreen but showed many tiny pale yellow berries—a most unusual plant.

"What might this be?" he asked.

"I'm sure I don't know. I picked it up in Guam."

Vance walked over to a rather high miniature tree in a large jardinière standing by the davenport on which Leland sat reading. This tree had large oblong glossy leaves, like the India-rubber plants that are cultivated in Europe for ornamental purposes, but these leaves were smaller and broader and seemed more profuse.

Vance regarded it a moment.

"*Ficus elastica*?" he asked.

"I imagine so," Stamm replied. (It was evident that his interest lay in fish rather than in plants.) "However, it's a curious type—maybe a cross of some kind. And it's undoubtedly stunted. Moreover, it's never had any pink buds. I got it in Burma three years ago."

"Amazin' how it has thrived." Vance bent over it closely and touched the dirt in the jardinière with his finger. "Any special soil required?"

Stamm shook his head.

"No. Any good fertilizer mixed with the earth seems to suffice."

At this point Leland closed his book. Then, with a sharp look at Vance, he rose and walked into the aquarium.

Vance drew out his handkerchief and wiped the moist earth from his finger.

"I think we'll be running along; it's nearly lunch time. We'll either be back or communicate with you later this afternoon. And we'll have to impose upon your hospitality a while longer. We do not want any one to leave here just yet."

"That will be perfectly all right," Stamm returned pleasantly, going to the hall door with us. "I think I'll rig up a windlass and get that rock out of the pool this afternoon. A little physical exercise, you know. . . ." And with a genial wave of the hand he turned and went back to his beloved fish.

When we had returned to the drawing-room Markham turned on Vance angrily.

"What's the idea of wasting all that time on fish and plants?" he demanded. "There's serious work to be done."

Vance nodded soberly.

"I was doing serious work, Markham," he returned, in a low voice. "And during the last half-hour I've learned many important things."

Markham scrutinized him a moment and said nothing.

Vance took up his hat.

"Come, old dear. We're through here for the present. I'm taking you to my apartment for lunch. The Sergeant can carry on till we return." He addressed Heath who stood by the table, smoking in sour silence. "By the by, Sergeant, there's something I wish you would do for me this afternoon."

Heath looked up without change of expression, and Vance went on:

"Have your men make a thorough search of the grounds in the vicinity of the pot-holes—in the bushes and clusters of trees. I would be jolly well pleased if they could find some sort of grass-cart, or wheelbarrow, or something of that nature."

Heath's unhappy eyes slowly focused on Vance and became animated. He took his cigar from his mouth, and a look of understanding spread over his broad face.

"I get you, sir," he said.

## 19. THE DRAGON'S TRACKS

(Monday, August 13; 1 p.m.)

On our drive to Vance's apartment we were caught in a sudden thunder-shower. Dark clouds had been gathering in the west for some time before we left the Stamm estate, though they had not appeared very menacing, and I thought they would pass us to the south. But the downpour was terrific, and our car was almost stalled on upper Broadway. When we reached Vance's apartment, however, a little before half-past one, the storm had passed over the East River, and the sun was shining again. We were, in fact, able to have our lunch on the roof-garden.

During the meal Vance deliberately avoided any discussion of the case, and Markham, after two or three futile efforts at conversation, settled into a glum silence.

Shortly after two o'clock Vance rose from the table and announced that he was leaving us for a few hours.

Markham looked up in exasperated surprise.

"But, Vance," he protested, "we can't let things remain as they are. We must do something immediately. . . . Must you go? And where are you going?"

Vance ignored the first question.

"I am going shopping," he returned, moving toward the door.

Markham sprang to his feet resentfully.

"Shopping! What, in the name of Heaven, are you going shopping for, at such a time?"

Vance turned and gave Markham a whimsical smile.

"For a suit of clothes, old dear," he replied.

Markham spluttered, but before he could articulate his indignation Vance added:

"I'll phone you at the office later." And with a tantalizing wave of the hand, he disappeared through the door.

Markham resumed his chair in sullen silence. He finished his wine, lighted a fresh cigar, and went off to his office in a taxicab.

I remained at the apartment and tried to catch up on some of my neglected work. Unable, however, to concentrate on figures and balances, I returned to the library and began travelling round the world on Vance's specially built short-wave radio set. I picked up a beautiful Brahms symphony concert from Berlin. After listening to the *Akademische Fest-Ouverture* and the E-minor Symphony, I tuned off and tried to work out a chess problem that Vance had recently posed for me.

Vance returned to the apartment a little before four o'clock that afternoon. He was carrying a moderate-sized package, neatly wrapped in heavy brown paper, which he placed on the centre-table. He seemed unduly serious and scarcely nodded to me.

Currie, having heard him, came in and was about to take his hat and stick, when Vance said:

"Leave them here. I'll be going out again immediately. But you might put the contents of this package in a small hand-bag for me."

Currie took the package from the table and went into the bedroom.

Vance relaxed in his favorite chair in front of the window and abstractedly lighted one of his *Régies*.

"So Markham hasn't shown up yet—eh, what?" he murmured, half to himself. "I phoned him from Whitehall Street to meet me here at four." He glanced at his watch. "He was a bit annoyed with me over the wire. . . . I do hope he comes. It's most important." He rose and began pacing up and down the room; and I realized that something momentous was occupying his thoughts.

Currie came back with the hand-bag and stood at the door, awaiting orders.

"Take it down-stairs and put it in the tonneau of the car," Vance directed, hardly lifting his eyes.

Shortly after Currie had returned, the door-bell rang and Vance came to an expectant halt.

"That should be Markham," he said.

A few moments later Markham entered the library.

"Well, here I am," he announced irritably, without a word of greeting. "I answered your curt summons, though God knows why."

"Really, y' know," Vance returned placatingly, "I didn't mean to be curt. . . ."

"Well, did you have any success in getting your suit?" Markham asked sarcastically, glancing round the room.

Vance nodded.

"Oh, yes, but I didn't bring all of the new integuments with me—only the shoes and gloves. They're in the car now."

Markham waited without speaking: there was something in Vance's manner and tone which belied the trivial signification of his words.

"The truth is, Markham," Vance went on, "I think—that is, I hope—I have found a plausible explanation for the horrors of the last two days."

"In a new sartorial outfit?" Markham asked, with irony.

Vance inclined his head soberly.

"Yes, yes. Just that—in a new sartorial outfit. . . . If I am right, the thing is fiendish beyond words. But there's no other rational explanation. It's inevitable from a purely academic point of view. But the problem is to prove, from a practical point of view, that my theory fits the known facts."

Markham stood by the library table, resting both hands on it and studying Vance with interrogative sharpness.

"What's the theory—and what are the facts you've got to check?"

Vance shook his head slowly.

"The theory can wait," he replied, without looking at Markham. "And the facts cannot be checked here." He drew himself up, threw his cigarette into the fireplace, and picked up his hat and stick. "Come, the car awaits us, old dear," he said, with an effort at lightness.

"We're proceeding to Inwood. And I'd be deuced grateful if you'd refrain from plying me with leading questions on our way out."

I shall never forget the ride to the Stamm estate that afternoon. Nothing was said en route and yet I felt that terrible and final events were portending. A sense of awe-stricken excitement pervaded me; and I think that Markham experienced the same feeling to some degree, for he sat motionless, gazing out of the car window with eyes that did not focus on any of the immediate objects we passed.

The weather was almost unbearable. The terrific storm that had broken over us during our drive to Vance's apartment had neither cleared nor cooled the atmosphere. There was a sultry haze in the air and, in addition to the suffocating humidity, the heat seemed to have increased.

When we arrived at the Stamm residence, Detective Burke admitted us. As we came into the front hall, Heath, who had evidently just entered through the side door, hurried forward.

"They've taken Greeff's body away," he reported. "And I've kept the boys busy on the usual routine stuff. But there's no new information for you. We're up against a blank wall, if you ask me."

Vance looked at him significantly.

"Nothing else on your mind, Sergeant?"

Heath nodded with a slow grin.

"Sure thing. I was waiting for you to ask me. . . . We found the wheelbarrow."

"Stout fella!"

"It was in that clump of trees alongside the East Road, about fifty feet this side of the pot-holes. When I got back Hennessey told me about it, and I thought I would take a look around. You know that open sandy space between the Clove and the Bird Refuge—well, I went over that ground pretty thoroughly, knowing what you had in mind, and I found a narrow wheel-track and a lot of depressions that might easily be footprints. So I guess you were right, sir."

Markham glanced severely from Heath to Vance.

"Right about what?" he asked, with annoyance.

"One of the details connected with Greeff's death," Vance answered. "But wait till I check on the things that led up to the wheelbarrow episode. . . ."

At this moment Leland, with Bernice Stamm at his side, came through the portières of the drawing-room into the front hall. He appeared somewhat embarrassed.

"Miss Stamm and I could not stand the noise," he explained; "so we left the others in the library and came to the drawing-room. It was too sultry outdoors—the house is more bearable."

Vance appeared to dismiss the other's comments as unimportant.

"Is everybody in the library now?" he asked.

"Every one but Stamm. He has spent most of the afternoon setting up a windlass on the other side of the pool. He intends to get that fallen rock out today. He asked me to help him, but it was too hot. And, anyway, I was not in the mood for that sort of thing."

"Where is Stamm now?" Vance asked.

"He has gone down the road, I believe, to get a couple of men to operate the windlass for him."

Bernice Stamm moved toward the front stairs.

"I think I'll go to my room and lie down for a while," she said, with a curious catch in her voice. Leland's troubled eyes followed her as she disappeared slowly up the stairs. Then he turned back to Vance.

"Can I be of any assistance?" he asked. "I probably should have helped Stamm with the rock, but the fact is there were several matters I wanted to talk over with Miss Stamm. She is taking this whole thing far more tragically than she will admit even to herself. She is really at the breaking-point; and I felt that I ought to be with her as much as possible."

"Quite so." Vance studied the man penetratingly.

"Has anything else happened here today that would tend to upset Miss Stamm?"

Leland hesitated. Then he said:

"Her mother sent for me shortly after lunch. She had seen Stamm go down to the pool, and she implored me rather hysterically to bring him back to the house. She was somewhat incoherent in her explanation of why she wanted him here. All I could get out of her was that there was some danger lurking in the pool for him,—the dragon superstition coming back into her mind, no doubt,—and after I had a talk with Mrs. Schwarz, I telephoned Doctor Holliday. He is up-stairs with her now."

Vance kept his eyes on Leland, and did not speak immediately. At length he said:

"We must ask you to remain here for a while."

Leland looked up and met Vance's gaze.

"I will be on the north terrace—if you should want me." He took a deep breath, turned quickly, and walked down the hall.

When he had closed the side door after him, Vance turned to Burke.

"Stay in the hall here till we return," he instructed the detective. "And see that no one goes down to the pool."

Burke saluted and moved away toward the stairs.

"Where's Snitkin, Sergeant?" Vance asked.

"After the wagon came for Greeff's body," Heath informed him, "I told him to wait at the East Road gate."

Vance turned toward the front door.

"That being that, I think we'll hop down to the pool. But we'll take the car as far as the little cement walk, and approach from that side."

Markham looked puzzled, but said nothing; and we followed Vance down the front steps to his car.

We drove down the East Road as far as the gate, picked up Snitkin, and then backed up to the tree-lined cement walk, where Vance halted. When we got out of the car Vance reached into the tonneau and took out the hand-bag that he had directed Currie to put there. Then he led the way down the walk to the low area of ground at the northeast corner of the pool. To our left, near the filter, was a large circular wooden windlass, well anchored in the ground, and beside it lay a coil of heavy sisal rope. But Stamm, evidently, had not yet returned.

"Stamm's a neat chap," Vance commented casually, looking at the windlass. "He's made a pretty good job of that winch. It'll take a lot of energy, though, to get that rock out of the pool. Good exercise, however—excellent for one's psychic balance."

Markham was impatient.

"Did you bring me all the way out here," he asked, "to discuss the advantages of physical exercise?"

"My dear Markham!" Vance reproved him mildly. Then he added sombrely: "It may be I've brought you on an even more foolish errand. And yet—I wonder. . . ."

We were standing at the end of the cement walk. Vance took up his hand-bag and started across the fifteen feet or so, which divided us from the rim of the pool.

"Please stay where you are just a minute," he requested. "I have a bit of an experiment to make."

He crossed the grass to the muddy bank. When he came within a few feet of the water, he bent over, placing the hand-bag in front of him. His body partly shielded it from our view, so that none of us could quite make out what he was doing with it. This particular part of the ground, always moist from its direct contact with the water, was, at this time, unusually soft and yielding, owing to the heavy downpour of rain early in the afternoon.

From where I stood I could see Vance open the bag before him. He reached into it and took out something. Then he bent over almost to the edge of the water, and leaned forward on one hand. After a moment he drew back; and again I saw him reach into the bag. Once more he bent forward, and threw all his weight on his extended hands.

Markham moved a little to one side, in order to get a better view of Vance's activities; but apparently he was unable to see what was going on, for he shrugged impatiently, sighed deeply, and thrust his hands into his pockets with a movement of exasperation. Both Heath and Snitkin stood looking on placidly, without the slightest indication of any emotion.

Then I heard the bag snap shut. Vance knelt on it for several moments, as if inspecting the edge of the pool. Finally he stood up and placed the bag to one side. He reached in his pocket, took out a cigarette, and deliberately lighted it. Slowly he turned, looked at us hesitantly, and beckoned to us to join him.

When we reached him he pointed to the flat surface on the muddy ground, near the water, and asked in a strained voice:

"What do you see?"

We bent over the small section of ground he had indicated; and there, in the mud, were outlined two familiar demarcations. One was like the imprint of a great scaly hoof; and the other resembled the impression of a three-taloned claw.

Markham was leaning over them curiously.

"Good Heavens, Vance! What's the meaning of this? They're like the marks we saw on the bottom of the pool!"

Heath, his serenity shaken for the moment, shifted his startled gaze to Vance's face, but made no comment.

Snitkin had already knelt down in the mud and was inspecting the imprints closely.

"What do you think about them?" Vance asked him.

Snitkin did not reply immediately. He continued his examination of the two marks. Then he slowly got to his feet and nodded several times with thoughtful emphasis.

"They're the same as the ones I made copies of," he declared. "No mistaking 'em, sir." He looked inquiringly at Heath. "But I didn't see these imprints on the bank when I was making the drawings."

"They weren't here then," Vance explained. "But I wanted you to see them, nevertheless—to make sure they were the same as the others. . . . I just made these myself."

"How did you make them—and with what?" Markham demanded angrily.

"With part of the sartorial outfit I purchased today," Vance told him. "The new gloves and the new shoes, don't y' know." Despite his smile his eyes were grave.

He picked up the hand-bag and walked back toward the cement path.

"Come, Markham," he said, "I'll show you what I mean. But we had better go back to the car. It's beastly damp here by the pool."

He entered the spacious tonneau, and we did likewise, wondering. Snitkin stood in the road by the open door, with one foot on the running-board.

Vance opened the bag and, reaching into it, drew out the most unusual pair of gloves I had ever seen. They were made of heavy rubber, with gauntlets extending about six inches above the wrists; and though they had a division for the thumb, they had only two broad tapering fingers. They looked like some monster's three-pronged talons.

"These gloves, Markham," Vance explained, "are technically known as two-fingered diving mittens. They are the United States Navy standard pattern, and are constructed in this fashion for convenience when it is necessary to have the use of the fingers under water. They are adapted to the most difficult types of submarine work. And it was with one of these gloves that I just made the mark on the earth there."

Markham was speechless for a moment; then he tore his fascinated gaze from the gloves and looked up at Vance.

"Do you mean to tell me it was with a pair of gloves like those that the imprints were made on the bottom of the pool?"

Vance nodded and tossed the gloves back into the bag.

"Yes, they explain the claw-marks of the dragon. . . . And here is what made the dragon's hoof-prints in the silt of the pool."

Reaching into the bag again, he brought out a pair of enormous, strange-looking foot-gear. They had heavy solid-brass bottoms with thick leather tops; and across the instep and the ankle were wide leather straps, with huge buckles.

"Diving shoes, Markham," Vance remarked. "Also standard equipment. . . . Look at the corrugations on the metal soles, made to prevent slipping."

He turned one of the shoes over, and there, etched, in the brass, were scale-like ridges and grooves, such as are found in the tread of an automobile tire.

There was a long silence. This revelation of Vance's had started, in all of us, new processes of speculative thought. Heath's face was rigid and dour, and Snitkin stood staring at the shoes with an air of fascinated curiosity. It was Markham who first roused himself.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, in a low tone, as if expressing his feelings aloud, but without reference to any listener. "I'm beginning to

see. . . ." Then he turned his eyes quickly to Vance. "But what about the suit you were going to get?"

"I saw the suit when I purchased the shoes and gloves," Vance replied, inspecting his cigarette thoughtfully. "It really wasn't necessary to own it, once I had seen it, and its workability had been explained to me. But I had to make sure, don't y' know,—it was essential to find the missing integers of my theory. However, I needed the shoes and gloves to experiment with. I wanted to prove, d' ye see, the existence of the diving suit."

Markham inclined his head comprehendingly, but there was still a look of awe and incredulity in his eyes.

"I see what you mean," he murmured. "There's a diving suit and a similar pair of shoes and gloves somewhere about here. . . ."

"Yes, yes. Somewhere hereabouts. And there's also an oxygen tank. . . ." His voice drifted off, and his eyes became dreamy. "They must be near at hand," he added, "—somewhere on the estate."

"The dragon's outfit!" mumbled Markham, as if following some inner train of thought.

"Exactly." Vance nodded and threw his cigarette out of the car window. "And that outfit should be somewhere near the pool. There wasn't time to carry it away. It couldn't have been taken back to the house—that would have been too dangerous. And it couldn't have been left where it might have been accidentally discovered. . . . There was design in these crimes—a careful plotting of details. Nothing haphazard, nothing fortuitous—"

He broke off suddenly and, rising quickly, stepped out of the car.

"Come, Markham! There's a chance!" There was suppressed excitement in his voice. "By Jove! it's the *only* chance. The equipment must be there—it couldn't be anywhere else. It's a hideous idea—gruesome beyond words—but maybe . . . maybe."

## 20. THE FINAL LINK

(Monday, August 13; 5 p.m.)

Vance hastened back down the cement walk toward the pool, with the rest of us close behind him, not knowing where he was leading us and with only a vague idea of his object. But there was something in his tone, as well as in his dynamic action, which had taken a swift and strong hold on all of us. I believe that Markham and Heath, like myself, felt that the end of this terrible case was near, and that Vance, through some subtle contact with the truth, had found the road which led to its culmination.

Half-way down the walk Vance turned into the shrubbery at the right, motioning us to follow.

"Be careful to keep out of sight of the house," he called over his shoulder, as he headed for the vault.

When he had reached the great iron door he looked about him carefully, glanced up at the high cliff, and then, with a swift movement to his pocket, took out the vault key. Unlocking the door, he pushed it inward slowly to avoid, I surmised, any unnecessary noise. For the second time that day we entered the dank close atmosphere of the old Stamm tomb, and Vance carefully closed the door. The beam from Heath's flashlight split the darkness, and Vance took the light from the Sergeant's hand.

"I'll need that for a moment," he explained, and stepped toward the grim tier of coffins on the right.

Slowly Vance moved the light along those gruesome rows of boxes, with their corroded bronze fittings and clouded silver name-plates. He worked systematically, rubbing off the tarnish of the silver with his free hand, so that he might read the inscriptions. When he had come to the bottom tier he paused before a particularly old oak coffin and bent down.

"Sylvanus Anthony Stamm, 1790-1871," he read aloud. He ran the light along the top of the coffin and touched it at several points with his fingers. "This should be the one, I think," he murmured. "There's very little dust on it, and it's the oldest coffin here. Disintegration of the body will be far advanced and the bone structure will have crumbled, leaving more room for—other things." He turned to Heath. "Sergeant, will you and Snitkin get this coffin out on the floor. I'd like a peep in it."

Markham, who had stood at one side in the shadows watching Vance intently and doubtfully, came quickly forward.

"You can't do that, Vance!" he protested. "You can't break into a private coffin this way. You can be held legally accountable. . . ."

"This is no time for technicalities, Markham," Vance returned in a bitter, imperious voice. . . . "Come, Sergeant. Are you with me?"

Heath stepped forward without hesitation. "I'm with you, sir," he said resolutely. "I think I know what we're going to find."

Markham looked squarely at Vance a moment; then moved aside and turned his back. Knowing what this unspoken acquiescence on Markham's part meant to a man of his precise and conventional nature, I felt a great wave of admiration for him.

The coffin was moved from its rack to the floor of the vault, and Vance bent over the lid.

"Ah! The screws are gone." He took hold of the lid, and with but little effort it slid aside.

With the Sergeant's help the heavy top was removed. Beneath was the inner casket. The lid of this was also loose, and Vance easily lifted it off and placed it on the floor. Then he played the flashlight on the interior of the casket.

At first I thought the thing I saw was some unearthly creature with a huge head and a tapering body, like some illustrations I had seen of Martians. I drew in an involuntary, audible breath: I was shocked and, at the same time, frightened. More monsters! My one instinct was to rush out into the clean sunlight, away from such a hideous and terrifying sight.

"That's a duplicate of the suit I saw today, Markham," came Vance's steady, matter-of-fact voice. He played his light down upon it. "A shallow-water diving suit—the kind used largely in pearl-fishing. There's the three-light screw helmet with its hinged face-plate. . . . And there's the one-piece United States Navy diving dress of rubberized canvas." He bent over and touched the gray material. "Yes, yes, of course—cut down the front. That was for getting out of it quickly without unscrewing the helmet and unlacing the backs of the legs." He reached into the casket alongside the diving suit and drew forth two rubber gloves and a pair of brass-soled shoes. "And here are duplicates of the shoes and gloves I brought here with me." (They were both caked with dried mud.) "These are what made the dragon's imprints on the bottom of the pool."

Markham was gazing down into the casket, like a man stunned by a sudden and awe-inspiring revelation.

"And hidden in that coffin!" he muttered, as if to himself.

"Apparently the one safe place on the estate," Vance nodded. "And this particular coffin was chosen because of its age. There would be little more than bones left, after all these years; and with a slight pressure the frame of the chest walls would have caved in, making space for the safe disposal of this outfit." Vance paused a moment, and then went on: "This type of suit, d'ye see, doesn't require an air pump and hose connection. An oxygen tank can be clamped to the breast-plate and attached to the intake-valve of the helmet. . . . See this?"

He pointed to the foot of the casket, and I saw, for the first time, lying on the bottom, a metal cylinder about eighteen inches long.

"That's the tank. It can be placed horizontally across the breast-plate, without interfering with the operations of the diver."

As he started to lift out the oxygen tank we heard a clinking sound, as if the tank had come in contact with another piece of metal.

Vance's face became suddenly animated.

"Ah! I wonder. . . ."

He moved the tank to one side and reached down into the depths of that ancient coffin. When his hand came out he was holding a vicious-looking grappling-iron. It was fully two feet long and at one end were three sharp steel hooks. For a moment I did not grasp the significance of this discovery; but when Vance touched the prongs with his finger I saw that they were clotted with blood, and the horrible truth swept over me.

Holding the grappling-iron toward Markham, he said in a curiously hushed voice:

"The dragon's claws—the same that tore Montague's breast—and Greeff's."

Markham's fascinated eyes clung to the deadly instrument.

"Still—I don't quite see—"



"This grapple was the one missing factor in the hideous problem," Vance interrupted. "Not that it would have mattered greatly, once we had found the diving suit and had explained the imprints in the pool. But it does clarify the situation, don't y' know."

He tossed the iron back into the casket and replaced the cover. At a sign from him Heath and Snitkin lifted the heavy oak lid back to the coffin and returned the ancient box, with its terrible and revelatory contents, to its original position on the lower tier.

"We're through here—for the present, at any rate," Vance said, as we passed out into the sunlight. He locked the door of the vault and dropped the key back into his pocket. "We had better be returning to the house, now that we have the solution to the crimes. . . ."

He paused to light a cigarette; then looked grimly at the District Attorney.

"Y' see, Markham," he said, "there was, after all, a dragon involved in the case—a fiendish and resourceful dragon. He had vengeance and hate and ruthlessness in his heart. He could live under water, and he had talons of steel with which to tear his victims. But, above all, he had the shrewd calculating mind of man—and when the mind of man becomes perverted and cruel it is more vicious than that of any other creature on earth."

Markham nodded thoughtfully.

"I'm beginning to understand. But there are too many things that need explaining."

"I think I can explain them all," Vance replied, "now that the basic pattern is complete."

Heath was scowling deeply, watching Vance with a look which combined skepticism with admiration.

"Well, if you don't mind, Mr. Vance," he said apologetically, "I'd like you to explain one thing to me right now.—How did the fellow in the diving suit get out of the pool without leaving footprints? You're not going to tell me he had wings, too, are you?"

"No, Sergeant." Vance waved his hand toward the pile of lumber beside the vault. "There's the answer. The point bothered me too until this afternoon; but knowing he could have left the pool only by walking, I realized that there must inevitably be a simple and rational explanation for the absence of footprints—especially when I knew that he was weighted down and wearing heavy diving shoes. When I approached the vault a few minutes ago, the truth suddenly dawned on me." He smiled faintly. "We should have seen it long ago, for we ourselves demonstrated the method by doing exactly the same thing when we walked out over the bottom of the pool. The murderer placed one of these boards between the end of the cement walk and the edge of the pool,—the width of that stretch of flat ground is little more than the length of the timber. Then, when he had walked out of the pool over the board, he simply carried it back and threw it on the pile of lumber from which he had taken it."

"Sure!" Heath agreed with a kind of shamefaced satisfaction. "That's what made that mark on the grass that looked like a heavy suit-case had been set there."

"Quite right," nodded Vance. "It was merely the indentation made by one end of the heavy plank when the chappie in the diving suit stepped on it. . . ."

Markham, who had been listening closely, interrupted.

"The technical details of the crime are all very well, Vance, but what of the person who perpetrated these hideous acts? We should make some definite move immediately."

Vance looked up at him sadly and shook his head.

"No, no—not immediately, Markham," he said. "The thing is too obscure and complicated. There are too many unresolved factors in it—too many things to be considered. We have caught no one red-handed; and we must, therefore, avoid precipitancy in making an arrest. Otherwise, our entire case will collapse. It's one thing to know who the culprit is and how the crimes were committed, but it's quite another thing to prove the culprit's guilt."

"How do you suggest that we go about it?"

Vance thought a moment before answering. Then he said:

"It's a delicate matter. Perhaps it would be wise to make subtle suggestions and bold innuendos that may bring forth the very admission that we need. But certainly we must not take any direct action too quickly. We must discuss the situation before making a decision. We have hours ahead of us till nightfall." He glanced at his watch. "We had better be going back to the house. We can settle the matter there and decide on the best course to pursue."

Markham acquiesced with a nod, and we set off through the shrubbery toward the car.

As we came out into the East Road a car drove up from the direction of Spuyten Duyvil, and Stamm and two other men who looked like workers got out and approached us.

"Anything new?" Stamm asked. And then, without waiting for an answer, he said: "I'm going down to get that rock out of the pool."

"We have some news for you," Vance said, "—but not here. When you've finished the job," he suggested, "come up to the house. We'll be there."

Stamm lifted his eyebrows slightly.

"Oh, all right. It'll take me only an hour or so." And he turned and disappeared down the cement path, the two workmen following him.

We drove quickly to the house. Vance, instead of entering at the front door, walked directly round the north side of the house, to the terrace overlooking the pool.

Leland was seated in a large wicker chair, smoking placidly and gazing out at the cliffs opposite. He barely greeted us as we came forward, and Vance, pausing only to light a fresh cigarette, sat down beside him.

"The game's up, Leland," he said in a tone which, for all its casualness, was both firm and grim. "We know the truth."

Leland's expression did not change.

"What truth?" he asked, almost as if he felt no curiosity about the matter.

"The truth about the murders of Montague and Greeff."

"I rather suspected you would find it out," he returned calmly. (I was amazed at the man's self-control.) "I saw you down at the pool a while ago. I imagine I know what you were doing there. . . . You have visited the vault also?"

"Yes," Vance admitted. "We inspected the coffin of Sylvanus Anthony Stamm. We found the diving equipment in it—and the three-pronged grappling-iron."

"And the oxygen tank?" Leland asked, without shifting his eyes from the cliffs beyond.

Vance nodded.

"Yes, the tank too.—The whole procedure is quite clear now. Everything about the crimes, I believe, is explained."

Leland bowed his head, and with trembling fingers attempted to repack his pipe.

"In a way, I am glad," he said, in a very low voice. "Perhaps it is better—for every one."

Vance regarded the man with a look closely akin to pity.

"There's one thing I don't entirely understand, Mr. Leland," he said at length. "Why did you telephone the Homicide Bureau after Montague's disappearance? You only planted the seed of suspicion of foul play, when the episode might have passed as an accident."

Leland turned his head slowly, frowned, and appeared to weigh the question that Vance had put to him. Finally he shook his head despondently.

"I do not know—exactly—why I did that," he replied.

Vance's penetrating eyes held the man's gaze for a brief space of time. Then he asked:

"What are you going to do about it, Mr. Leland?"

Leland glanced down at his pipe, fumbled with it for a moment, and then rose.

"I think I had better go up-stairs to Miss Stamm—if you don't mind. It might be best if it were I who told her." Vance nodded. "I believe you are right."

Leland had scarcely entered the house and closed the door when Markham sprang to his feet and started after him; but Vance stepped up quickly and put a firm restraining hand on the District Attorney's shoulder.

"Stay here, Markham," he said, with grim and commanding insistence.

"But you can't do this thing, Vance!" Markham protested, trying to throw off the other's hold. "You have no right to contravene justice this way. You've done it before—and it was outrageous!"<sup>[17]</sup>

"Please believe me, Markham," Vance returned sternly, "it's the best thing." Then his eyes opened wide, and a look of astonishment came into them. "Oh, my word!" he said. "You don't yet understand. . . . Wait—wait." And he forced Markham back into his chair.

A moment later Stamm, in his bathing suit, emerged from one of the *cabañas* and crossed the coping of the filter to the windlass beyond. The two men he had brought with him from Spuyten Duyvil had already attached the rope to the drum and stood at the hand-cranks, awaiting Stamm's orders. Stamm picked up the loose end of the coiled rope and, throwing it over his shoulder, waded into the shallow water along the foot of the cliff until he came to the submerged rock. We watched him for some time looping the rope over the rock and endeavoring to dislodge it with the assistance of the men operating the winch. Twice the rope slipped, and once a stake anchoring the winch was dislodged.

It was while the men were repairing this stake that Leland returned softly to the terrace and sat down again beside Vance. His face was pale and set, and a great sadness had come into his eyes. Markham, who had started slightly when Leland appeared, now sat looking at him curiously. Leland's eyes moved indifferently toward the pool where Stamm was struggling with the heavy rope.

"Bernice has suspected the truth all along," Leland remarked to Vance, in a voice barely above a whisper. . . . "I think, though," he added, "she feels better, now that you gentlemen understand everything. . . . She is very brave. . . ."

Across the sinister waters of the Dragon Pool, there came to us a curious rumbling and crackling sound, like sharp, distant thunder. As I instinctively glanced toward the cliffs I saw the entire pinnacle of the rocky projection we had examined the day before, topple and slide downward toward the spot where Stamm was standing breast-deep in the water.

The whole terrible episode happened so quickly that the details of it are, even today, somewhat confused in my mind. But as the great mass of rock slid down the cliff, a shower of small stones in its wake, I caught a fleeting picture of Stamm glancing upward and then striving frantically to get out of the path of the crashing boulder, which the rainstorm earlier in the afternoon must have loosened. But his arms had become entangled in the rope which he was attempting to fasten about the rock in the pool, and he was unable to disengage himself. I got a momentary glimpse of his panic-stricken face just before the great mass of rock caught him and pinned him beneath the waters.

Simultaneously with the terrific splash, a fearful, hysterical shriek rang out from the balcony high above our heads; and I knew that old Mrs. Stamm had witnessed the tragedy.

We all sat in stunned silence for several seconds. Then I was conscious of Leland's soft voice.

"A merciful death," he commented.

Vance took a long, deep inhalation on his cigarette.

"Merciful—and just," he said.

The two men at the windlass had entered the water and were wading rapidly toward the place where Stamm had been buried; but it was only too obvious that their efforts would be futile. The great mass of rock had caught Stamm squarely, and there could be no hope of rescue.

The first sudden shock of the catastrophe past, we rose to our feet, almost with one accord. It was then that the hall door opened and Doctor Holliday, pale and upset, lumbered out on the terrace.

"Oh, there you are, Mr. Leland." He hesitated, as if he did not know exactly how to proceed. Then he blurted out:

"Mrs. Stamm's dead. Sudden shock—she saw it happen. You had better break the news to her daughter."

## 21. THE END OF THE CASE

(Monday, August 13; 10 p.m.)

Late that night Markham and Heath and I were sitting with Vance on his roof-garden, drinking champagne and smoking.

We had remained at the Stamm estate only a short time after Stamm's death. Heath had stayed on to supervise the detail work which closed the case. The pool had been drained again, and Stamm's body had been taken from beneath the rock boulder. It was mutilated beyond recognition. Leland, with Miss Stamm's assistance, had taken charge of all the domestic affairs.

Vance and Markham and I had not finished dinner until nearly ten o'clock, and shortly afterward Sergeant Heath joined us. It was still hot and sultry, and Vance had produced a bottle of his 1904 Pol Roger.

"An amazin' crime," he remarked, lying back lethargically in his chair. "Amazin'—and yet simple and rational."

"That may be true," Markham returned. "But there are many details of it which are still obscure to me."

"Once its basic scheme is clear," Vance said, "the various shapes and colors of the mosaic take their places almost automatically." He emptied his glass of champagne.

"It was easy enough for Stamm to plan and execute the first murder. He brought together a house-party of warring elements, on any member of which suspicion might fall if criminality were proved in connection with Montague's disappearance. He felt sure his guests would go swimming in the pool and that Montague, with his colossal vanity, would take the first dive. He deliberately encouraged the heavy drinking, and he himself pretended to overindulge. But as a matter of fact, he was the only member of the party, with the possible exception of Leland and Miss Stamm, who did no drinking."

"But Vance—"

"Oh, I know. He gave the appearance of having drunk heavily all day. But that was only part of his plan. He was probably never more sober in his life than when the rest of the party left the house for the swimming pool. During the entire evening he sat on the davenport in the library, and surreptitiously poured his liquor into the jardinière holding the rubber-plant."

Markham looked up quickly.

"That was why you were so interested in the soil of that plant?"

"Exactly. Stamm had probably emptied two quarts of whisky into the pot. I took up a good bit of the soil on my finger; and it was well saturated with alcohol."

"But Doctor Holliday's report—"

"Oh, Stamm was actually in a state of acute alcoholism when the doctor examined him. You remember the quart of Scotch he ordered from Trainor, just before the others went down to the pool. When he himself came back to the library, after the murder, he undoubtedly drank the entire bottle; and when Leland found him his state of alcoholic collapse was quite genuine. Thus he gave the whole affair an air of verisimilitude."

Vance lifted the champagne from the wine cooler and poured himself another glass. When he had taken a few sips he lay back again in his chair.

"What Stamm did," he continued, "was to hide his diving outfit and the grapnel in his car in the garage earlier in the day. Then, feigning a state of almost complete drunken insensibility, he waited till every one had gone to the pool. Immediately he went to the garage, and drove—or perhaps coasted—down the East Road to the little cement path. He donned his diving suit, which he put on over his dinner clothes, and attached the oxygen tank—a matter of but a few minutes. Then he put the board in place, and entered the pool. He was reasonably sure that Montague would take the first dive; and he was able to select almost the exact spot in the pool toward which Montague would head. He had his grapnel with him, so that he could reach out in any direction and get his victim. The water in the pool is quite clear and the flood-lights would give him a good view of Montague. The technique of the crime for an experienced diver like Stamm was dashed simple."

Vance made a slight gesture with his hand.

"There can be little doubt as to exactly what happened. Montague took his dive, and Stamm, standing on the sloping basin opposite the deep channel, simply hooked him with the grappling-iron—which accounts for the wounds on Montague's chest. The force of the dive, I imagine, drove Montague's head violently against the metal oxygen tank clamped to the breast-plate of Stamm's helmet, and fractured his skull. With his victim stunned and perhaps unconscious, Stamm proceeded to choke him under the water until he was quite limp. It was no great effort for Stamm to drag him to the car and throw him in. Next Stamm replaced the board, doffed his diving suit, hid it in the old coffin in the vault, and drove to the pot-holes, where he dumped Montague's body. Montague's broken bones were the result of the rough way in which Stamm chucked him into the rock pit; and the abrasions on his feet were undoubtedly caused by Stamm's dragging him over the cement walk to the parked car. Afterward Stamm drove the car back to the garage, returned cautiously to the library, and proceeded to consume the quart of whisky."

Vance took a long inhalation on his cigarette, exhaling the smoke slowly.

"It was an almost perfect alibi."

"But the time element, Vance—" Markham began.

"Stamm had plenty of time. At least fifteen minutes elapsed before the others had changed to their bathing suits; and this was twice as much time as Stamm required to coast down the hill in his car, slip into his diving suit, put the piece of lumber in place, and station himself in the pool. And, certainly, it took him not more than fifteen minutes, at the most, to replace the board, hide his diving suit, deposit his victim in the pot-hole, and return to the house."

"But he was taking a desperate chance," Markham commented.

"On the contr'y, he was taking no chance at all. If his calculations worked out successfully, there was no way in which the plot could go awry. Stamm had all the time necessary; he had the equipment; and he was working out of sight of any possible witnesses. If

Montague had not dived into the pool, as was his custom, it would have meant only that the murder would have to be postponed. In that case Stamm would simply have walked out of the pool, returned to the house, and bided his time."

Vance frowned wistfully and turned his head lazily toward Markham.

"There was, however, one fatal error in the calculations," he said. "Stamm was too cautious—he lacked boldness: he covered his gamble, as it were. As I have said, in planning the house-party he invited persons who had reason to want Montague out of the way, his idea being to supply the authorities with suspects in the event his scheme did not work out. But, in doing so, he overlooked the fact that some of these very people were familiar with diving apparatus and with his own under-sea work in the tropics—people who, having this information, might have figured out how the murder was committed, provided the body was found. . . ."

"You mean," asked Markham, "that you think Leland saw through the plot from the first?"

"There can be little doubt," Vance returned, "that when Montague failed to come up from his dive, Leland strongly suspected that Stamm had committed a crime. Naturally, he was torn between his sense of justice and fair play, on the one hand, and his love for Bernice Stamm, on the other. My word, what a predicament! He compromised by telephoning to the Homicide Bureau and insisting that an investigation be instigated. He wouldn't definitely expose or accuse the brother of the woman he loved. But, as an honorable man, he couldn't bring himself to countenance what he believed to be deliberate murder. Y' know, Markham, he was infinitely relieved when I told him this afternoon that I knew the truth. But meanwhile the man had suffered no end."

"Do you think any one else suspected?" Markham asked.

"Oh, yes. Bernice Stamm suspected the truth—Leland himself told us so this afternoon. That's why the Sergeant, when he first saw her, got the impression she was not primarily worried about Montague's disappearance.—And I feel pretty sure that Tatum also guessed the truth. Don't forget, he had been on the trip to Cocos Island with Stamm and was familiar with the possibilities of diving suits. But the present situation no doubt seemed a bit fantastic to him, and he couldn't voice his suspicion because there was apparently no way of proving it.—And Greeff, too, having helped to equip some of Stamm's expeditions, undoubtedly had a fairly accurate idea as to what had happened to Montague."

"And the others also?" asked Markham.

"No, I doubt if either Mrs. McAdam or Ruby Steele really suspected the truth; but I think both of them felt that something was wrong. Ruby Steele was attracted by Montague—which accounts, perversely, for the antagonism between them. And she was jealous of Bernice Stamm as well as of Teeny McAdam. When Montague disappeared, I have no doubt the idea of foul play did enter her mind. That's why she accused Leland: she hated him because of his superiority."

Vance paused a moment and went on.

"Mrs. McAdam's mental reactions in the matter were a bit subtler. I doubt if she entirely understood her own emotions. Unquestionably, however, she too suspected foul play. Although the fact that Montague had faded from the scene would have favored her personal ends, I imagine she had some lingerin' sentiment for the chap, and that's why she handed us Greeff and Leland as possibilities—both of whom she disliked. And I imagine also that her scream was purely emotional, while her later indifference indicated the dominance of her scheming mind over her heart. The horror of the possibility of Montague's having been murdered accounted for her violent reaction when I told her of the splash in the pool: she pictured terrible things happening to him. The old feminine heart at work again, Markham."

There were several moments of silence. Then Markham said, almost inaudibly, as if stating to himself some point in a train of thought:

"And of course the car that Leland and Greeff and Miss Stamm heard was Stamm's."

"Unquestionably," Vance returned. "The time element fitted exactly."

Markham nodded, but there was a troubled reservation in his frown.

"But still," he said, "there was that note from the Bruett woman."

"My dear Markham! There's no such person. Stamm created Ellen Bruett to account for Montague's disappearance. He was hoping that the whole affair would simply blow over as a commonplace elopement. He wrote the rendezvous note himself, and put it in Montague's pocket after he returned from the pool that night. And you remember that he indicated where we could find it, when he opened the clothes-closet door. A clever ruse, Markham; and the sound of the car on the East Road bore out the theory, though Stamm probably didn't take the sound of the car into consideration at all."

"No wonder my men couldn't find any trace of the dame," grumbled the Sergeant.

Markham was gazing at his cigar with a thoughtful abstracted look.

"I can understand the Bruett factor," he remarked at length; "but how do you account for Mrs. Stamm's uncannily accurate prophecies?"

Vance smiled mildly.

"They were not prophecies, Markham," he replied, with a sad note in his voice. "They were all based on real knowledge of what was going on, and were the pathetic attempts of an old woman to protect her son. What Mrs. Stamm didn't actually see from her window, she probably suspected; and nearly everything she said to us was deliberately calculated to divert us from the truth. That's why she sent for us at the outset."

Vance drew deeply on his cigarette again, and looked out wistfully over the tree-tops.

"Much of her talk about the dragon was insincere, although there is no question that the hallucination concerning the dragon in the pool had taken a powerful hold on her weakened mind. And this partial belief in the existence of a water-monster formed the basis of her defense of Stamm. We don't know how much she saw from her window. Personally, I think she felt instinctively that Stamm had plotted the murder of Montague, and I also think that she heard the car going down the East Road and suspected what its errand was. When she listened at the top of the stairs that first night and heard Stamm protesting, the shock produced by the realization of her fears caused her to scream and to send for us later to tell us that no one in the house was guilty of any crime."

Vance sighed.

"It was a tragic effort, Markham; and all her other efforts to mislead us were equally tragic. She attempted to build up the dragon

hypothesis because she herself was not quite rational on the subject. Moreover, she knew Stamm would take the body away and hide it—which accounts for her seeming prophecy that the body would not be found in the pool. And she was able to figure out where Stamm would hide the body—in fact, she may even have been able to tell, from the sound, approximately how far down the road Stamm drove the car before returning to the garage. When she screamed at the time the pool was emptied, she was simply making a dramatic gesture to emphasize her theory that the dragon had flown off with Montague's body."

Vance stretched his legs and settled even deeper into his chair.

"Mrs. Stamm's prognostications of the second tragedy were merely another effort toward foisting the dragon theory upon us. She undoubtedly suspected that her son, having succeeded in murdering Montague, would, if the opportunity presented itself, also put Greeff out of the way. I imagine she knew all about Greeff's financial plottings, and sensed Stamm's hatred for him. She may even have seen, or heard, her son and Greeff go down toward the pool last night and have anticipated the terrible thing that was going to happen. You recall how frantically she endeavored to bolster up her theory of the dragon when she heard of Greeff's disappearance. I had a suspicion then that she knew more than she would admit. That was why I went directly to the potholes to see if Greeff's body was there. . . . Oh, yes, that tortured old woman knew of her son's guilt. When she begged Leland to bring him back into the house this afternoon, saying that some danger was lurking in the pool, it wasn't a premonition. It was only her instinctive fear that some retribution might overtake her son at the scene of his crimes."

"And it did overtake him," mumbled Markham. "A curious coincidence."

"He sure had it coming to him," put in the practical Sergeant. "But what gets me is the trouble he took to avoid leaving footprints."

"Stamm had to protect himself, Sergeant," Vance explained. "Any noticeable imprints of his diving shoes would have given away the entire plot. Therefore, he took the precaution of placing a board over that patch of ground."

"But he took no precaution against his footprints on the bottom of the pool," Markham submitted.

"True," Vance returned. "It had not occurred to him, I imagine, that the imprints he made under the water would remain; for he was certainly a frightened man when the marks of his diving shoes came to light: he was afraid they would be recognized for what they were. I admit that the truth did not occur to me at the time. But, later, a suspicion of the truth dawned on me; and that is why I wished to verify my theory by searching for a diving suit and shoes and gloves. There are but few companies that make standard diving equipment in this country, and I had little trouble in locating the firm from which Stamm had acquired his outfit."

"But what about Leland?" Markham asked. "Surely he would have recognized the tracks."

"Oh, to be sure. In fact, the moment I mentioned those strange tracks to him, he suspected immediately how they had been made; and when he saw Snitkin's drawings he knew the truth. I think he rather hoped that we also would see it, although he could not bring himself to tell us directly because of his loyalty to Bernice Stamm. Miss Stamm herself suspected the truth—you recall how upset she was when I mentioned the queer footprints to her. And Mrs. Stamm, too, knew the significance of those imprints when she heard of them. But she very cleverly turned them to her own purpose and used them to support the theory of the dragon that she was endeavoring to instill in us."

Markham filled his glass.

"That part of it is all clear," he said, after a short silence. "But there are certain points connected with Greeff's murder that I don't yet understand."

Vance did not speak at once. First he lighted a fresh cigarette slowly and meditatively. Then he said:

"I can't make up my mind, Markham, whether Greeff's murder was planned for this particular week-end, or was suddenly decided on. But the possibility unquestionably was at the back of Stamm's mind when he planned the party. There can be no doubt that he detested Greeff and also feared him; and, with his perverted mind, he saw no way of eliminating the menace presented by Greeff except through murder. What led Stamm to his decision to do away with Greeff last night was undoubtedly the amazing amount of dragon talk that followed the finding of the imprints on the bottom of the pool, and the claw-like tears down Montague's chest. He saw no reason why he should not continue to build up this outlandish theory of the dragon. As long as the circumstances of Montague's death appeared entirely irrational and fantastic, Stamm, no doubt, felt safe from apprehension; and in this state of false security, he sought to repeat the irrationality of Montague's death in Greeff's murder. He argued, I imagine, that if he were safe from suspicion as a result of the dragonish implications in Montague's murder, he would be equally safe from suspicion if Greeff were disposed of in a similar manner. That's why he duplicated the technique so carefully. He struck Greeff over the head to make a wound similar to the one on Montague. He then strangled Greeff, in order to reproduce the throat marks; and, that accomplished, he used the grapnel on Greeff's chest, thus reproducing the supposed dragon's claw-marks. He then carried the murder to its logical extreme—or, rather, to its *reductio ad absurdum*—by chucking the fellow into the pot-hole."

"I can see how his mind was working," Markham admitted. "But in Greeff's case he had to create the opportunity for the crime."

"Quite so. But that wasn't difficult. After Stamm's vicious outburst Saturday night, Greeff was only too glad to accept the reconciliation Stamm offered him last night in the library. You recall that Leland told us they sat for hours talking amicably before retiring. What they probably talked about was the prospect of a new expedition, and Greeff was delighted to be able to offer his help. Then, when they had gone up-stairs, Stamm undoubtedly invited Greeff into his own room for a last drink, later suggesting that they go for a walk to continue the discussion; and the two went out together. It was at that time that both Leland and Trainor heard the side door being unbolted."

Vance again sipped his champagne.

"How Stamm inveigled Greeff into the vault is something we'll never know. However, it's a point of no importance, for certainly Greeff was in a frame of mind to acquiesce in any suggestion Stamm might have made. Stamm may have told Greeff that he was able to explain Montague's death if the other would go into the vault with him. Or, it may have been a more commonplace invitation—the expression of a desire to inspect the masonry after the heavy rains. But whatever the means used by Stamm, we know that Greeff did enter the vault with him last night. . . ."

"The gardenia, of course—and the bloodstains," Markham murmured.

"Oh, yes; it was quite evident. . . . And after Stamm had killed Greeff and mutilated him exactly as he had mutilated Montague, he

took him down to the pot-holes in the wheelbarrow, over the sandy ground along the foot of the cliff, where he would not attract the attention of any guard that might have been stationed on the East Road."

Heath gave a gratified grunt.

"And then he left the wheelbarrow in that bunch of trees, and pussy-footed back to the house."

"Exactly, Sergeant. Moreover, the grating metallic noise that Leland heard was obviously the creaking of the rusty hinges of the vault door; and the other sound which Leland described could have been nothing but the wheelbarrow. And, despite all Stamm's caution on re-entering the house, both Leland and Trainor heard him throw the bolt."

Vance sighed.

"It was not a perfect murder, Markham, but it had the elements of perfection in it. It was a bold murder, too; for if either of the murders were solved, both would be solved. It was a double gamble—the placing of two chips, instead of one, on a selected number."

Again Markham nodded sombrely.

"That part is clear enough now," he said. "But why should the key to the vault have been found in Tatum's room?"

"That was part of Stamm's fundamental mistake. As I have said, Stamm was overcautious. He didn't have the courage to carry through his plot without building bridges. He may have had the key for years, or he may have secured it recently from Mrs. Stamm's trunk. But really, it doesn't matter. Once he had used it for his purpose, he could not throw it away, for obviously he intended to remove the diving suit from the vault when the first opportunity offered. He could have hidden the key in the meantime; but if the diving suit had been discovered in the vault by some one's tearing down a wall or breaking in the door, suspicion would immediately have fallen on him, as it was his own diving suit. Therefore, in an effort to protect himself in this remote eventuality, he probably put the key first in Greeff's room, to point suspicion to Greeff. Then, when the opportunity to murder Greeff arose, Stamm planted the key in Tatum's room. Stamm liked Leland and wanted Bernice to marry him—which, incidentally, was the primary motive for his getting rid of Montague—and he certainly would not have tried to throw suspicion on Leland. You will remember that I first searched Greeff's room—I thought that the key might be there, inasmuch as there was a possibility we would think that Greeff had merely run away. But when it was not there I looked for it in Tatum's room. Luckily we found it and didn't have to break into the vault—which I would certainly have insisted upon if there had been no other means of entering."

"But what I still don't understand, Vance," Markham persisted, "is why the key should have interested you in the first place."

"Neither do I—entirely," Vance returned. "And it's much too hot tonight to indulge in psychological analyses of my mental quirks. Let's say, for brevity, that my idea about the key was mere guesswork. As you know, the vault fascinated me because of its strategic position; and I couldn't see how else the first murder could have been so neatly accomplished unless the vault had been used in some way. It was most convenient, don't y' know. But the entire matter was far from clear in my mind. In fact, it was dashed vague. However, I thought it worth determining, and that's why I went to Mrs. Stamm and demanded to know the hiding-place of the key. I frightened her into telling me, for she didn't associate the vault with Stamm's machinations. When I discovered that the key had disappeared from its hiding-place, I was more convinced than ever that it was a factor in the solution of our problem."

"But how, in the name of Heaven," asked Markham, "did you first hit upon the idea that Stamm was the guilty person? He was the only person in the house that seemed to have a good alibi."

Vance shook his head slowly.

"No, Markham old dear; he was the only member of the party who did *not* have an alibi. And it was for that reason that I had my eye on him from the first—although I admit there were other possibilities. Stamm, of course, thought that he had built up a perfect alibi, at the same time hoping that the murder would pass as a mere departure. But when Montague's murder was established, Stamm's position was really weaker than that of any of the others; for he was the only one who was not standing beside the pool at the time Montague dived in. It would have been difficult for any one of the others to have murdered Montague in the circumstances, just as it would have been impossible for Stamm to have murdered him if he had actually been in a state of acute alcoholism. It was this combination of circumstances that gave me my first inkling of the truth. Naturally, Stamm couldn't have gone to the pool with the others and still have accomplished his purpose; and, reasoning from this premise, I arrived at the conclusion that it was possible for him to have feigned drunkenness by secretly disposing of his liquor, and then made his drunkenness a reality after he had returned to the house. When I learned that he had spent the entire evening on the davenport in the library, I naturally became interested in the jardinière holding the rubber-plant at the head of the davenport."

"But, Vance," protested Markham, "if you were so certain from the first that the crime was rational and commonplace, why all the silly pother about a dragon?"

"It was not silly. There was always the remote possibility that some strange fish, or sea-monster, had been responsible for Montague's death. Even the greatest zoologists understand but little about aquatic life: it is positively amazin' how meagre our knowledge of under-water creatures really is. The breeding of the Betta, for instance, has been going on for decades, and with all our experimentation with this labyrinth family, no one knows whether the *Betta pugnax* is a nest-builder or a mouthbreeder. Mrs. Stamm was quite right when she ridiculed scientific knowledge of submarine life. And you must not forget, Markham, that Stamm was an ardent fish hunter, and that he brought back to this country all kinds of rare specimens about which practically nothing is known. Scientifically, the superstition of the pool could not be ignored. But, I admit, I did not take the matter very seriously. I clung childishly to the trodden paths, for life has a most disappointin' way of proving commonplace and rational when we are hopin' most passionately for the bizarre and supernatural. Anyway, I thought it worth while to inspect Stamm's collection of fish. But I was more or less familiar with all his exhibits; so I descended to the realm of simple, understandable things, and tested the soil in the jardinière."

"And incidentally," Markham commented, with a slow smile, "you lingered over the fish and the other plants so as not to give Stamm any idea of what you were really after in the rubber-plant pot."

Vance smiled back.

"It may be, don't y' know. . . . How about another magnum of Pol Roger?" And he rang for Currie.

It was less than a year after these two sinister murders at the old Dragon Pool, with their sequence of tragedies, that Leland and

Bernice Stamm were married. They were both strong and, in many ways, remarkable characters; but the memory of the tragedies affected them too deeply for them to remain in Inwood. They built a home in the hills of Westchester, and went there to live. Vance and I visited them shortly after their marriage.

The old Stamm residence was never occupied again, and the estate was acquired by the city and added to what is now Inwood Hill Park. The house was torn down, and only the crumbling stones of its foundation remain. But the two square stone posts of the entrance gate, which marked the beginning of the driveway from Bolton Road, are still standing. The old Dragon Pool exists no more. The stream that fed it was diverted into Spuyten Duyvil Creek. Its semi-artificial bed has been filled in, and what was once the basin of the Dragon Pool is now overgrown with wild vegetation. It would be difficult today even to trace the course of the old stream or to determine the former boundaries of that sinister and tragic pool.

After the final tragedy and the breaking up of the century-old traditions of the Stamm estate, I often wondered what became of Trainor, the butler, when the doors of the ancient mansion had been closed for all time. Why the memory of the fellow should have remained in my mind, I cannot say; but there was in him something at once ghost-like and corporeal, something both pathetic and offensive, which made a strong impression on me. I was, therefore, glad when I recently ran into him.

Vance and I were visiting a tropical-fish shop in East 34th Street; and there, behind the counter, half hidden by the tanks, was Trainor.

He recognized Vance at once, and shook his head lugubriously as we approached him.

"I'm not doing so well with my *Scatophagus* here," he repined. "Not the proper conditions—if you know what I mean, sir."

THE END

## Footnotes

[1] "The Bishop Murder Case" (Scribners, 1929).

[2] At one time Vance had turned his sun-parlor into an aquarium and devoted several years to breeding these beautiful veil-tailed fish. He succeeded in producing corn-flower blue, deep maroon, and even black specimens; and he won several awards with them at the exhibitions of the Aquarium Society at the Museum of Natural History.

[3] This is not to be confused with Lower Bolton Road, otherwise known as River Road, which turns off Dyckman Street near the New York Central Hudson River railroad tracks and passes below the Memorial Hospital.

[4] I made a note of these unusual words, and years later, when Vance and I were in California, to see the Munthe Collection of Chinese art, I brought up the subject with Doctor M. R. Harrington, the author of "Religion and Ceremonies of the Lenapes" and now Curator of the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles. He explained that *Amangemokdoming* meant "Dragon-place"; *Amangemokdom Wikit*, "Dragon his-house"; and *Amangemokdomipek*, "Dragon-pond." He also explained that the word *amangam*, though sometimes translated "big fish," seems to have meant "water-monster" as well; and that it would yield the shorter compound *Amangaming*. This evidently was the word preferred by the Lenapes in Inwood.

[5] In the Walum Olum the word *amangam* is translated as "monster" and Brinton in his notes derives it from *amangi*, "great or terrifying," and *names*, "fish with reference to some mythical water-monster." In the Brinton and Anthony dictionary, however, *amangamek*, the plural form, is translated simply as "large fishes." The Indians regarded such a creature, not as a mere animal, but as a *manitto*, or being endowed with supernatural as well as physical power.

[6] Kehoe's Hole, of which the lake in West Side Park, Newark, is the last vestige, has had a most unusual history. The once great swamp was also called, at different times, Magnolia Swamp and Turtle Ditch, and an enterprising newspaper reporter has dubbed the present lake Suicide Lake. The old swamp had the distinction of being considered bottomless; and many strange tales are told, by the old-timers and pseudo-archivists in the neighborhood, of mysterious drownings in its waters, and of the remarkable disappearances of the bodies despite every effort to find them. One story tells of the disappearance beneath its surface of a team of horses and a wagon. These amazing tales—extending over a period of forty years or more—may be accounted for by the fact that there were once quicksands in parts of the swamp. But tradition still has it that the bottom of the present lake has not been fathomed and that once a body sinks beneath its surface, it is never found.

[7] What is purported to be the Keating map, or a copy of it, has been almost generally used by treasure seekers on Cocos Island. It is supposed to have been made by Captain Thompson himself, who left it to a friend named Keating. Keating, with a Captain Bogue, outfitted an expedition to the island. There was mutiny on board the boat, and Bogue died on the island; but Keating miraculously escaped. At his death his widow turned the map over to Nicholas Fitzgerald, who, in turn, willed it to Commodore Curzon-Howe of the British navy.

[8] Doctor Emanuel Doremus, Chief Medical Examiner.

[9] In a pamphlet published in Morris, Illinois, in 1887, written by the Honorable P. A. Armstrong and entitled "The Piasa, or the Devil Among the Indians," there is an old engraving showing the *Piasa* as a monster with a dragon's head, antlers like a deer, the scales of a great fish, claws, and large wings, and with a long tail, like that of a sea-serpent, coiled about its body. The petroglyphs, or pictographs, carved on rock, of this devil-dragon were first found by Father Marquette in the valley of the Mississippi about 1665; and his description of the *Piasa*, given in Armstrong's pamphlet, reads thus: "They are as large as a calf, with head and horns like a goat, their eyes are red, beard like a tiger's, and a face like a man's. Their tails are so long that they pass over their bodies and between their legs, ending like a fish's tail."

[10] Lenape is the generic name for the Algonkian tribes in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and vicinity; and it was one of these tribes that inhabited Inwood.

[11] "The Greene Murder Case" (Scribners, 1927).

[12] The glacial pot-holes in Inwood Hill Park were recently discovered. They are excellent geological specimens of deeply bored, striated cavities formed in the glacial period by the grinding action of the lower gravel surface of the massive continental ice sheet that covered the northeastern part of North America between 30,000 and 50,000 years ago. One of these sub-glacial holes is about three and a half feet in diameter and five feet deep. Another is over four feet across; and still another is eight feet in diameter.

[13] There is a slab of Archæan-age granite with glacial markings from Vinalhaven, Maine, in front of the American Museum of Natural History, showing the formation of a glacial pot-hole. The cylindrical boring in it, however, is much smaller than those in Inwood.

[14] The fact is that one Patrick Coghlan, a resident of Inwood, found these pot-holes only a few years ago, on one of his rambling walks. They have since been cleared by the Dyckman Institute and made available for public inspection and study.

[15] The Moraine Cooler was one of Vance's favorite summer drinks. It is ordinarily made with Rhine wine, lemon juice (with the rind), Curaçao, and club soda; but Vance always substituted Grand Marnier for the Curaçao.

[16] The papers that day had carried spectacular accounts of Montague's murder; and the reporters had let their imaginations run riot over the possibilities of an actual aquatic monster having caused his death. A zoologist from one of the local universities had been interviewed and had expressed the opinion that such an explanation could not be scientifically refuted because of our scant knowledge of submarine life.

[17] Markham, I believe, was referring to the opportunity that Vance had given the murderer in "The 'Canary' Murder Case" to commit suicide after he had admitted his guilt.



## 08. CASINO

### 1. AN ANONYMOUS LETTER

(Saturday, October 15; 10 a.m.)

It was in the cold bleak autumn following the spectacular Dragon murder case that Philo Vance was confronted with what was probably the subtlest and most diabolical criminal problem of his career. Unlike his other cases, this mystery was one of poisoning. But it was not an ordinary poisoning case: it involved far too clever a technique, and was thought out to far too many decimal points, to be ranked with even such famous crimes as the Cordelia Botkin, Molineux, Maybrick, Buchanan, Bowers and Carlyle Harris cases.

The designation given to it by the newspapers—namely, the Casino murder case—was technically a misnomer, although Kinkaid's famous gambling Casino in West 73rd Street played a large part in it. In fact, the first sinister episode in this notorious crime actually occurred beside the high-stake roulette table in the "Gold Room" of the Casino; and the final episode of the tragedy was enacted in Kinkaid's walnut-paneled Jacobean office, just off the main gambling salon.

Incidentally, I may say that that last terrible scene will haunt me to my dying day and send cold shivers racing up and down my spine whenever I let my mind dwell on its terrifying details. I have been through many shocking and unnerving situations with Vance during the course of his criminal investigations, but never have I experienced one that affected me as did that terrific and fatal dénouement that came so suddenly, so unexpectedly, in the gaudy environment of that famous gambling rendezvous.

And Markham, too, I know, underwent some chilling metamorphosis in those few agonizing moments when the murderer stood before us and cackled in triumph. To this day, the mere mention of the incident makes Markham irritable and nervous—a fact which, considering his usual calm, indicates clearly how deep and lasting an impression the tragic affair made upon him.

The Casino murder case, barring that one fatal terminating event, was not so spectacular in its details as many other criminal cases which Vance had probed and solved. From a purely objective point of view it might even have been considered commonplace; for in its superficial mechanism it had many parallels in well-known cases of criminological history. But what distinguished this case from its many antetypes was the subtle inner processes by which the murderer sought to divert suspicion and to create new and more devilish situations wherein the real motive of the crime was to be found. It was not merely one wheel within another wheel: it was an elaborate and complicated piece of psychological machinery, the mechanism of which led on and on, almost indefinitely, to the most amazing—and erroneous—conclusions.

Indeed, the first move of the murderer was perhaps the most artful act of the entire profound scheme. It was a letter addressed to Vance thirty-six hours before the mechanism of the plot was put in direct operation. But, curiously enough, it was this supreme subtlety that, in the end, led to the recognition of the culprit. Perhaps this act of letter-writing was too subtle: perhaps it defeated its own purpose by calling mute attention to the mental processes of the murderer, and thereby gave Vance an intellectual clue which fortunately diverted his efforts from the more insistent and more obvious lines of ratiocination. In any event, it achieved its superficial object; for Vance was actually a spectator of the first thrust, so to speak, of the villain's rapier.

And, as an eye witness to the first episode of this famous poison murder mystery, Vance became directly involved in the case; so that, in this instance, he carried the problem to John F.-X. Markham, who was then the District Attorney of New York County and Vance's closest friend; whereas, in all his other criminal investigations, it was Markham who had been primarily responsible for Vance's participation.

The letter of which I speak arrived in the morning mail on Saturday, October 15. It consisted of two typewritten pages, and the envelop was postmarked Closter, New Jersey. The official post-office stamp showed the mailing time as noon of the preceding day. Vance had worked late Friday night, tabulating and comparing the æsthetic designs on Sumerian pottery in an attempt to establish the cultural influences of this ancient civilization,<sup>[1]</sup> and did not arise till ten o'clock on Saturday. I was living in Vance's apartment in East 38th Street at the time; and though my position was that of legal adviser and monetary steward I had, during the past three years, gradually taken over a kind of general secretaryship in his employ. "Employ" is perhaps not the correct word, for Vance and I had been close friends since our Harvard days; and it was this relationship that had induced me to sever my connection with my father's law firm of Van Dine, Davis and Van Dine and to devote myself to the more congenial task of looking after Vance's affairs.

On that raw, almost wintry, morning in October I had, as usual, opened and segregated his mail, taking care of such items as came under my own jurisdiction, and was engaged in making out his entry blanks for the autumn field trials,<sup>[2]</sup> when Vance entered the library and, with a nod of greeting, sat down in his favorite Queen-Anne chair before the open fire.

That morning he was wearing a rare old mandarin robe and Chinese sandals, and I was somewhat astonished at his costume, for he rarely came to breakfast (which invariably consisted of a cup of Turkish coffee and one of his beloved *Régie* cigarettes) in such elaborate dress.

"I say, Van," he remarked, when he had pushed the table-button for Currie, his aged English butler and majordomo; "don't look so naïvely amazed. I felt depressed when I awoke. I couldn't trace the designs on some of the jolly old stelæ and cylinder seals they've dug up at Ur, and in consequence had a restless night. Therefore, I bedecked myself in this Chinese attire in an effort to counteract my feelin's, and in the hope, I may add, that I would, through a process of psychic osmosis, acquire a bit of that Oriental calm that is so highly spoken of by the Sinologists."

At this moment Currie brought in the coffee. Vance, after lighting a *Régie* and taking a few sips of the thick black liquid, looked toward me lazily and drawled: "Any cheerin' mail?"

So interested had I been in the strange anonymous letter which had just arrived—although I had as yet no idea of its tragic significance—that I handed it to him without a word. He glanced at it with slightly raised eyebrows, let his gaze rest for a moment on the enigmatic signature, and then, placing his coffee cup on the table, read it through slowly. I watched him closely during the process, and noted a curiously veiled expression in his eyes, which deepened and became unusually serious as he came to the end.

The letter is still in Vance's files, and I am quoting it here verbatim, for in it Vance found one of his most valuable clues—a clue

which, though it did not actually lead to the murderer at the beginning, at least shunted Vance from the obvious line of research intended by the plotter. As I have just said, the letter was typewritten; but the work was inexpertly done—that is, there was evidence of the writer's unfamiliarity with the mechanism of a typewriter. The letter read:

DEAR MR. VANCE: I am appealing to you for help in my distress. And I am also appealing to you in the name of humanity and justice. I know you by reputation—and you are the one man in New York who may be able to prevent a terrible catastrophe—or at least to see that punishment is meted out to the perpetrator of an impending crime. Horrible black clouds are hovering over a certain household in New York—they have been gathering for years—and I *know* that the storm is about to break. There is danger and tragedy in the air. *Please* do not fail me at this time, although I admit I am a stranger to you.

I do not know exactly what is going to happen. If I did I could go to the police. But any official interference now would put the plotter on guard and merely postpone the tragedy. I wish I could tell you more—but I do not know any more. The thing is all frightfully vague—it is like an atmosphere rather than a specific situation. *But it is going to happen—something* is going to happen—and whatever does happen will be deceptive and untrue. So please don't let appearances deceive you. Look—*look—beneath* the thing for the truth. All those involved are abnormal and tricky. *Don't underestimate them.*

Here is all I can tell you—

You have met young Lynn Llewellyn—that much I know—and you probably know of his marriage three years ago to the beautiful musical-comedy star, Virginia Vale. She gave up her career and she and Lynn have been living with his family. But the marriage was a terrible mistake, and for three years a tragedy has been brewing. And now things have come to a climax. *I have seen the terrible forms taking shape.* And there are others besides the Llewellyns in the picture.

There is danger—*awful danger*—for some one—I don't know just who. *And the time is tomorrow night, Saturday.*

Lynn Llewellyn *must be watched.* And watched carefully.

There is to be a dinner at the Llewellyn home tomorrow night—and every principal in this impending tragedy will be present—Richard Kinkaid, Morgan Bloodgood, young Lynn and his unhappy wife, and Lynn's sister Amelia, and his mother. The occasion is the mother's birthday.

Although I know that there will be a rumpus of some kind at that dinner, I realize that you can do nothing about it. It will not matter anyway. The dinner will be only the beginning of things. But something momentous will happen *later.* I *know* it will happen. *The time has now come.*

After dinner Lynn Llewellyn will go to Kinkaid's Casino to play. He goes every Saturday night. I know that you yourself often visit the Casino. And what I beg of you to do is to go there tomorrow night. You *must* go. And you must watch Lynn Llewellyn—every minute of the time. Also watch Kinkaid and Bloodgood.

You may wonder why I do not take some action in the matter myself; but I assure you my position and the circumstances make it utterly impossible.

I wish I could be more definite. But I do not know any more to tell you. *You must find out.*

The signature, also typewritten, was "One Deeply Concerned."

When Vance had perused the letter a second time he settled deep in his chair and stretched his legs out lazily.

"An amazin' document, Van," he drawled, after several meditative puffs on his cigarette. "And quite insincere, don't y' know. A literary touch here and there—a bit of melodrama—a few samples of gaudy rhetoric—and, occasionally, a deep concern. . . . Quite, oh, quite: the signature, though vague, is genuine. Yes . . . yes—that's quite obvious. It's more heavily typed than the rest of the letter—more pressure on the keys. . . . Passion at work. And not a pleasant passion: a bit of vindictiveness, as it were, coupled with anxiety. . . ." His voice trailed off. "Anxiety!" he continued, as if to himself. "That's exactly what exudes from between the lines. But anxiety about what? about whom? . . . The gambling Lynn? It might be, of course. And yet . . ." Again his voice trailed off, and once more he inspected the letter, adjusting his monocle carefully and scrutinizing both sides of the paper. "The ordin'ry commercial bond," he observed. "Available at any stationer's. . . . And a plain envelop with a pointed flap. My anxious and garrulous correspondent was most careful to avoid the possibility of being traced through his stationer. . . . Very sad. . . . But I do wish the epistler had gone to business school at some time. The typing is atrocious: bad spacings, wrong keys struck, no sense of margin or indentation—all indicative of too little familiarity with the endless silly gadgets of the typewriter."

He lighted another cigarette and finished his coffee. Then he settled back in his chair and read the letter for the third time. I had seldom seen him so interested. At length he said:

"Why all the domestic details of the Llewellyns, Van? Any one who reads the newspapers knows of the situation in the Llewellyn home. The pretty blond actress marrying into the Social Register over the protests of mama and then ending up under mama's roof: Lynn Llewellyn a young gadabout and the darling of the night-clubs: serious little sister turning from the frivolities of the social whirl to study art—who in this fair bailiwick could have failed to hear of these things? And mama herself is a noisy philanthropist and a committee member of every social and economic organization she can find. And certainly Kinkaid, the old lady's brother, is not an *inconnu*. There are few characters in the city more notorious than he—much to old Mrs. Llewellyn's chagrin and humiliation. The wealth of the family alone would make its doings common gossip." Vance made a wry face. "And yet my correspondent reminds me of these various matters. Why? Why the letter at all? Why am I chosen as the recipient? Why the flowery language? Why the abominable typing? Why this paper and the secrecy? Why everything? . . . I wonder . . . I wonder. . . ."

He rose and paced up and down. I was surprised at his perturbation: it was altogether unlike him. The letter had not impressed me very much, aside from its unusualness; and my first inclination was to regard it as the act of a crank or of some one who had a grudge against the Llewellyns and was taking this circuitous means of causing them annoyance. But Vance evidently had sensed something in the letter that had completely escaped me.

Suddenly he ceased his contemplative to-and-fro, and walked to the telephone. A few moments later he was speaking with District Attorney Markham, urging him to stop in at the apartment that afternoon.

"It's really quite important," he said, with but a trace of the usual jocular manner he assumed when speaking to Markham. "I have a fascinatin' document to show you. . . . Toddle up—there's a good fellow."

For some time after he had replaced the receiver Vance sat in silence. Finally he rose and turned to the section of his library devoted to psychoanalysis and abnormal psychology. He ran through the indices of several books by Freud, Jung, Stekel and Ferenczi; and, marking several pages, he sat down again to peruse the volumes. After an hour or so he replaced the books on the shelves, and spent another thirty minutes consulting various reference books, such as "Who's Who," the New York "Social Register" and "The American Biographical Dictionary." Finally he shrugged his shoulders slightly, yawned mildly and settled himself at his desk, on which were spread numerous reproductions of the art works unearthed in Doctor Woolley's seven years' excavations at Ur.

Saturday being a half-day at the District Attorney's office, Markham arrived shortly after two o'clock. Vance meanwhile had dressed and had his luncheon, and he received Markham in the library.

"A sear and yellow day," he complained, leading Markham to a chair before the fireplace. "Not good for man to be alone. Depression rides me like a hag. I missed the field trial on Long Island today. Preferred to stay in and hover over the glowin' embers. Maybe I'm getting old and full of dreams. . . . Distressin'! . . . But I'm awfully grateful and all that for your comin'. How about a pony of 1811 *Napoléon* to counteract your autumnal sorrows?"

"I've no sorrows today, autumnal or otherwise," Markham returned, studying Vance closely. "And when you babble most you're thinking hardest—the unmistakable symptom." (He still scrutinized Vance.) "I'll take the cognac, however. But why the air of mystery over the phone?"

"My dear Markham—oh, my dear Markham! Really, now, was it an air of mystery? The melancholy days—"

"Come, come, Vance." Markham was beginning to grow restless. "Where's that interesting paper you wished me to see?"

"Ah, yes—quite." Vance reached into his pocket, and, taking out the anonymous letter he had received that morning, handed it to Markham. "It really should not have come on a depressin' day like this."

Markham read the letter through casually and then tossed it on the table with a slight gesture of irritation.

"Well, what of it?" he asked, attempting, without success, to hide his annoyance. "I sincerely hope you're not taking this seriously."

"Neither seriously nor frivolously," Vance sighed; "but with an open mind, old dear. The epistle has possibilities, don't y' know."

"For Heaven's sake, Vance!" Markham protested. "We get letters like that every day. Scores of them. If we paid any attention to them we'd have time for nothing else. The letter-writing habit of professional trouble-makers—But I don't have to go into that with you: you're too good a psychologist."

Vance nodded with unwonted seriousness.

"Yes, yes—of course. The epistol'ry complex. A combination of futile egomania, cowardice and Sadism—I'm familiar with the formula. But, really, y' know, I'm not convinced that this particular letter falls in that categ'ry."

Markham glanced up.

"You really think it's an honest expression of concern based on inside knowledge?"

"Oh, no. On the contr'ry." Vance regarded his cigarette meditatively. "It goes deeper than that. If it were a sincere letter it would be less verbose and more to the point. Its very verbosity and its stilted phraseology indicate an ulterior motive: there's too much thought behind it. . . . And there are sinister implications in it—an atmosphere of abnormal reasoning—a genuine note of cruel tragedy, as if a fiend of some kind were plotting and chuckling at the same time. . . . I don't like it, Markham—I don't at all like it."

Markham regarded Vance with considerable surprise. He started to say something, but, instead, picked up the letter and read it again, more carefully this time. When he had finished he shook his head slowly.

"No, Vance," he protested mildly. "The saddest days of the year have affected your imagination. This letter is merely the outburst of some hysterical woman similarly affected."

"There *are* a few somewhat feminine touches in it—eh, what?" Vance spoke languidly. "I noticed that. But the general tone of the letter is not one that points to hallucinations."

Markham waved his hand in a deprecatory gesture and drew on his cigar a while in silence. At length he asked:

"You know the Llewellyns personally?"

"I've met Lynn Llewellyn once;—just a curs'ry introduction—and I've seen him at the Casino a number of times. The usual wild type of pampered darling whose mater holds the purse strings. And, of course, I know Kinkaid. Every one knows Richard Kinkaid but the police and the District Attorney's office." Vance shot Markham a waggish look. "But you're quite right in ignoring his existence and refusing to close his gilded den of sin. It's really run pretty straight, and only people who can afford it go there. My word! Imagine the naïveté of a mind that thinks gambling can be stopped by laws and raids! . . . The Casino is a delightful place, Markham—quite correct and all that sort of thing. You'd enjoy it immensely." Vance sighed dolefully. "If only you weren't the D. A.! Sad . . . sad. . . ."

Markham shifted uneasily in his chair, and gave Vance a withering look followed by an indulgent smile.

"I may go there some time—after the next election perhaps," he returned. "Do you know any of the others mentioned in the letter?"

"Only Morgan Bloodgood," Vance told him. "He's Kinkaid's chief croupier—his right hand, so to speak. I know him only professionally, however, though I've heard he's a friend of the Llewellyns and knew Lynn's wife when she was in musical comedy. He's a college man, a genius at figures: he majored in mathematics at Princeton, Kinkaid told me once. Held an instructorship for a year or two, and then threw in his lot with Kinkaid. Probably needed excitement—anything's preferable to the quantum theory. . . . The other prospective *dramatis personæ* are unknown to me. I never even saw Virginia Vale—I was abroad during her brief triumph on the stage. And old Mrs. Llewellyn's path has never crossed mine. Nor have I ever met the art-aspiring daughter, Amelia."

"What of the relations between Kinkaid and old Mrs. Llewellyn? Do they get along as brother and sister should?"

Vance looked up at Markham languidly.

"I'd thought of that angle, too." He mused for a moment. "Of course, the old lady is ashamed of her wayward brother—it's quite annoyin' for a fanatical social worker to harbor a brother who's a professional gambler; and while they're outwardly civil to each other, I imagine there's internal friction, especially as the Park-Avenue house belongs to them jointly and they both live under its protectin' roof. But I don't think the old girl would carry her animosity so far as to do any plotting against Kinkaid. . . . No, no. We can't find an

explanation for the letter along that line. . . ."

At this moment Currie entered the library.

"Pardon me, sir," he said to Vance in a troubled tone; "but there's a person on the telephone who wishes me to ask you if you intend to be at the Casino tonight—"

"Is it a man or a woman?" Vance interrupted.

"I—really, sir—" Currie stammered, "I couldn't say. The voice was very faint and indistinct—disguised, you might say. But the person asked me to tell you that he—or she, sir—would not say another word, but would wait on the wire for your answer."

Vance did not speak for several moments.

"I've rather been expecting something of the sort," he murmured finally. Then he turned to Currie. "Tell my ambiguously sexed caller that I will be there at ten o'clock."

Markham took his cigar slowly from his mouth and looked at Vance with troubled concern.

"You actually intend to go to the Casino because of that letter?"

Vance nodded seriously.

"Oh, yes—quite."

## 2. THE CASINO

(Saturday, October 15; 10:30 p.m.)

Richard Kinkaid's famous old gambling establishment, the Casino, in West 73rd Street, near West End Avenue, had, in its heyday, many claims to the glories of the long-defunct Canfield's. It flourished but a short time, yet its memory is still fresh in many minds, and its fame has spread to all parts of the country. It forms a glowing and indispensable link in the chain of resorts that runs through the spectacular history of the night life of New York. A towering apartment house, with terraces and penthouses, now rises where the Casino once stood.

To the uninitiated passer-by the Casino was just another of those large and impressive gray-stone mansions which were once the pride of the upper West Side. The house had been built in the 'Nineties and was the residence of Richard's father, Amos Kinkaid (known as "Old Amos"), one of the city's shrewdest and wealthiest real-estate operators. This particular property was the one parcel that had been willed outright to Richard Kinkaid in Old Amos's will: all the other property had been bequeathed jointly to his two children, Kinkaid and Mrs. Anthony Llewellyn. Mrs. Llewellyn, at the time of the inheritance, was already a widow with two children, Lynn and Amelia, both in their early teens.

Richard Kinkaid had lived alone in the gray-stone house for several years after Old Amos's death. He had then locked its doors, boarded up its windows, and indulged his desire for travel and adventure in the remote places of the earth. He had always had an irresistible instinct for gambling—perhaps a heritage from his father—and in the course of his travels he had visited most of the famous gambling resorts of Europe. As you may recall, the accounts of his spectacular gains and losses often reached the front pages of this country's press. When his losses had far exceeded his gains Kinkaid returned to America, a poorer but no doubt a wiser man.

Counting on political influence and powerful personal connections, he then decided to make an endeavor to recoup his losses by opening a fashionable gambling house of his own, patterned along the lines of some of America's famous houses of the old days.

"The trouble with me," Kinkaid had told one of his chief under-cover supporters, "is that I've always gambled on the wrong side of the table."

He had the big house in 73rd Street remodelled and redecorated, furnished it with the most lavish appointments, and entered upon his notorious enterprise "on the right side of the table." These embellishments of the house, so rumor had it, all but exhausted the remainder of his patrimony. He named the new establishment Kinkaid's Casino, in cynical memory perhaps of Monte Carlo. But so well known did the place become among the social elect and the wealthy, that the prefix "Kinkaid's" soon became superfluous: there was only one "Casino" in America.

The Casino, like so many of the extra-legal establishments of its kind, and like the various fashionable night-clubs that sprang up during the prohibition era, was run as a private club. Membership was requisite, and all applicants were prudently investigated and weighed. The initiation fee was sufficiently high to discourage all undesirable elements; and the roster of those who were accorded the privileges of the "club" read almost like a compilation of the names of the socially and professionally prominent.

For his chief croupier and supervisor of the games, Kinkaid had chosen Morgan Bloodgood, a cultured young mathematician whom he had met at his sister's home. Bloodgood had been at college with Lynn Llewellyn, though the latter was his senior by three years; and, incidentally, it was Bloodgood who brought about the meeting of Virginia Vale and young Llewellyn. Bloodgood, while in college and during the time he had taught mathematics, had, as a hobby, busied himself with the laws of probability. He applied his findings especially to the relation of these laws to numerical gambling, and had figured out elaborately the percentages in all the well-known games of chance. His estimates of permutations, possibilities of repetitions and changes of sequence as bearing on card games are today officially used in computing chances in drawings; and he was at one time associated with the District Attorney's office in exposing the overwhelming chances in favor of the owners in connection with a city-wide campaign against slot-machines of all types.

Kinkaid was once asked why he had chosen young Bloodgood in preference to an old-time, experienced croupier; and he answered:

"I am like Balzac's old Gobseck, who gave all his personal legal business to the budding solicitor, Derville, on the theory that a man under thirty can be relied upon, but that after that age no man may be wholly trusted."

The assistant croupiers and dealers at the Casino were likewise chosen from the ranks of well-bred, non-professional young men of good appearance and education; and they were carefully trained in the intricacies of their duties.<sup>[3]</sup>

Cynical though Kinkaid's philosophy may have been, the practical application of it met with success. His gambling from the "right side of the table" prospered. He was content with the usual house percentage, and the shrewdest of gamblers and experts were never able to bring against him an accusation of "fixing" any of his games.<sup>[4]</sup> In all disputes between a player and the croupier, the player was paid without question. Many small fortunes were lost and won at the Casino during its comparatively brief existence; and the play was always large, especially on Friday and Saturday nights.

When Vance and I arrived at the Casino on that fatal Saturday night of October 15, there was as yet only a scattering of guests present. It was too early for the full quota of habitués who, as a rule, came after the theatre.

As we walked up the wide stone steps from the paved outer court and entered the narrow vestibule of plate glass and black ironwork, we were greeted with a nod from a Chinese porter who stood at the left of the entrance. By some secret signal our identity was communicated to those in charge on the inside; and almost simultaneously with our arrival in the vestibule the great bronze door (which Old Amos had brought over from Italy) was swung open. In the spacious reception hall, fully thirty feet square, hung with rich brocades and old paintings, and furnished in luxurious Italian Renaissance style, our hats and coats were taken from us by two uniformed attendants, both of them extremely tall and powerful men.<sup>[5]</sup>

At the rear of the hall was a divided marble stairway which led, on either side of a small glistening fountain, to the gaming rooms above.

On the second floor Kinkaid had combined the former drawing-room and the reception-room into one large salon which he had

christened the Gold Room. It ran the entire width of the house and was perhaps sixty feet long. The west wall was broken by an alcove which was furnished as a small lounge. The salon was decorated in modified Roman style, with an occasional suggestion of Byzantine ornamentation. The walls were covered with gold leaf, and the flat marble pilasters, which broke them into large rectangular panels, were of a subdued ivory tone that blended with the gold of the walls and the buff-colored ceiling. The draperies at the long windows were of yellow silk brocaded with gold; and the deep-piled carpet was a neutralized ochre in color.

There were three roulette tables set down the centre of the room, two black-jack, or *vingt-et-un*, tables at the middle of the east and west walls, four chuck-a-luck tables, or bird cages, in the four corners, and an elaborate dice table at the far end, between the windows. At the rear of the Gold Room, to the west, was a private card room, with a row of small individual tables where any form of solitaire could be played, and a dealer to look on and to pay or collect, according to the luck and skill of the player. Adjoining this room, to the east, was a crystal bar with a wide archway leading into the main salon. Here only the finest liquors and wines were served. These two rooms had evidently been the main dining-room and the breakfast room of the old Kinkaid mansion. A cashier's cage had been constructed in what had once been a linen closet, to the left of the bar.

Richard Kinkaid's private office had been constructed by shutting off the front end of the upper hallway. It had one door leading into the bar and another into the Gold Room. This office was about ten feet square and was paneled in walnut—a sombre yet beautifully appointed room, with a single frosted-glass window opening on the front court.

(I mention the office here because it played so important a part in the final terrible climax of the tragedy that was soon to begin before our eyes.)

When, that Saturday night, we had reached the narrow hall on the second floor, that led, through a wide draped entrance, into the main salon, Vance glanced casually into the two playing rooms and then turned into the bar.

"I think, Van, we'll have ample time for a sip of champagne," he said, with a curious restraint in his voice. "Our young friend is sitting in the lounge, quite by himself, apparently absorbed in computations. Lynn is a system player; and all manner of preliminaries are necessary before he can begin. If anything untoward is going to befall him tonight, he is either blissfully unaware of it or serenely indifferent. However, there's no one in the room now who could reasonably be interested in his existence—or his non-existence, for that matter—so we might as well bide a wee in here."

He ordered a bottle of 1904 *Krug*, and settled back, with outward placidity, in the sprawling chair beside the little table on which the wine was served. But, despite his apparently languid manner, I knew that some unusual tension had taken hold of him: this was obvious to me from the slow, deliberate way in which he took his cigarette from his mouth and broke the ashes in the exact centre of the tray.

We had scarcely finished our champagne when Morgan Bloodgood, emerging from a rear door, passed through the bar toward the main salon. He was a tall, slight man with a high, somewhat bulging forehead, a thin straight aquiline nose, heavy, almost flabby, lips, a pointed chin, and prominent Darwinian ears with abnormally large tragi and receding lobes. His eyes were hard and smouldering and of a peculiar gray-green cast; and they were so deeply sunken as to appear in almost perpetual shadow. His hair was thin and sand-colored; and his complexion was sallow to the point of bloodlessness. Yet he was not an unattractive man. There was coolness and calm in the ensemble of his features—an immobility that gave the impression of latent power and profound trains of thought. Though I knew he was barely thirty, he could easily have passed for a man of forty or more.

When he caught sight of Vance he paused and nodded with reserved pleasantry.

"Going to try your luck tonight, Mr. Vance?" he asked in a deep mild voice.

"By all means," Vance returned, smiling only with his lips. Then he added: "I have a new system, don't y' know."

"That's bully for the house," grinned Bloodgood. "Based on Laplace or von Kries?" (I thought I detected a suggestion of sarcasm in his voice.)

"Oh, my dear fellow!" Vance replied. "Really, now! I rarely go in for abstruse mathematics: I leave that branch of research to experts. I prefer Napoleon's simple maxim: '*Je m'engage et puis je vois*.'"

"That's as good—or as bad—as any other system," Bloodgood retorted. "They all amount to the same thing in the end." And with a stiff bow he passed on into the Gold Room.

Through the divided portières we saw him take his place at the wheel of the centre roulette table.

Vance put down his glass and, carefully lighting another *Régie*, rose leisurely.

"I opine the time to mingle has come," he murmured, as he moved toward the archway leading into the Gold Room.

As we entered the salon the door of Kinkaid's office opened, and Kinkaid appeared. On seeing Vance he smiled professionally, and greeted him in a tone of stereotyped geniality:

"Good evening, sir. You're quite a stranger here."

"Charmed not to have been entirely forgotten, don't y' know," Vance returned dulcetly. "Especially," he added, in a steady, flat voice, "as one of my objects in comin' tonight was to see you."

Kinkaid stiffened almost imperceptibly.

"Well, you see me, don't you?" he asked, with a cold smile and a simulated air of good-nature.

"Oh, quite." Vance, too, became facetiously cordial. "But I should infinitely prefer seein' you in the restful Jacobean surroundings of your private office."

Kinkaid looked at Vance with narrowed searching eyes. Vance returned the gaze steadily, without permitting the smile to fade from his lips.

Without a word Kinkaid turned and reopened the office door, stepping aside to let Vance and me precede him. He followed us, and closed the door behind him. Then he stood stiffly and, with steady eyes on Vance, waited.

Vance lifted his cigarette to his lips, took a deep inhalation, and blew a ribbon of smoke toward the ceiling.

"I say, might we sit down?" he asked casually.

"By all means—if you're tired." Kinkaid spoke in a metallic voice, his face an expressionless mask.

"Thanks awfully." Vance ignored the other's attitude, and settling himself in one of the low leather-covered chairs near the door,

crossed his knees in lazy comfort.

Despite Kinkaid's unfriendly manner, I felt that the man was not at bottom antagonistic to his guest, but that, as a hardened gambler, he was assuming a defensive bearing in the face of some possible menace the nature of which was unknown to him. He knew, as every one else in the city knew, that Vance was closely, even though unofficially, associated with the District Attorney; and it occurred to me that Kinkaid probably thought Vance had come to him as proxy on some unpleasant official mission. His reaction to such a suspicion would naturally have been this belligerently guarded attitude.

Richard Kinkaid, his superficial appearance as the conventional gambler notwithstanding, was a cultured and intelligent man. He had been an honor student at college, and held two academic degrees. He spoke several languages fluently and, in his younger days, had been an archaeologist of considerable note. He had written two books on his travels in the Orient, both of which may be found today in every public library.

He was a large man, nearly six feet tall; and despite his tendency to corpulency, it was obvious that he was powerfully built. His iron-gray hair, cut in a short pompadour, looked very light in contrast with his ruddy complexion. His face was oval, but his coarse features gave him an aspect of ruggedness. His brow was low and broad; his nose short, flat and irregular; and his mouth was pinched and hard—a long, straight, immobile slit. His eyes, however, were the outstanding feature of his face. They were small, and the lids sloped downward at the outer corners, like those of a man with Bright's disease, so that the pupils seemed always to be above the centres of the visible orbs, giving to his expression a sardonic, almost sinister, cast. There were shrewdness, perseverance, subtlety, cruelty and aloofness in his eyes.

As he stood before us that night, one hand resting on the beautifully carved flat-top desk at the window, the other stuffed deep into the side pocket of his dinner jacket, he kept his gaze fixed on Vance, without displaying either annoyance or concern: his was the perfect "poker face."

"What I wished to see you about, Mr. Kinkaid," Vance remarked at length, "is a letter I received this morning. It occurred to me it might interest you, inasmuch as your name was not too fondly mentioned in it. In fact, it intimately concerns the various members of your family."

Kinkaid continued to gaze at Vance without change of expression. Nor did he speak or make the slightest move.

Vance contemplated the end of his cigarette for a moment. Then he said:

"I think it might be best if you perused this letter yourself."

He reached into his pocket and handed the two typewritten pages to Kinkaid, who took them indifferently and opened them.

I watched him closely as he read. No new expression appeared in his eyes, and his lips did not move; but the color of his face deepened perceptibly, and, when he had reached the end, the muscles in his cheeks were working spasmodically. His fat neck bulged over his collar, and ugly splotches of red spread over it.

The hand in which he held the letter dropped jerkily to his side, as if the muscles of his arm were tense; and he slowly lifted his gaze until it met Vance's eyes.

"Well, what about it?" he asked through his teeth.

Vance moved his hand in a slight negative gesture of rejection.

"I'm not placin' any bets just now," he said quietly. "I'm takin' them."

"And suppose I'm not betting?" retorted Kinkaid.

"Oh, that's quite all right," Vance smiled icily. "Every one's prerogative, don't y' know."

Kinkaid hesitated a moment; then he grunted deep in his throat and sat down in the chair before the desk, placing the letter before him. After a minute or so of silence he thumped the letter with his knuckles and shrugged.

"I'd say it was the work of some crank." His tone was at once light and contemptuous.

"No, no. Really, now, Mr. Kinkaid," Vance protested blandly. "That won't do—it won't at all do. You've chosen the wrong number, as it were. You lose that chip. Why not make another selection?"

"What the hell!" exploded Kinkaid. He swung round in the swivel chair and glared at Vance with cold, penetrating menace. "I'm no damned detective," he went on, his lips scarcely moving. "What has the letter to do with me, anyway?"

Vance did not reply. Instead he met Kinkaid's vindictive gaze with cool, steady calm—a calm at once impersonal and devastating. I have never envied any one the task of out-staring Vance. There was a subtle psychological power in his gaze, when he wished to exert it, that could not be resisted by the strongest natures that sought to oppose him through the projection of that inner character which is conveyed by the direct stare.

Kinkaid, with all his forcefulness of mind, had met his match. He knew that Vance's gaze would neither drop nor shift; and in that silent communication that takes place between two strong adversaries when they look deep into each other's eyes—that strange wordless duel of personalities—Kinkaid capitulated.

"Very well," he said, with a good-natured smile. "I'll place another wager—if that'll help you any." He glanced over the letter again. "There's a hell of a lot of truth here. Whoever wrote this knows something about the family situation."

"You use a typewriter yourself—eh, what?" asked Vance.

Kinkaid started and then forced a laugh.

"Just about as rotten as that," he returned, waving his hand toward the letter.

Vance nodded sympathetically.

"I'm no good at it myself," he remarked lightly, "Beastly invention, the typewriter. . . . But I say, do you think any one intends to harm young Llewellyn?"

"I don't know, but I hope so," Kinkaid snapped, with an ugly grin. "He needs killing."

"Why not do it yourself then?" Vance's tone was matter-of-fact.

Kinkaid chuckled unpleasantly.

"I've often thought of it. But he's hardly worth the risk."

"Still," mused Vance, "you seem more or less tolerant of your nephew in public."

"Family prejudice, I suppose," Kinkaid said. "The curse of nepotism. My sister dotes on him."

"He spends considerable time here at the Casino." The remark was half question, half statement.

Kinkaid nodded.

"Trying to annex some of the Kinkaid money which his mother won't supply him too freely. And I humor him. Why not? He plays a system." Kinkaid snorted. "I wish they'd all play a system. It's the hit-or-miss babies that cut down the profits."

Vance turned the conversation back to the letter.

"Do you believe," he asked, "that there's a tragedy hanging over your family?"

"Isn't there one hanging over every family?" Kinkaid returned. "But if anything's going to happen to Lynn I hope it doesn't happen in the Casino."

"At any rate," persisted Vance, "the letter insists that I come here tonight and watch the johnnie."

Kinkaid waved his hand.

"I'd discount that."

"But you just admitted that there is a lot of truth in the letter."

Kinkaid sat motionless for a while, his eyes, like two small shining disks, fixed on the wall. At length he leaned forward and looked squarely at Vance.

"I'll be frank with you, Mr. Vance," he said earnestly. "I've a hell of a good idea who wrote that letter. Simply a case of mania and cold feet. . . . Forget it."

"My word!" murmured Vance. "That's dashed interestin'." He crushed out his cigarette and, rising, picked up the letter, refolded it, and put it back into his pocket. "Sorry to have troubled you and all that. . . . I think, however, I'll loiter a bit."

Kinkaid neither rose nor said a word as we went out into the Gold Room.



### 3. THE FIRST TRAGEDY

(Saturday, October 15; 11:15 p.m.)

The place had already begun to fill. There were at least a hundred "members" playing at the various tables and standing chatting in small groups. There was a gala, colorful atmosphere in the great room, coupled with a tinge of excitement and tension. The Japanese orderlies, in native costume, were darting about noiselessly on their various errands; and on either side of the arched entrance stood two uniformed attendants. No movement, however innocent, of any person escaped the ever-watchful eyes of these sentinels. It was a fashionable gathering; and I had no difficulty in identifying many prominent persons from social and financial circles.

Lynn Llewellyn was still sitting in a corner of the lounge, busily engaged with pencil and note-book and apparently oblivious to all the activity going on about him.

Vance strolled down the length of the room, greeting a few acquaintances on his way. He paused at the chuck-a-luck table near the east front window and bought a stack of chips. These he wagered on the "one," doubling each time up to five, and then beginning again. It was incredible how many "ones" showed up on the dice in the cage; and after fifteen minutes Vance had won nearly a thousand dollars. He seemed restless, though, and took his winnings indifferently.

Turning again to the centre of the room he walked to the roulette table operated by Bloodgood. He looked on for several turns of the wheel from behind a chair, and then sat down to join the play. He was facing the lounge alcove, and as he took his place at the table he glanced casually in that direction and let his eyes rest for a moment on Llewellyn, who was still deep in thought.

The selections for the next turn of the wheel had been made,—there were only five or six players engaged at the time,—and Bloodgood stood with the ball poised against his middle finger in the trough of the bowl, ready to project it on its indeterminate convolutions. But for some reason he did not flip it at once.

"*Faites votre jeu, monsieur,*" he called in a facetious sing-song, looking directly at Vance.

Vance turned his head quickly and met the slightly cynical smile on Bloodgood's heavy lips.

"Thanks awfully for the personal signal," he said, with exaggerated graciousness; and, leaning far up the table toward the wheel, he placed a hundred-dollar bill on the green area marked "0" at the head of the three columns of figures. "My system tells me to play the 'house number' tonight."

The faint smile on Bloodgood's lips faded, and his eyebrows went up a trifle. Then he spun the wheel dexterously.

It was a long play, for the ball had been given a terrific impetus and it danced back and forth for some time between the grooved wheel and the sides of the bowl. At length it seemed to settle in one of the numbered compartments, though the wheel was still spinning too rapidly to permit the reading of the numerals; but it leaped out again, made one or two gyrations, and finally came to rest in the green slot—the "house number."

A hum went up round the table as the rake gathered in all the other stakes; but though I watched Bloodgood's face closely, I could not detect the slightest change of expression:—he was the perfect unemotional croupier.

"Your system seems to be working," he remarked to Vance, as he moved out a stack of thirty-five yellow chips. "*Vous vous engagez, et puis vous voyez. . . . Mais, qu'est-ce que vous espérez voir, monsieur?*"

"I haven't the groggiest notion," returned Vance, gathering up his bill and the chips. "I'm not hopin'—I'm driftin'."

"In any event, you're lucky tonight," smiled Bloodgood.

"I wonder. . . ." Vance slid his winnings into his pocket and turned from the table.

He walked slowly toward the card room, paused at the entrance, and then moved on to the *vingt-et-un* game which was in progress at a high semi-circular table only a few yards from the lounge alcove. There were two vacant chairs facing the hallway; but Vance waited. The dealer sat on a small raised platform, and when the player at his right relinquished his seat Vance took the vacant chair. I noted that from this position he had an unobstructed view of Llewellyn.

He placed a yellow chip on the paneled section of the table in front of him, and a closed card was dealt to him. He glanced at it: standing behind him, I saw that it was the ace of clubs. The next card dealt him was another ace.

"Fancy that, Van," he remarked to me over his shoulder. "The 'ones' are followin' me around tonight."

He turned up his first ace and laid the other beside it, placing another yellow chip on it. He was the last to be served by the dealer on the "draw"; and to my astonishment he drew two face cards—a knave and a queen. This combination of an ace and a face card constitutes a "natural"—the highest hand in black-jack—and Vance had drawn two of them on the one deal. The dealer's cards totalled nineteen.

Vance was about to wager a second hand when Llewellyn rose with determination from his seat in the corner of the lounge and approached Bloodgood's roulette table, with note-book in hand. Instead of continuing the play, Vance again took up his winnings, slid from his high chair, and sauntered back to the centre of the room, taking his place behind the row of chairs on the side of the roulette table opposite to that at which Llewellyn had seated himself.

Lynn Llewellyn was of medium height and slender, with a suggestion of quick wiry strength. His eyes were a flat, dull blue, and though they moved quickly, they showed no animation. His mouth, however, was emotional and mobile. His thin, somewhat haggard face gave one the impression of weakness coupled with cunning; yet withal it was a capable face—a face which a certain type of woman would consider handsome.

When he had taken his seat he looked about him swiftly, nodded to Bloodgood and to others present, but apparently did not see Vance, although Vance stood directly across the table. He watched the play for several minutes, making a notation of the winning numbers in the leather-bound booklet he had placed before him on the table. After five or six plays, he began to frown, and, turning in his chair, summoned one of the Japanese boys who was passing.

"Scotch," he ordered; "with plain water on the side."

While the drink was being fetched he continued his notations. At length, when three numbers in the same column had come in succession, he began eagerly to play. When the boy brought the Scotch he waved it brusquely away, and concentrated on the game.

For the first half-hour that we stood watching him I tried to trace some mathematical sequence in his choice of numbers, but, meeting with no success, I gave it up. I later learned that Llewellyn was playing a curious and, according to Vance, a wholly inconsistent and contradictory variation of the Labouchère—or, as it is popularly called, Labby—system which, for many years, was thoroughly tested at Monte Carlo.

But, however inadequate the system may have been scientifically, Llewellyn was profiting by it. Indeed, had he followed up his advantages, after the unreasoned custom of the amateur player, he would, as it happened, have progressed more rapidly. But each time he caught a number (*en plein*) or a half-number (*à cheval*) or a quarter-number (*en carré*) he withdrew his winnings in proportion to their duplication, multiplying only when luck went against him. After almost every play he glanced quickly at the carefully ruled tables and columns of figures in his book; and it was obvious that, despite all temptation to do otherwise, he was abiding rigidly by the set formula he had decided to follow.

Shortly after midnight, when one of his suites of doubling had reached its peak, the right number came. The result was a large winning, and when he had drawn down the six piles of yellow chips, he took a deep tremulous breath and leaned back in his chair. I calculated roughly that he was approximately ten thousand dollars ahead at this point. News of his luck soon spread to the other players in the room, and there was a general gathering of the curious around Bloodgood's table.

I glanced about me and noted the various expressions of the spectators: some were cynical, some envious, some merely interested. Bloodgood himself showed no indication, either by a look or an intonation of voice, that anything unusual was taking place. He was the faultless automaton, discharging his duties with detached mechanical precision.

When Llewellyn relaxed in his seat after this coup he glanced up, and, catching sight of Vance, bowed abstractedly. He was still busy with his calculations and computations, noting each turn of the wheel, and recording the winning number in his book. His face had become flushed, and his lips moved nervously as he jotted down the figures. His hands trembled perceptibly, and every few moments he took a long deep inhalation, as if trying to calm his nerves. Once or twice I noticed that he threw his left shoulder forward and bent his head to the left, like a man with angina pectoris trying to relieve the pain over his heart.

After the sixth play had passed, Llewellyn leaned over and continued his careful system of selecting and pyramiding. This time I noticed that he introduced some new variations into his method. He did what is known as "covering" his bets, by setting the even-money black and red fields against the color of the number he chose, and by opposing the *première, milieu, or dernière douzaine* against the particular group of twelve in which he had made his *en plein* numerical choice, as well as by utilizing both the odd and even fields (*pair and impair*), and the high and low field (*passe and manque*), in the same manner.

"That byplay," Vance whispered in my ear, "is not on the books. He's losing his nerve, and is toying with both the d'Alembert and the Montant Belge systems. But it really doesn't matter in the least. If he's lucky he'll win anyway; if he's not, he'll lose. Systems are for optimists and dreamers. The immutable fact remains that the house pays thirty-five to one against thirty-six possibilities and an added house number. That's destiny—no one can conquer it."

But Llewellyn's luck at roulette was evidently running in his favor that night, for it was but a short time before he won again on a pyramided number. When he drew the chips to him his hands shook so that he upset one of the stacks and had difficulty in reassembling it. Again he sank back in his chair and let the next plays pass. His color had deepened; his eyes took on an unnatural glitter; and the muscles of his face began to twitch. He gazed about him blankly and missed one of the numbers that had shown on the wheel, so that he had to ask Bloodgood for it in order to keep the entries in his book complete.

A tension had taken hold of the spectators. A strange lull replaced the general conversation. Every one seemed intent on the outcome of this age-old conflict between a man and the unfathomed laws of probability. Llewellyn sat there with a fortune in chips piled up in front of him. A few more thousand dollars and the bank would be "broken"; for Kinkaid had set a nightly capital of forty thousand dollars for this table.

During the electrified silence that had suddenly settled over the room, broken only by the whirr of the spinning ball, the clink of chips and the droning voice of Bloodgood, Kinkaid emerged from his office and approached the table. He halted beside Vance, and indifferently watched the play for a while.

"This is evidently Lynn's night," he remarked casually.

"Yes, yes—quite." Vance did not take his eyes from the nervous trembling figure of Llewellyn.

At this moment Llewellyn again caught an *en plein*, but he had only a single chip on the number. However, it marked the end of some mathematical cycle, according to his confused system; and, withdrawing his chips, he leaned back once more. He was breathing heavily, as if he could not get sufficient air into his lungs; and again he thrust his left shoulder forward.

A Japanese boy was passing, and Llewellyn hailed him.

"Scotch," he ordered again, and, with apparent effort, jotted down the winning number in his book.

"Has he been drinking much tonight?" Kinkaid asked Vance.

"He ordered one drink some time ago but didn't take it," Vance told him. "This will be his first, as far as I know."

A few minutes later the boy set down beside Llewellyn a small silver tray holding a glass of whisky, an empty glass and a small bottle of charged water. Bloodgood had just spun the wheel, and he glanced at the tray.

"Mori!" he called to the boy. "Mr. Llewellyn takes plain water."

The Japanese turned back, set the whisky on the table before Llewellyn, and, taking up the tray with the charged water, moved away. As he came round the end of the table, Kinkaid beckoned to him.

"You can get the plain water from my carafe in the office," he suggested.

The boy nodded and hastened on his errand.

"Lynn needs a drink in a hurry," Kinkaid remarked to Vance. "No use holding him up, with that crowd in the bar. . . . The damned fool! He won't have a dollar when he goes home tonight."

As if to verify Kinkaid's prophecy, Llewellyn made a large wager and lost. As he consulted his book for the next number, the boy

came up again and placed a glass of clear water beside him. Llewellyn emptied his whisky glass at one gulp and immediately drank the water. Shoving the two empty glasses to one side, he made his next play.

Again he lost. He doubled on the following spin; and lost again. Then he redoubled, and once more he lost. He was playing Black 20 and Red 5, and on the next turn he halved his former bet between Red 21 and Black 4. "Eleven" came. He now quartered, playing 17, 18, 20 and 21 with one stack, and 4, 5, 7 and 8 with another. "Eleven" repeated.

When Bloodgood had raked in the chips Llewellyn sat staring at the green cloth without moving. For fully five minutes he remained thus, letting the plays pass without paying any attention. Once or twice he brushed his hand across his eyes and shook his head violently, as if some confusion of mind were overpowering him.

Vance had moved forward a step and was watching him intently, and Kinkaid, too, appeared deeply concerned about Llewellyn's behavior. Bloodgood glanced at him from time to time, but without any indication of more than a casual interest.

Llewellyn's face had now turned scarlet, and he pressed the palms of his hands to his temples and breathed deeply, as a man will do when his head throbs with pain and he experiences a sense of suffocation.

Suddenly, as though he were making a great effort, he sprang to his feet, upsetting his chair, and turned from the table. His hands had fallen to his sides. He took three or four steps, staggered, and then collapsed in a distorted heap on the floor.

A slight commotion followed, and several of the men on Llewellyn's side of the table crowded about the prostrate figure. But two of the uniformed attendants at the entrance hurried forward, and, elbowing their way through the spectators, lifted Llewellyn and carried him toward Kinkaid's private office. Kinkaid was already at the door, holding it open for them when they reached it with the motionless form.

Vance and I followed them into the office before Kinkaid had time to close the door.

"What do you want here?" snapped Kinkaid.

"I'm stayin' a while," Vance returned in a cold, firm voice. "Put it down to youthful curiosity—if you must have a reason."

Kinkaid snorted and waved the two attendants out.

"Here, Van," requested Vance; "help me lift the chap into that straight chair."

We raised Llewellyn into the chair, and Vance held the man's body far forward so that his head hung between his knees. I noticed that Llewellyn's face had lost all its color and was now a deathly white. Vance felt for his pulse and then turned to Kinkaid, who stood rigidly by the desk, a faint cynical sneer on his mouth.

"Any smelling salts?" Vance asked.

Kinkaid drew out one of the desk drawers and handed Vance a squat green bottle which Vance took and held under Llewellyn's nose.

At this moment Bloodgood opened the office door, stepped inside, and closed it quickly behind him.

"What's the trouble?" he asked Kinkaid. There was a look of alarm on his face.

"Get back to the table," Kinkaid ordered angrily. "There's no trouble. . . . Can't a man faint?"

Bloodgood hesitated, shot a searching look at Vance, shrugged his shoulders, and went out.

Vance again tried Llewellyn's pulse, forced the man's head back, and, lifting one of the eyelids, inspected the eye. Then he placed Llewellyn on the floor and slipped a flat leather cushion, from one of the chairs, under his head.

"He hasn't fainted, Kinkaid," Vance said, rising and facing the other grimly. "He's been poisoned. . . ."

"Rot!" The word was a guttural ejaculation.

"Do you know a doctor in the neighborhood?" Vance's tone was significantly calm.

Kinkaid drew in his breath audibly.

"There's one next door. But—"

"Get him!" commanded Vance. "And be quick about it."

Kinkaid stood in rigid resentment for a brief moment; then he turned to the telephone on the desk and dialed a number. After a pause he cleared his throat and spoke in a strained voice.

"Doctor Rogers? . . . This is Kinkaid. There's been an accident here. Come right away. . . . Thanks."

He banged the receiver down and turned to Vance with a muttered oath.

"A sweet mess!" he complained furiously.

He stepped to a small stand beside the desk, on which stood a silver water-service, and, picking up the carafe, inverted it over one of the crystal glasses. The carafe was empty.

"Hell!" he grumbled. He pressed a button in one of the walnut panels of the east wall. "I'm going to have a brandy. How about you?" He gave Vance a sour look.

"Thanks awfully," murmured Vance. The door leading into the bar opened and an attendant appeared.

"*Courvoisier*," Kinkaid ordered. "And fill that bottle," he added, pointing to the water-service.

The man picked up the carafe and returned to the bar. (He had started slightly at the sight of Llewellyn's body on the floor, but by no other sign had he indicated that there was anything amiss. Kinkaid had chosen his personnel with shrewd discrimination.) When the cognac had been brought in and served, Kinkaid drank his in one swallow. Vance was still sipping his when one of the uniformed men from the reception hall below rapped on the door and admitted the doctor, a large rotund man with a benevolent, almost childlike, face.

"There's your patient," Kinkaid rasped, jerking his thumb toward Llewellyn. "What's the verdict?"

Doctor Rogers knelt down beside the prone figure, mumbling as he did so: "Lucky you caught me. . . . Had a confinement—just got in. . . ."

He made a rapid examination: he looked at Llewellyn's pupils, took his pulse, put the stethoscope to his heart, and felt his wrists and the back of his neck. As he worked he asked several questions regarding what had preceded Llewellyn's present condition. It was Vance who answered all of the questions, describing Llewellyn's nervousness at the roulette table, his high color, and his sudden prostration.

"Looks like a case of poisoning," Doctor Rogers told Kinkaid, opening his medicine case swiftly and preparing a hypodermic injection. "I can't say what it is yet. He's in a stupor. Small, accelerated pulse; rapid, shallow respiration; dilated pupils . . . all

symptoms of acute toxæmia. What you tell me of the flush, the staggering and the collapse; and now the pallor—all point to some sort of poison. . . . I'm giving him a hypo of caffein. It's all I can do here. . . ." He rose ponderously and threw the syringe back into his bag. "Must get him to a hospital immediately—he needs heroic treatment. I'll call an ambulance. . . ." And he waddled to the telephone.

Kinkaid stepped forward: he was again the cool, poker-faced gambler.

"Get him to the nearest hospital—the best you know," he said, in a businesslike voice. "I'll take care of everything."

Doctor Rogers nodded.

"The Park End—it's in the neighborhood." And he began dialing a number clumsily.

Vance moved toward the door.

"I think I'll be staggerin' along," he drawled. His face was grim, and he gave Kinkaid a long significant look. "Interestin' letter I received—eh, what? . . . Cheerio!"

A few minutes later we were out in 73rd Street. It was a raw cold night, and a chilling drizzle had begun to fall.

Vance's car was parked a hundred feet or so west of the entrance to the Casino, and as we walked toward it, Detectives Snitkin and Hennessey[6] stepped out of the doorway of a near-by house.

"Everything all right, Mr. Vance?" Snitkin asked, in a low, sepulchral voice.

"Pon my word!" exclaimed Vance. "What are you two gallant sleuths doing here on a night like this?"

"Sergeant Heath[7] told us to come up here and hang around the Casino, in case you might want us," Snitkin explained. "The Sergeant said you were expecting something to break around here."

"Really! Did he, now? Fancy that!" Vance appeared puzzled. "Stout fella, the Sergeant. . . . However, everything is taken care of. I'm dashed grateful to you for coming, but there's no earthly reason for you to hover about any longer. I'm toddlin' off to bed myself."

But instead of going home he drove to Markham's apartment in West 11th Street.

Markham, much to my surprise, was still up, and greeted us cordially in his drawing-room.[8] When we had settled ourselves before the gas-logs Vance turned to him with a questioning air.

"Snitkin and Hennessey were guarding me like good fellows tonight," he said. "Do you, by any chance, ken the reason for such solicitous devotion?"

Markham smiled, a bit shamefacedly.

"The truth is, Vance," he apologetically explained; "after I left your apartment this afternoon I got to thinking there might be something in that letter, after all; and I called up Sergeant Heath and told him—as near as I could remember—everything that was in it. I also told him you had decided to go to the Casino tonight to watch young Llewellyn. I suppose he thought it might be just as well to send a couple of the boys up there to be on hand in case there *was* any truth in the letter."

"That explains it," nodded Vance. "There was no need, however, for the bodyguard. But the letter proved amazingly prophetic."

"What's that!" Markham swung round in his chair.

"Yes, yes. Quite a prognosticatin' epistle." Vance took a deep draw on his cigarette. "Lynn Llewellyn was poisoned before my eyes."

Markham sprang to his feet and stared at Vance.

"Dead?"

"He wasn't when I left him. But I didn't tarry." Vance was thoughtful. "He was in bad shape though. He's under the care of a Doctor Rogers at the Park End Hospital. . . . Deuced curious situation. I'm rather confused." He, too, got up. "Wait a bit." He went into the den, and I heard him at the telephone.

In a few minutes he returned.

"I've just talked to the pudgy Æsculapius at the hospital," he reported. "Llewellyn's about the same—except that his respiration has become slower and more shallow. His pressure is down to seventy over fifty, and he's having convulsive movements. . . . Everything's being done that's possible—adrenalin, caffein, digitalis, and gastric lavage by the nasal route. No positive diagnosis possible, of course. Very mystifyin', Markham. . . ."

Just then the telephone rang and Markham answered it. A minute later he emerged from the den. His face was pale, and there were deep corrugations on his forehead. He came back to the centre-table, like a man in a daze.

"Good God, Vance!" he muttered. "Something devilish *is* going on. That was Heath on the wire. A call has just come through to Headquarters. Heath relayed it to me—because of that letter, I imagine. . . ."

Markham paused, looking out into space; and Vance glanced up at him curiously.

"And what, pray, was the burden of the Sergeant's song?"

Markham, as if with considerable effort, turned his eyes back to Vance.

"Llewellyn's young wife is dead—poisoned!"

#### 4. THE DEAD GIRL'S ROOM

(Sunday, October 16; 1:30 a.m.)

Vance's eyebrows went up sharply.

"My word! I didn't expect that." He took his cigarette from his mouth and looked at it with concern. "And yet . . . there may be a pattern. I say, Markham, did the Sergeant happen to say what time the lady died?"

"No." Markham shook his head abstractedly. "A doctor was summoned first, it seems; and then the call was sent through to Headquarters. We can assume that death occurred about half an hour ago—"

"Half an hour!" Vance tapped the arm of his chair in thoughtful tattoo. "Just about the time Llewellyn collapsed. . . . Simultaneity, what? . . . Queer—deuced queer. . . . No other information?"

"No, nothing more. Heath was just hopping a car with some of the boys, headed for the Llewellyn house. He'll probably phone again when he gets there."

Vance threw his cigarette on the hearth and rose.

"We sha'n't be here, however," he said, with a curiously grim intonation, turning toward Markham. "We're going to Park Avenue to find out for ourselves. I don't like this thing, Markham—I don't at all like it. There's something fiendish and sinister—and abnormal—going on. I felt it when I first read that letter. Some terrible killer is abroad, and these two poisonings may be only the beginning. A poisoner is the worst of all criminals,—there's no knowing how far he may go. . . . Come."

I had rarely seen Vance so perturbed and insistent; and Markham, feeling the force of his resolution and his fears, permitted himself, without protest, to be driven in Vance's car to the old Llewellyn mansion on Park Avenue.

The house, of brownstone, stood back a few yards from the Avenue. A high black scroll-iron fence, with a wide iron gate, extended the entire width of the lot, which was about fifty feet; and the shallow areaway had not been paved, but was still set with an old square box hedge, two trimmed cypress trees, and two small rectangular flowerbeds, one on each side of the flagstone walk that led to the massive oak front door.

When we arrived at the Llewellyn home, the police were already there. Two uniformed officers from the local precinct station stood in the areaway. On recognizing the District Attorney, they saluted and came forward.

"Sergeant Heath and some of the boys of the Homicide Squad just went in, Chief," one of them told Markham, thrusting his thumb against the pushbutton of the door-bell.

The front door was immediately opened by a tall, thin, and very pale man in a black-and-white checked dressing-gown.

"I'm the District Attorney," Markham told him, "and I want to see Sergeant Heath. He came a few minutes ago, I believe."

The man bowed with stiff, exaggerated dignity.

"Certainly, sir," he said, with an oily, slightly cockney accent. "Won't you come in, sir. . . . The police officers are upstairs—in Mrs. Lynn Llewellyn's room at the south end of the hall.—I'm the butler, sir, and I was told to remain here at the door." (This last remark was his apology for not showing us the way.)

We brushed past him and ascended the wide circular stairs, which were brilliantly lighted. As we reached the first landing, Detective Sullivan, standing in the hall above, greeted Markham.

"Howdy, Chief. The Sergeant'll be glad you've come. It looks like a dirty job." And he led the way down the hall.

In the south wing of the house Sullivan threw open a door for us. We entered a room which was large and almost square, with a high ceiling, an old-fashioned carved mantelpiece, and heavy over-drapes of a bygone era hanging from the great double-shuttered windows. The furniture—all Empire—looked authentic and costly; and hanging on the walls were many rare old prints which would have been an asset to any art museum.

On the high canopied bed to our left lay the still figure of a woman of about thirty. The silk cover had been partly thrown back, and both her arms were drawn up over her head. Her hair was brushed back flat, and over it was a hair-net, tied at the back of her neck.

Her face, under a layer of recently applied cold-cream, was cyanosed and blotchy, as if she had died in a convulsion; and her eyes were wide open and staring. It was an unlovely and blood-chilling sight.

Sergeant Heath, two members of the Homicide Bureau—Detectives Burke and Guilfoyle—and a Lieutenant Smalley, from the local station, were in the room. The Sergeant was seated at the large marble-topped centre-table, his note-book before him.

Facing the table stood a tall vigorous woman of about sixty, with a strong aquiline face. She was dabbing her eyes with a small lace handkerchief. Though I had never seen her before, I recognized her, from pictures that had appeared in the newspapers from time to time, as Mrs. Anthony Llewellyn.

Near her stood a young woman who looked singularly like Lynn Llewellyn, and I rightly assumed that she was Amelia Llewellyn, Lynn's sister. Her dark hair was parted in the middle and combed straight back over her ears to a twisted knot low on the back of her head. Her face, like her mother's, was strong and aquiline, with a marked hardness and an almost contemptuous expression. She glanced at us, when we entered, with a cold and indifferent, and somewhat bored, look. Both women were wearing silk tufted dressing-gowns, cut on the lines of a Japanese kimono.

Before the mantel stood a slender, nervous man of about thirty-five, in dinner clothes, smoking a cigarette in a long ivory holder. We soon learned that he was Doctor Allan Kane, a friend of Miss Llewellyn's, who lived within a block of the Llewellyn home, and who had been called in by Miss Llewellyn. It was Doctor Kane who had informed the police of young Mrs. Llewellyn's death. Kane, though he appeared to be agitated, had an air of professional seriousness. His face was flushed, and he kept shifting his weight from one foot to the other; but his gaze was direct and appraising as he looked at each of us in turn.

Sergeant Heath rose and greeted us as we came in.

"I was hoping you'd come, Mr. Markham," he said, with an air of obvious relief. "But I wasn't expecting Mr. Vance. I thought he'd

be at the Casino."

"I was at the Casino, Sergeant," Vance told him in a serious low tone. "And thanks awfully for Snitkin and Hennessey. But I didn't need them. . . ."

"Lynn!" The name, like an agonized wail, split the gloomy atmosphere of the room. It had come from the lips of Mrs. Llewellyn; and she turned to Vance with a face distorted with apprehension. "Did you see my son there? And is he all right?"

Vance regarded the woman for several moments, as if making up his mind how to answer her question. Then he said sympathetically but with determined precision:

"I regret, madam, that your son, too, has been poisoned—"

"My son dead?" The intensity of her words sent a chill through me.

Vance shook his head, his eyes fixed intently on the distracted woman.

"Not at the last report. He's under a doctor's care at the Park End Hospital—"

"I must go to him!" she cried, starting from the room.

But Vance restrained her gently.

"No; not just now, please," he said in a firm kindly voice. "You could do no good. And you are needed here at present. I will get a report from the hospital for you in a little while. . . . I regret having had to bring you this sad news, madam; but you would have had to hear it sooner or later. . . . Please sit down and help us."

The woman drew herself up and squared her jaw with Spartan fortitude.

"It can never be said that we Llewellyns ever shirked our duty," she announced, in a hard stern voice; and she sat down rigidly in a chair at the foot of the bed.

Amelia Llewellyn had been watching her mother with cynical indifference.

"That's all very noble," she commented, with a shrug. "'We Llewellyns'—the usual abracadabra. '*Firmitas et fortitudo*,' the family motto. A gryphon *rampant* or *sejant* or *couchant*—I forget which. In any event, a gryphon is a chimerical creature. Quite characteristic of our family: capable of anything—and nothing."

"Perhaps the Llewellyn gryphon is *segreant*," Vance suggested, looking straight at the girl.

She caught her breath, stared back at Vance for a few seconds, and then replied cynically: "It might be, at that. The Llewellyns are rather flighty."

Vance continued to regard her closely, and after a moment she walked up to him with a twisted smile.

"So, darling little Lynn—the filial paragon—has also been poisoned?" she said; and the smile faded from her mouth. "Some one is evidently determined to make a nice thorough job of it. I wouldn't be surprised if I were next. . . . There's too much rotten money in this family."

She shot a sneering look at her mother, who glared at her angrily; and then, sitting down on the edge of the table, she lighted a cigarette.

Markham was impatient and annoyed.

"Get on with your work, Sergeant," he ordered brusquely. "Who found this young woman?" He waved his hand distastefully toward the bed.

"I did." Amelia Llewellyn became serious, and her breast rose and fell with emotion.

"Ah!" Vance sat down and studied the girl quizzically. "Suppose you tell us the circumstances, Miss Llewellyn."

"We all went to bed round eleven," she began. "Uncle Dick and Mr. Bloodgood had gone to the Casino right after dinner. Lynn followed about an hour later. And Allan—Doctor Kane here—had some calls to make, and left with Lynn. . . ."

"Just a moment," broke in Vance, holding up his hand. "I understood the dinner tonight was more or less a family affair. Was Doctor Kane present?"

"Yes, he was here." The girl nodded bitterly. "I knew what another of these anniversary affairs would be—bickerings, recriminations, general squabbling. And I was nervous. So, at the last minute, I asked Doctor Kane to come to dinner. I thought his presence might tone down the animosity. Of course, Morgan Bloodgood was here too, but he's really like one of the family: we never hesitate to air our differences in his presence."

"And did Doctor Kane wield a restraining influence on the gathering tonight?" asked Vance.

"I'm afraid not," she returned. "There was too much pent-up passion that had to have an outlet."

Vance hesitated and then went on with his questioning:

"So Lynn and your uncle and the others departed; and you and your sister-in-law and your mother retired about eleven. Then what happened?"

"I was upset and fidgety and couldn't sleep. I got up around midnight and started to sketch. I worked for an hour or so, and had just decided to turn in when I heard Virginia cry out in a hysterical voice. My room is in this wing of the house; and the two apartments are divided only by a short private passageway which I use as a clothes closet." She indicated, with a movement of her head, a door at the rear of the room.

"You could hear your sister-in-law call out with the two doors and the passageway between you?" Vance asked.

"Ordinarily, I couldn't have heard her," the girl explained; "but I had just gone into the clothes closet to hang up my dressing-gown."

"And what did you do then?"

"I stepped to the door there to listen, and Virginia sounded as if she were choking. I tried the door and found it unlocked. . . ."

"Was it unusual for this door to be unlocked?" Vance interrupted.

"No. In fact, it is seldom locked."

"Continue, please."

"Well," the girl went on, "Virginia was lying on the bed, as she is now. Her eyes were staring; her face was terribly red; and she was in a horrible convulsion. I ran out into the hall and called to mother. Mother came in and looked at her. 'Get a doctor, Amelia,' she said; and I immediately phoned to Doctor Kane. He lives only a short distance from here, and he came right over. Before I was through

phoning, Virginia seemed to collapse. She became very still—too still. I—I knew that she had died. . . ." The girl shuddered involuntarily, and her voice trailed off.

"And now, Doctor Kane?" Vance turned toward the man standing by the mantel.

Kane came forward nervously: his hand trembled as he took his cigarette holder from his lips.

"When I arrived, sir, a few minutes later," he began, with a studied air of professional dignity, "Mrs. Llewellyn—Mrs. Lynn Llewellyn, I mean, of course—was quite dead. Her eyes were staring; her pupils were so widely dilated that I could hardly see the retina; and she was covered with a scarlatiniform rash. She seemed to have a *post-mortem* rise of temperature, and the position of her arms and the distortion of her facial and neck muscles indicated that she had had a convulsion and died of asphyxia. It looked like some poison in the belladonna group—hyoscin, atropin, or scopolamin. I did not move the body, and I warned both Mrs. Llewellyn and her daughter not to touch her. I immediately telephoned to the police."

"Quite correct," murmured Vance. "And then you waited for our arrival?"

"Naturally." Kane had regained much of his self-control, though his face was still flushed and he breathed heavily.

"And nothing in the room has been touched?"

"Nothing. I have been here all the time, and Miss Llewellyn and her mother waited here with me."

Vance nodded slowly.

"By the by, doctor," he asked, "do you use a typewriter?"

Kane gave a slight start of surprise.

"Why—yes," he stammered. "I used to type my papers at medical school. I'm not very good at it, though. I—I don't understand. . . . But if my typing can be of any help in the matter—"

"Merely an idle question," Vance returned casually, and then turned to Heath. "The Medical Examiner been notified?"

"Sure." The Sergeant was sullen and chewed viciously on his black cigar. "The call went through to the office in the usual way, but I phoned Doremus[9] at his home,—I didn't like the set-up tonight. . . ."

"And he was probably much annoyed," suggested Vance.

The Sergeant grunted.

"I'll say he was. But I told him Mr. Markham might be here, and he said he'd come himself. He oughta be here pretty soon."

Vance rose and faced Kane.

"I think that will be all for the present, doctor. But I must ask you to remain until the Medical Examiner comes. You may be able to assist him. . . . Would you mind waiting in the drawing-room downstairs?"

"Certainly not." He bowed stiffly and went toward the door. "I'll be glad to help in any way I can."

When he had gone Vance turned to the two women.

"I'm sorry to have to ask you to remain up," he said, "but I'm afraid it's necess'ry. Will you be so good as to wait in your rooms." His voice, though mild and gracious, held an undertone of command.

Mrs. Llewellyn stood up and her eyes blazed.

"Why can't I go to my son?" she demanded. "There's nothing more I can do here. I know nothing at all about this affair."

"You cannot help your son," Vance replied firmly; "and you may be able to help us. I'll be glad, however, to get the hospital's report for you."

He went to the telephone on the night-stand; and a minute later he was talking with Doctor Rogers. When he had replaced the receiver he turned to Mrs. Llewellyn encouragingly.

"Your son has come out of his coma, madam," he reported. "And he is breathing more normally; his pulse is stronger; and he seems to be out of danger. You will be notified immediately if there should be any change for the worse."

Mrs. Llewellyn, holding her handkerchief close to her face, went out sobbing.

Amelia Llewellyn did not go at once. She waited till the door had closed behind her mother, and then looked at Vance questioningly.

"Why," she asked in a dead, metallic voice, "did you ask Doctor Kane if he used a typewriter?"

Vance took out the letter that had brought him into the affair, and handed it to her without a word. He watched her closely with half-closed eyes as she read it. A troubled frown settled over her face, but she showed no surprise. When she had come to the end she slowly and deliberately refolded the letter and handed it back to Vance.

"Thanks," she said, and turning, started toward the door to the passageway leading to her quarters.

"One moment, Miss Llewellyn." Vance's summoning voice halted her just as she placed her hand on the knob; and she faced the room again. "Do you, too, use a typewriter?"

The girl nodded lethargically.

"Oh, yes. I do all of my correspondence on a small typewriter I have. . . . However," she added, with a faint, weary smile, "I'm much more adept than the person who typed that letter."

"And are the other members of the household given to using the typewriter, too?" asked Vance.

"Yes—we're all quite modern." The girl spoke indifferently. "Even mother types her own lectures. And Uncle Dick, having been an author at one time, developed a rapid, but sloppy, two-fingered system."

"And your sister-in-law: did she use one?"

The girl's eyes turned toward the bed, and she winced.

"Yes. Virginia played around with the machine when Lynn was out gambling. . . . Lynn himself is quite proficient as a typist. He once attended a commercial school—probably thought he might be called on some time to handle the Llewellyn estate. But mother wasn't thinking along those lines; so he turned to night-clubs instead." (There was a curious detachment in her manner which I could not fathom at the time.)

"That leaves only Mr. Bloodgood—" Vance began; but the girl quickly interrupted him.

"He types, also." Her eyes darkened somewhat, and I felt that her attitude toward Bloodgood was not altogether a friendly one. "He typed most of his reports of that slot-machine affair he was connected with on our typewriter downstairs."



Vance raised his eyebrows slightly in mild interest.

"There is a typewriter downstairs?"

Again the girl nodded, and shrugged as if the matter was of no interest to her.

"There always has been one there—in the little library off the drawing-room."

"Do you think," asked Vance, "that the letter I showed you was typed on that machine?"

"It might have been." The girl sighed. "It's the same kind of type and the same color ribbon. . . . But there are so many like it."

"And perhaps," Vance pursued, "you could suggest who is the author of the communication."

Amelia Llewellyn's face clouded, and the hard look returned to her eyes.

"I could make several suggestions," she said in a dull angry tone. "But I have no intention of doing anything of the kind." And opening the door with decisive swiftness, she went from the room.

"You learned a hell of a lot!" snorted Heath with ponderous sarcasm. "This house is just a bunch of stenographers."

Vance regarded the Sergeant indulgently.

"I learned a good deal, don't y' know."

Heath shifted the cigar between his teeth and made a grimace.

"Maybe yes and maybe no," he rumbled. "The case is cock-eyed anyway, if you ask me.—Llewellyn getting poisoned at the Casino, and his wife having it handed to her here at the same time. Looks to me as if there was a gang at work."

"The same person could have accomplished both acts, Sergeant," Vance returned mildly. "In fact, I feel sure it was the same person. Furthermore, I think it was that person who sent me the letter. . . . Just a minute."

He walked to the night-stand, and, moving the telephone aside, picked up a small folded piece of paper.

"I saw this when I called the hospital," he explained. "But I purposely didn't look at it till the ladies should have left us."

He unfolded the paper and held it under the night-light on the table. From where I stood I could see that it was a single sheet of pale-blue note-paper, and that there was typing on it.

"Oh, my aunt!" Vance murmured, as he read it. "Amazin'! . . ."

At length he handed the paper to Markham, who held it so that Heath and I, who were standing at his side, could see it. It was an inexpertly typed note, and ran:

Dear Lynn—I cannot make you happy, and God knows, no one in this house has ever tried to make *me* happy. Uncle Dick is the only person here who has ever been civil or considerate toward me. I am not wanted here and am utterly miserable. I am going to poison myself.

Good-by—and may your new roulette system bring you the fortune that you seem to want more than you want anything else.

The signature, "Virginia," was also typewritten.

Markham folded the note and pursed his lips. He looked at Vance for a long time; then he remarked:

"That seems to simplify matters."

"Oh, my dear fellow!" Vance protested. "That note merely complicates the situation abominably."



## 5. POISON!

(Sunday, October 16; 2:15 a.m.)

At that moment Sullivan opened the door and admitted Doctor Doremus, a slight jaunty person with a businesslike, peppery air. He wore a tweed top-coat, and the brim of his pearl-gray felt hat was turned down rakishly on one side.

He greeted us with dramatic consternation, and then cocked an eye flippantly at Sergeant Heath.

"When you don't call me to see your corpses at meal time," he complained with falsetto ill-nature, "you wait till I'm sound asleep and then rout me out. No system . . . no system. It's a conspiracy to rob me of food and rest. I've aged twenty years since I took this job three years ago."

"You look young and snappy enough," grinned Heath. (He had long since become accustomed to the Medical Examiner's grousing.)

"Well, it's through no kindly consideration on the part of you babies in the Homicide Bureau, by Gad!" Doremus snapped. "Where's the body?" His eyes shot round the room and came to rest on the still figure of Virginia Llewellyn. "A lady, eh? What did she die of?"

"You tell us." Heath had suddenly become aggressive.

Doremus grunted; then, removing his hat and coat, he put them on a chair and approached the bed. For ten minutes he was examining the dead girl, and, once again, I was impressed by his competency and thoroughness. For all his nonchalant mannerisms and cynical attitude, he was a shrewd and efficient physician—one of the best and most conscientious medical examiners New York has ever had.

While Doremus was busy with his gruesome task Vance made a brief inspection of the room. He went first to the night-table on which stood a small silver water-service similar to the one in Kinkaid's office at the Casino. He picked up the two glasses and looked at them: they both seemed to be dry. He then took the stopper from the carafe, and inverted the bottle over one of the glasses. It was empty. Vance frowned as he set it back on the tray. After inspecting the interior of the little drawer in the table, he walked toward the bathroom door, which was half open, at the rear of the room.

As he passed Markham he commented in a low voice:

"The general service tonight has been abominable. Kinkaid's water carafe was empty; and so is the Lynn Llewellyns'. Queer, don't y' know. . . . Incidentally, the drawer in that table by the bed contains only a handkerchief, a pack of cards—for solitaire, no doubt,—a pencil and pad, a stick of lip pomade, and a pair of reading glasses. . . . Nothing lethal, as it were."

I followed Vance into the bathroom, for I knew that he had something definite in mind when he began his tour of inspection:—this fact was clearly indicated by his casual and lazy manner, which he invariably assumed in moments of highest tension.

The bathroom was quite a large one, thoroughly modernized, and had two small windows facing on the south court. The room was neatly arranged and everything was in order. Vance, after switching on the light, glanced about him searchingly. There was a small atomizer and a tube of bath tablets on one of the window sills.

Vance pressed the bulb of the atomizer and sniffed at the spray.

"Derline's *Fleur-de-lis*, Van," he remarked. "Ideal for blondes." He read the label on the tube of bath tablets. "Also Derline's *Fleur-de-lis*. Quite consistent and correct. Alas, too many women make the fatal error of contrasting their bath perfume with their personal scent. . . ."

He opened the door of the medicine cabinet and looked inside. It contained only the usual items: cleansing creams and skin food, a bottle of hand lotion, toilet water, talcum and bath powders, a deodorant, a tube of tooth paste, dental floss, a thermometer, and the conventional array of medicinal preparations—iodin, aspirin, sodium bicarbonate, camphor, Dobell's solution, yellow throat mixture, glycerin, argyrol, aromatic spirits of ammonia, benzoin, milk of magnesia, bromide tablets, a standard eye-wash with its cup-shaped stopper, medicated alcohol, and so forth.

Vance spent considerable time scrutinizing each item. At length he took down a small brown bottle with a printed label, and, carefully adjusting his monocle, read the fine type of the formula. Then he slipped the bottle into his pocket, closed the cabinet door, and turned back into the bedroom.

Doctor Doremus was just putting the sheet back over the still form on the bed. He turned toward Heath with simulated truculence.

"Well, what about it?" he demanded irritably, spreading his hands in a gesture of inquiry. "She's dead—if that's what you want to know. And I have to be dragged out of the blankets at two in the morning to tell you that!"

Heath took his cigar slowly from between his teeth and glowered at the Medical Examiner.

"All right, doc," he said. "She's dead, says you. But how long has she been that way, and what killed her?"

"I knew that was coming," sighed Doremus, and then became professionally serious. "Well, Sergeant, she's been dead about two hours; and she was poisoned. . . . Now, I suppose you'll want me to tell you where she got the poison." And he leered at Heath.

Vance stepped between the two men.

"A doctor who was called in," he said gravely to Doremus, "suggested that she might have died from one of the poisons in the belladonna group."

"Any third-year medical student would know that," Doremus returned. "Sure, it's belladonna poisoning. . . . Was this saw-bones here in time to catch her *post-mortem* rise in temperature?"

Vance nodded.

"He was here within ten minutes of her death."

"Well, there you are." Doremus put on his coat and carefully adjusted his hat on the side of his head. "All the indications: staring eyes, widely dilated pupils, pin-point rash, a jump in temperature, signs of convulsions and asphyxia. . . . Simple."

"Yes, yes—quite." Vance drew forth the bottle he had taken from the bathroom cabinet, and handed it to the Medical Examiner. "Could these tablets have been the cause of death?" he asked.

Doremus looked closely at the label and the printed formula.

"Regulation rhinitis tablets—household-remedy stuff." He held the bottle under the table light and squinted at it. "Powdered camphor," he read aloud; "fluid extract of belladonna root, a quarter minim; and quinin sulphate. . . . Certainly this could have done it—if enough of 'em were taken."

"The bottle's empty; and it contained a hundred tablets originally," Vance pointed out.

Doctor Doremus, still scrutinizing the label, nodded his head.

"A hundred times one-quarter of a minim would be twenty-five minims. . . . Enough belladonna to knock anybody cold." He handed the bottle back to Vance. "That's the answer. Why get me up in the middle of the night when you had all the dope?"

"Really, doctor," returned Vance quietly, "we're merely probin' around. I just found this empty bottle, d' ye see, and thought I'd advance it as a possibility."

"Looks all right to me." Doremus went to the door. "Only a *post mortem* 'll answer your questions definitely."

Markham spoke up brusquely.

"That's just what we want, doctor. When is the soonest we can have the autopsy report?"

"Oh, Lord!" Doremus set his teeth. "And to-morrow's Sunday. This modern speed will kill me yet. . . . How would eleven o'clock tomorrow morning do?"

"That would be eminently satisfactory," Markham told him.

Doctor Doremus took a small pad from his pocket, and, writing something on it, tore off the top sheet and handed it to the Sergeant.

"Here's your order for the removal of the body."

The Sergeant pocketed the slip of paper.

"The body'll be at the morgue before you are," he mumbled.

"That's bully." Doremus gave Heath a vicious leer and opened the door. "And now I'm going back to sleep. You can have a massacre tonight if you want to, but you won't see me again till nine a. m." He waved his hand in a farewell gesture which included us all, and went swiftly out.

When the Medical Examiner had slammed the door behind him, Markham turned to Vance gravely.

"Where'd you find that bottle, Vance?"

"In yon *lavatorium*. It was the only thing I saw there that seemed to have any possibilities."

"Taken in connection with that suicide note you found," observed Markham, "it would seem to furnish a simple explanation of this terrible affair."

Vance regarded Markham thoughtfully for several moments; then, after a long inhalation on his cigarette, he walked the length of the room and back, his head bowed in contemplation.

"I'm not so sure, Markham," he murmured, almost as if to himself. "I'll grant you that it's a specious solution of the death of this girl on the bed. But what of that poor johnnie in the hospital? It wasn't belladonna that hit him; and there certainly wasn't any suicidal urge in *his* mind. He was playing to win tonight; and his silly system was apparently working out. Yet, in the midst of it he fades out. . . . No, no. The empty bottle of rhinitis tablets is too simple. And this affair is not simple at all. It's filled with shadows and false scents: it has hidden subtleties and convolutions. . . ."

"After all, you found the bottle—" began Markham. But Vance interrupted him.

"That may have been arranged for us. It fits too snugly into the pattern. We'll know more—or less—tomorrow morning when Doremus has turned in his report."

Markham was annoyed.

"Why try to concoct mysteries?"

"My dear Markham!" Vance reproached him, and stood for several minutes apparently absorbed in one of the eighteenth-century prints hanging over the mantel.

Heath, in the meantime, had been telephoning to the Department of Public Welfare for a wagon to take the body away. When he had completed the call he spoke to Lieutenant Smalley of the local precinct station, who had watched the proceedings silently from a corner of the room.

"There's nothing more, Lieutenant. Mr. Markham's here, and there's only routine stuff till Doc Doremus makes the autopsy. But you might leave a couple of your men on the job outside."

"Anything you want, Sergeant." Lieutenant Smalley shook hands all round, and went out with an air of obvious relief.

"I think we can go, too," Markham said. "You're in charge, of course, Sergeant—I'll arrange it with the Inspector the first thing in the morning."

"I say, Markham," Vance put in, "let's not dash precipitately away. I could bear to know a few facts, and as long as we're here tonight. . . ."

"What, for instance, do you want to know?" Markham was impatient.

Vance turned away from the print, and gazed sadly at the dead girl.

"I'd like a few more words with Doctor Kane before we drift out into the chillin' mist."

Markham made a wry face, but finally nodded in reluctant assent.

"He's downstairs." And he led the way out into the hall.

Doctor Kane was pacing nervously up and down when we entered the drawing-room.

"What's the report?" he asked before Vance had time to speak.

"The Medical Examiner merely corroborated your own diagnosis, doctor," Vance told him. "The *post mortem* will be performed the first thing in the morning. . . . By the by, doctor, are you the Llewellyns' family physician?"

"I can hardly say that," the other answered. "I doubt if they have any one attend them regularly. They don't require much medical supervision; they're a very healthy family. I do prescribe occasionally, though, for minor ailments—but as a friend rather than professionally."

"And have you done any prescribing for any of them lately?" asked Vance.

Kane took a moment to think.

"Nothing of any consequence," he answered at length. "I suggested a tonic of iron—Blaud's Mass—and strychnin for Miss Llewellyn a few days ago—"

"Has Lynn Llewellyn any constitutional ailment," interrupted Vance, "that would cause him to collapse under keen excitement?"

"No-o. He has a hypertrophied heart, with the attendant increased blood-pressure—the result of athletics in college—"

"Angina?"

Kane shook his head.

"Nothing as serious as that—though his condition may develop into that some day."

"Ever prescribe for him?"

"A year or so ago I gave him a prescription for some nitroglycerin tablets—a two-hundredth of a grain. But that's all."

"Nitroglycerin—eh, what?" A flash of interest animated Vance's smouldering eyes. "That's most revealin'. . . . And his wife: were you ever called upon in her behalf?"

"Oh, once or twice," Kane answered, with a careless wave of his cigarette holder. "She had rather weak eyes, and I recommended an ordinary eye solution. . . . It's been my experience," he added in a pompous tone, "that very light blondes with pale blue eyes—lack of pigmentation, you understand—have weaker eyes than brunettes—"

"Let's not indulge in ophthalmological theory," Vance cut in, with an ingratiating smile. "It's getting beastly late. . . . What else have you prescribed for young Mrs. Llewellyn?"

"That's really about all." Kane, for all his attempt at poise, was becoming nervous. "I recommended a certain salve for a mild erythema on one of her hands several months ago; and last week, when she had an annoying cold in the head, I suggested regulation rhinitis tablets. I don't recall anything else—"

"Rhinitis tablets?" Vance's penetrating gaze was on the man. "How many did you tell her to take?"

"Oh, the usual dose," Kane returned, with an effort at carelessness, "one or two tablets every two hours."

"Most rhinitis tablets contain belladonna, y' know," remarked Vance in a hard, even tone.

"Why, yes—of course. . . ." Kane's eyes suddenly opened wide, and he stared at Vance with frightened intensity. "But—but, really. . . ." He stammered, and broke off.

"We found an empty hundred-tablet bottle in her medicine cabinet," Vance informed him, without shifting his gaze. "And, according to your own diagnosis, Mrs. Llewellyn died of belladonna poisoning."

Kane's jaw dropped, and his face went pale.

"My God!" he muttered. "She—she couldn't have done that." The man was trembling noticeably. "She would know better—and I was most explicit. . . ."

"No one can blame you in the circumstances, doctor," Vance said consolingly. "Tell me, was Mrs. Llewellyn an intelligent and conscientious patient?"

"Yes—very." Kane moistened his lips with his tongue, and made a valiant effort to control himself. "She was always most careful to follow my instructions implicitly. I remember now that she phoned me, the other day, asking if she could take an extra tablet before the two-hour interval had elapsed."

"And the eye lotion?" asked Vance with marked casualness.

"I'm sure she followed my advice," Kane answered earnestly. "Though, of course, that was an absolutely harmless solution—"

"And what was your advice regarding it?"

"I told her she should bathe her eyes with it every night before retiring."

"What were the ingredients in the unguent you recommended for her hand?"

Kane looked surprised.

"I'm sure I don't know," he returned unsteadily. "The usual simple emollients, I suppose. It was a proprietary preparation, on sale at any drug store,—probably contained zinc oxide or lanolin. There couldn't possibly have been anything harmful in it."

Vance walked to the front window and looked out. He was both puzzled and disturbed.

"Was that the extent of your medical services to Lynn Llewellyn and his wife?" he asked, returning slowly to the centre of the room.

"Yes!" Though Kane's voice quavered, there was in it, nevertheless, a note of undeniable emphasis.

Vance let his eyes rest on the young doctor for a brief period.

"I think that will be all," he said. "There's nothing more you can do here tonight."

Kane drew a deep breath of relief and went to the door.

"Good night, gentlemen," he said, with a questioning look at Vance. "Please call on me if I can be of any help." He opened the door and then hesitated. "I'd be most grateful if you'd let me know the result of the autopsy."

Vance bowed abstractedly.

"We'll be glad to, doctor. And our apologies for having kept you up so late."

Kane did not move for a moment, and I thought he was going to say something; but he suddenly went out, and in a moment we could hear the butler helping him with his coat.

Vance stood at the table for several moments, gazing straight before him and letting his fingers move over the inlaid design of the wood. Then, without shifting his eyes, he sat down and very slowly and deliberately drew out his cigarette-case.

Markham had been standing near the door during this interview, watching both Vance and the doctor intently. He now walked across the room to the marble mantel and leaned against it.

"Vance," he commented gravely, "I'm beginning to see what's in your mind."

Vance looked up and sighed deeply.

"Really, Markham?" He shook his head with a discouraged air. "You're far more penetratin' than I am. I'd give my *ting-yao* vase to know what is in my mind. It's all very confusin'. Everything fits—it's a perfect mosaic. And that's what frightens me."

He shook himself gently, as if to throw off some unpleasant intrusion of thought, and, going to the door, summoned the butler.

"Please tell Miss Llewellyn," he said, when the man appeared, "—I think she is in her own apartment—that we should appreciate her coming to the drawing-room."

When the man had turned down the hall toward the stairs, Vance moved to the mantel and stood beside Markham.

"There are a few other little things I want to know before we make our *adieux*," he explained. He was troubled and restless: I had rarely seen him in such a mood. "No case I have ever helped you with, Markham, has made me feel so strongly the presence of a subtle and devastating personality. Not once has it manifested itself in all the tragic events of this evening; but I know it's there, grinning at us and defying us to penetrate to the bottom of this devilish scheme. And all the ingredients in the plot are, apparently, commonplace and obvious,—but I've a feelin' they're sign-posts pointing *away* from the truth." He smoked a moment in silence; then he said: "The fiendish part of it is, it's not even intended that we should follow the sign-posts. . . ."

There was the sound of soft footsteps descending the stairs; and a moment later Amelia Llewellyn stood at the drawing-room door.

## 6. A CRY IN THE NIGHT

(Sunday, October 16; 3 a.m.)

She had changed her tufted robe for a pair of black satin lounging pyjamas; and I saw evidences of the recent application of rouge, lip-stick and powder. She was smoking a cigarette in an embossed ebony holder; and as she stood before us, framed in the ivory of the door casement, she made a striking figure which somehow reminded me of one of Zuloaga's spectacular poster-paintings.

"I received your verbal subpoena from the jittery yet elegant Crichton—our butler's name is really Smith—and here I am." She spoke with an air of facetious worldliness. "Well, where do we stand now?"

"We much prefer not to stand, Miss Llewellyn," Vance answered, moving a chair forward with a commanding soberness.

"Delighted." She settled herself in the chair and crossed her knees. "I'm frightfully tired, what with all this unusual excitement."

Vance sat down facing her.

"Has it occurred to you, Miss Llewellyn," he asked, "that your brother's wife may have committed suicide?"

"Good Heavens, no!" The girl leaned forward in questioning amazement: she had suddenly dropped her cynical manner.

"You know of no reason, then, why she should have taken her life?" Vance pursued quietly.

"She had no more reason than any one else has." Amelia Llewellyn gazed thoughtfully past Vance. "We could all find some good excuse for suicide. But Virginia had nothing to worry about. She was well provided for, and she was living more comfortably, materially, than she ever had been before." (This remark was made with a decided tinge of bitterness.) "She knew Lynn pretty well before she married him, and she must have calculated every advantage and disadvantage beforehand. Considering the fact that we did not particularly like her, we treated her quite decently—especially mother. But then, Lynn has always been mother's darling, and she'd treat a boa-constrictor with kindness and consideration if Lynn brought it into the house."

"Still," suggested Vance, "even in such circumstances, people do occasionally commit suicide, y' know."

"That's quite true." The girl shrugged. "But Virginia was too cowardly to take her own life, no matter how unhappy she may have been." (A note of animosity informed her voice.) "Besides, she was always self-centred and vain—"

"Vain about what, for instance?" Vance interrupted.

"About everything." She flung the ashes of her cigarette to the floor. "She was particularly vain about her personal appearance. She was at all times on the stage and in make-up, so to speak."

"Does it not seem possible to you"—Vance was peculiarly persistent—"that if she had been miserable enough—?"

"No!" The girl anticipated the rest of his question with an emphatic denial. "If Virginia had been too miserable to stand the life here, she wouldn't have done away with herself. She would have run off with some other man. Or perhaps gone back to the stage—which is just an indirect way of doing the same thing."

"You're not very charitable," murmured Vance.

"Charitable?" She laughed unpleasantly. "Perhaps not. But, at any rate, I'm not altogether stupid, either."

"Suppose," remarked Vance mildly, "that I should tell you that we found a suicide note?"

The girl's eyes opened wide, and she gazed at Vance in consternation.

"I don't believe it!" she said vehemently.

"And yet, Miss Llewellyn, it's quite true," Vance told her with quiet gravity.

For several moments no one spoke. Amelia Llewellyn's eyes drifted from Vance out into space; her lips tightened; and a shrewd, hard expression appeared on her face. Vance watched her closely, without seeming to do so. At length she moved in her chair and said with artificial simplicity:

"One never can tell, can one? I guess I'm not a very good psychologist. I can't imagine Virginia killing herself. It's most theatrical, however. Did Lynn attempt self-annihilation, too?—a suicide pact, or something of the sort?"

"If he did," returned Vance casually, "he evidently failed—according to the latest report."

"That would be quite in keeping with his character," the girl remarked in a dead tone. "Lynn is not the soul of efficiency. He always just misses the mark. Too much maternal supervision, perhaps."

Vance was annoyed by her attitude.

"We'll let that phase of the matter drop for the moment," he said with a new sharpness. "We're interested just now in facts. Can you tell us anything of your uncle's—that is, Mr. Kinkaid's—attitude toward your sister-in-law? The note we found mentioned that he had been particularly kind to her."

"That's true." The girl assumed a less supercilious air. "Uncle Dick always seemed to have a soft spot in his heart for Virginia. Maybe he felt that, as Lynn's wife, she was to be pitied. Or maybe he considered her an adventurer like himself. In any event, there seemed to be a bond of some kind between them. Sometimes I've thought that Uncle Dick has let Lynn win at the Casino occasionally so that Virginia would have more spending money."

"That's most interestin'." Vance lighted a fresh cigarette and went on. "And that brings me to another question. I do hope you won't mind. It's a bit personal, don't y' know; but the answer may help us no end. . . ."

"Don't apologize," the girl put in. "I'm not in the least secretive. Ask me anything you care to."

"That's very sportin' of you," murmured Vance. "The fact is, we should like to know the exact financial status of the members of your family."

"Is that all?" She looked genuinely surprised, perhaps even disappointed. "The answer is quite simple. When my grandfather, Amos Kinkaid, died, he left the bulk of his fortune to my mother. He had great faith in her business ability; but he didn't think so much of Uncle Dick and willed him only a small portion of the estate. We children—Lynn and I—were too young to receive any individual consideration; and anyway, he probably counted on mother to look out for our welfare. The result is that Uncle Dick has had to look

after himself more or less, and that mother is the custodian of Old Amos's money. Lynn and I are both wholly dependent on her generosity; but she gives us a fair enough allowance. . . . And that's about all there is to it."

"But how," asked Vance, "will the estate be distributed in the event of your mother's death?"

"That only mother can tell you," replied the girl. "But I imagine it will be divided between Lynn and myself—with the greater part, of course, going to Lynn."

"What of your uncle?"

"Oh, mother regards him with too much disapproval. I doubt seriously that she has considered him in her will at all."

"But in the event that your mother outlives both you and your brother, where would the money go then?"

"To Uncle Dick, I guess—if he were alive. Mother has a pronounced clannish instinct. She'd much prefer Uncle Dick to inherit the fortune to having it fall into the hands of an outsider."

"But suppose either you or your brother should die before your mother, do you think the remaining child would inherit everything?"

Amelia Llewellyn nodded.

"That is my opinion," she answered, with quiet frankness. "But no one can tell what plans or ideas mother has. And, naturally, it's not a subject that's ever discussed between us."

"Oh, quite—quite." Vance smoked for a moment and then raised himself a little in his chair. "There's one other question I'd like to ask you. You've been very generous, don't y' know. The situation is quite serious at the moment, and there's no tellin' what facts or suggestions may prove of assistance to us. . . ."

"I think I understand." The girl spoke with an apparent softness and appreciation of which I had heretofore thought her incapable. "Please don't hesitate to ask me anything that may be of help to you. I'm terribly upset—really. I didn't care for Virginia, but—after all—a death like hers is—well, something you wouldn't wish for your worst enemy."

Vance took his eyes from the girl and contemplated the tip of his cigarette. I tried to probe his mental reaction at the moment, but his face showed nothing of what was going through his mind.

"My question concerns Mrs. Lynn Llewellyn," he said. "It's simply this: if she had survived both you and your brother, what effect would that have had on your mother's will?"

Amelia Llewellyn pondered the question.

"I really couldn't say," she replied at length. "I've never thought of the situation in that light. But I'm inclined to believe mother would have made Virginia her chief beneficiary. She would probably have clutched at anything to keep Uncle Dick from getting the estate. And furthermore her almost pathological devotion to Lynn would affect her decision. After all, Virginia was Lynn's wife; and Lynn and everything pertaining to him has always come first with mother." She looked up appealingly. "I wish I could help you more than I have."

Vance rose.

"You have helped us no end—really. We're all gropin' about in the dark just now. And we sha'n't keep you up any longer. . . . But we'd like to speak to your mother. Would you mind asking her to come here to the drawing-room?"

"Oh, no." The girl rose wearily and went toward the door. "She'll be delighted, I'm sure. Her one ambition in life is to have a hand in every one's affairs and to be the centre of every disturbance." She went slowly from the room, and we could hear her ascending the stairs.

"A strange creature," Vance commented, as if he were thinking out loud. "A combination of extremes . . . cold as steel, yet highly emotional. Constant cerebral antagonism goin' on . . . can't make up her mind. She's livin' on a psychic borderline—heart and mind at odds. . . . Curiously symbolic of this entire case. No compasses and no way of takin' our bearin's." He looked up wistfully. "Don't you feel that, Markham? There are a dozen roads to take—and they all may lead us astray. But there's a hidden alley somewhere, and that's the route we have to take. . . ."

He walked toward the rear of the drawing-room.

"In the meantime," he said, in a lighter tone, "I'll indulge my zeal for thoroughness."

Behind heavy velour drapes in the middle of the rear wall were massive sliding doors; and Vance drew one of them aside. He felt along the wall in the room beyond, and in a few seconds there was a flood of light revealing a small library. We could see Vance stand for a moment looking about him; and then he went to the low kidney-shaped desk and sat down. On the desk stood a typewriter, and after inserting a piece of paper in it, he began typing. In a few moments he withdrew the paper from the machine, looked at it closely, and, folding it, put it in his inside breast pocket.

On his way back to the drawing-room he paused before a set of book-shelves and let his eye run over the neat array of volumes it held. He was still inspecting the books when Mrs. Llewellyn came in with an air of imperious regality. Vance must have heard her enter, for he turned immediately, and rejoined us in the drawing-room.

He bowed, and, indicating one of the large silk-covered chairs by the centre-table, asked her to sit down.

"What did you gentlemen wish to see me about?" Mrs. Llewellyn asked, without making any move to seat herself.

"I notice, madam," Vance returned, ignoring both her manner and her question, "that you have a most interestin' collection of medical books in the little room beyond." He moved his hand in a designating gesture toward the sliding doors.

Mrs. Llewellyn hesitated and then said:

"I shouldn't be in the least surprised. My late husband, though not a doctor, was greatly interested in medical research. He wrote occasionally for some of the scientific journals."

"There are," continued Vance, without any change of intonation, "several standard works on toxicology among the more general treatises."

The woman thrust out her chin aggressively, and, with the suggestion of a shrug, sat down with rigid dignity on the edge of a straight chair near the door.

"It's quite likely," she replied. "Do you consider them as having any bearing on the tragedy that has happened tonight?" There was an undercurrent of contempt in the question.

Vance did not pursue the subject. Instead, he asked her:

"Do you know of any reason why your daughter-in-law should have taken her own life?"

Not a muscle of the woman's face moved for several moments; but her eyes suddenly darkened, as if in thought. Presently she raised her head.

"Suicide?" There was a repressed animation in her voice. "I hadn't thought of her death in that light, but now that you make the suggestion, I can see that such an explanation would not be illogical." She nodded slowly. "Virginia was most unhappy here. She did not fit into her new environment, and several times she said to me that she wished she were dead. But I attached no importance to the remark,—it's a much abused figure of speech. However, I did everything I could to make the poor child happy."

"A tryin' situation," murmured Vance sympathetically. "By the by, madam, would you mind telling us—wholly in confidence, I assure you—what the general terms of your will might be?"

The woman glared at Vance in angry consternation.

"I *would* mind—most emphatically! Indeed, I resent the question. My will is a matter that concerns no one but myself. It could have no bearing whatever on the present hideous predicament."

"I'm not entirely convinced of that," returned Vance mildly. "There is one line of reasoning, for example, that might lead us to speculate on the possibility that one of the potential beneficiaries would gain by the—shall we say, absence?—of certain other heirs."

The woman sprang to her feet and stood in tense rigidity, her eyes glowering at Vance with vindictive animosity.

"Are you intimating, sir,"—her voice was cold and venomous—"that my brother—?"

"My dear Mrs. Llewellyn!" Vance remonstrated sharply. "I had no one in mind. But you do not seem to appreciate the significance of the fact that two members of your household have been poisoned tonight, and that it is our duty to ascertain every possible factor that may, even remotely, have some bearing on the case."

"But you yourself," protested the woman in a mollified voice, reseating herself, "advanced the possibility of Virginia's having committed suicide."

"Hardly that, madam," Vance corrected her. "I merely asked you whether you considered such a theory plausible. . . . On the other hand, do you think it likely that your son attempted to take his own life?"

"No—certainly not!" she replied dogmatically. Then a distracted look came into her eyes. "And yet . . . I don't know—I can't tell. He has always been very emotional—very temperamental. The least little thing would upset him. He brooded, and exaggerated. . . ."

"Personally," said Vance, "I cannot believe that your son attempted to end his life. I was watching him at the time he was stricken. He was winning heavily, and was intent on every turn of the wheel."

The woman seemed to have lost interest in everything but her son's welfare.

"Do you think he's all right?" she asked pleadingly. "You should have let me go to him. Couldn't you inquire again how he is?"

Vance rose immediately and went toward the door.

"I'll be glad to, madam."

A few moments later we heard him talking over the telephone in the hall. Then he returned to the drawing-room.

"Mr. Llewellyn," he reported, "is apparently out of danger. Doctor Rogers has left the hospital; but the house physician on night duty tells me your son is resting quietly, and that his pulse is practically normal now. He believes Mr. Llewellyn will be able to return home tomorrow morning."

"Thank God!" The woman breathed a sigh of relief. "I shall be able to sleep now. . . . Was there anything more you wished to ask me?"

Vance inclined his head.

"The question will doubtless seem irrelevant to you; but the answer may clarify a certain phase of this unfortunate situation." He looked directly at Mrs. Llewellyn. "Just what is Mr. Bloodgood's status in this household?"

The woman raised her eyebrows, and gazed back at Vance for a full half-minute before answering. Then she spoke in a conventional and curiously detached tone.

"Mr. Bloodgood is a very close friend of my son's. They were at college together. And I believe he knew Virginia quite well for several years before her marriage into our family. My brother—Mr. Kinkaid—has, for a long time, been an ardent admirer of Mr. Bloodgood's. He saw possibilities in the young man, and trained him for his present position. Mr. Bloodgood comes here to my home a great deal, both socially and on business. . . . You see," she added in explanation, "my brother lives here. The house is really half his."

"Just where are Mr. Kinkaid's quarters?" Vance asked.

"He occupies the entire third floor."

"And may I," continued Vance, "ask what the relationship is between Mr. Bloodgood and your daughter?"

The woman shot Vance a quick look, but did not hesitate to answer the question with apparent frankness.

"Mr. Bloodgood is deeply interested in Amelia. He has asked her to marry him, I believe; but she has given him no definite answer, as far as I know. Sometimes I think she likes him, but there are other times when she treats him abominably. I have a feeling she does not altogether trust him. But then again, she is constantly thinking of her art; and she may merely have the idea that marriage would interfere with her career."

"Would you approve of the union?" Vance asked casually.

"I'd neither approve nor disapprove," she said, and closed her lips tightly.

Vance regarded her with a slightly puzzled frown. "Is Doctor Kane also interested in your daughter?"

"Oh, yes, I imagine he's interested enough—in a calf-like way. But I can assure you Amelia has no sentimental leanings in his direction. She uses him constantly though,—she has no scruples in that respect. Allan Kane is a great convenience to her at times; and he comes of a very good family."

Vance got up lazily from his chair and bowed.

"We sha'n't detain you any longer," he said with an air of stern courtesy. "We appreciate your help, and we wish you to know that everything will be taken care of with the least possible inconvenience to yourself."

Mrs. Llewellyn drew herself up haughtily, rose, and went from the room without a word.

When she was out of hearing Markham got to his feet aggressively and confronted Vance.

"I've had enough of this." His tone was one of irritable reproach. "All this domestic gossip is getting us nowhere. You're simply manufacturing bugaboos."

Vance sighed resignedly.

"Ah, well! Let's toddle along. The witchin' hour has long since passed."

As we went out into the hall, Detective Sullivan came down the stairs.

"The Sergeant's going to wait for the buggy and put everybody to bed," he told Markham. "I'm going home and hit the hay. Good night, Chief. . . . So long, Mr. Vance." And he lumbered out into the night.

The cadaverous butler, looking tired and drowsy, helped us with our coats.

"You'll take orders from Sergeant Heath," Markham instructed him.

The man bowed and went toward the door to open it for us. But before he reached it there came the sound of a key being inserted in the lock; and in another moment Kinkaid blustered into the hall. He drew up shortly as he caught sight of us.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded truculently. "And what are those officers doing outside?"

"We're here on a matter of duty," Markham told him. "There's been a tragedy here tonight."

The muscles of Kinkaid's face suddenly relaxed into a calm, cold, blank expression: he had become, in the fraction of a second, the inscrutable gambler.

"Your nephew's wife is dead," Vance said. "She was poisoned. And, as you know, Lynn Llewellyn also was poisoned tonight. . . ."

"To hell with Lynn!" Kinkaid spoke through his teeth. "What's the rest of the story?"

"That's all we know at the moment—except that Mrs. Llewellyn died at approximately the same time her husband collapsed in your Casino. The Medical Examiner says belladonna. Sergeant Heath of the Homicide Bureau is waiting upstairs for the car to take her body to the mortuary. We hope to know more after the *post mortem* tomorrow. Your nephew, by the by,—according to the latest report—is out of danger. . . ."

At this moment there came a startling interruption. A woman's voice cried out from somewhere upstairs. A door opened and slammed, and a faint sound of moaning came to us. Then there was the sound of heavy footsteps running along the hallway above us. The blood seemed to freeze in my veins—I cannot say why—and we all moved toward the stairs.

Suddenly Heath appeared on the upper landing. Under the strong glare of the hall light I could see that his eyes were round with excitement. He beckoned to us with an agitated sweep of the arm.

"Come up here, Mr. Markham," he called in a husky voice. "Something—something's happened!"



## 7. MORE POISON

(Sunday, October 16; 3:30 a.m.)

When we reached the upper landing Heath was already far down the hall, lumbering toward the open door of a room at the north end. We followed rapidly, but the Sergeant's broad back obstructed our view, and it was not until we had actually entered the room that we saw the cause of the sudden and startling summons that had come to us. This room, like the hallway, was brilliantly lighted: it was obviously Mrs. Anthony Llewellyn's bedroom. Though larger than Virginia Llewellyn's room, it contained far less furniture,—there was a rigorous, almost bleak, severity about it, which reflected the character and personality of its occupant.

Mrs. Llewellyn stood leaning against the wall just inside the door, her lace handkerchief pressed tight against her drawn face, her eyes staring down at the floor in frightened horror. She was moaning and trembling, and did not lift her eyes when we came in. What she was looking at seemed to hold her fascinated and speechless.

There, within a few feet of her, limp and crumpled on the deep blue carpet, lay the still form of Amelia Llewellyn.

At first Mrs. Llewellyn merely pointed. Then with a great effort she said in an awed, husky voice:

"She was just going to her room, and she suddenly staggered, put her hands to her head, and collapsed there." Again she pointed stiffly to her daughter, almost as if she imagined we could not see the prostrate figure.

Vance was already on his knees beside the girl. He felt her pulse, listened to her breathing, looked at her eyes. Then he beckoned to Heath and motioned to the bed opposite. They lifted the girl and placed her across the bed, letting her head hang down over the side.

"Smelling salts," ordered Vance. "And, Sergeant, call the butler."

Mrs. Llewellyn jerked herself into activity, went to her dressing-table and produced a green bottle like the one that Kinkaid had given Vance at the Casino earlier that night.

"Hold it under her nose—not too close to burn," he instructed the woman, and turned toward the door.

The butler appeared. His weariness seemed to have vanished; he was now nervously alert.

"Get Doctor Kane on the phone," Vance said peremptorily.

The man went swiftly to a small telephone desk and began dialing a number.

Kinkaid remained in the doorway looking on with a hard face, rigidly immobile. Only his eyes moved as he took in each aspect of the situation. He looked toward the bed, but his gaze was not on the quiet form of his niece: it was coldly focused on his sister.

"What's the answer, Mr. Vance?" he asked stiffly.

"Poison," Vance mumbled, lighting a cigarette. "Yes—quite. Same like Lynn Llewellyn. An ugly business." He glanced up slowly. "Does it surprise you?"

Kinkaid's eyes drooped menacingly.

"What the hell do you mean by that question?"

But Doctor Kane was on the wire, and Vance spoke to him:

"Amelia Llewellyn's seriously ill. Come over immediately. And bring your hypo—caffein and digitalis and adrenalin. Understand? . . . Right-o." He replaced the receiver and turned back to the room. "Kane's still up, fortunately—he'll be here in a few minutes." Then he adjusted his monocle and studied Kinkaid. "What's your answer to my question?"

Kinkaid began to bluster, apparently thought better of it, and thrust out his jaw.

"Yes!" he snapped, meeting Vance's gaze squarely. "I'm as much surprised as you are."

"You'd be amazed to know how far I am from being surprised," Vance murmured, and moved toward the two women. He took the smelling salts from Mrs. Llewellyn, and again felt the girl's pulse. Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and waved Mrs. Llewellyn aside.

"What's the whole story?" he asked her, not unkindly. "Let's have it before the doctor gets here."

The woman had stumbled to a chair, seated herself erectly, and drawn her robe about her. When she spoke it was in a calm self-possessed tone.

"Amelia came to my room here and told me you wanted to see me. She sat down in this chair I'm sitting in now. She told me she'd wait for me here—that she wanted to talk to me. . . ."

"Is that all?" asked Vance. "You didn't come down immediately, don't y' know. I did a bit of typing in the interim."

Mrs. Llewellyn compressed her lips. She added coldly:

"If it's essential for you to know: I put some powder on my face and straightened my hair at the dressing-table there. I delayed—to pull myself together. . . . I knew it would be an ordeal."

"And durin' this spiritual preparation, just what was your daughter doing or saying?"

"She didn't say anything. She lighted a cigarette and smoked. . . ."

"Nothing else? No other indication of activity?"

"She may have crossed her knees or folded her hands—I wasn't noticing." The woman spoke with withering sarcasm; then added: "Oh, yes. She leaned over to the night-table and poured herself a glass of water from the jug."

Vance inclined his head.

"Natural impulse. Nervous, upset. Too many cigarettes. Dry throat. Yes. Quite in order. . . ." He rose and inspected the vacuum-jug on the night-table between the bed and the chair in which Mrs. Llewellyn was sitting.

"Empty," he remarked. "Very thirsty. Yes. Or perhaps. . . ." He returned to his seat on the edge of the bed and appeared to meditate. "Empty," he repeated, and nodded thoughtfully. "Dashed funny. All water bottles empty tonight. At the Casino. In Mrs. Lynn Llewellyn's room. And now here. Great paucity of water. . . ." He looked up quickly. "Where, Mrs. Llewellyn, is the entrance to your daughter's room?"

"The door at the end of the little corridor that leads off the hall at the head of the stairs." She was inspecting Vance with a curious concern in which was mingled a patent antagonism.

Vance addressed himself to Heath.

"Sergeant, take a peep at the water-service in Miss Llewellyn's room."

Heath went out with alacrity. A few minutes later he returned.

"It's empty," he reported in stolid bewilderment.

Vance rose and, walking to an ash-tray on the telephone desk, put out his cigarette. He lingered dreamily over the process.

"Yes, yes. Of course. It would be. As I was sayin'. A drought hereabouts. Water, water nowhere; but many drops to drink—what? Reversin' the Ancient Mariner. . . ." He lifted his head and faced Mrs. Llewellyn again. "Who fills the jugs?"

"The maid—naturally."

"When?"

"After dinner—when she turns down the beds."

"Ever failed you before?"

"Never. Annie's thoroughly competent and dependable."

"Well, well. We'll speak to Annie in the morning. Matter of routine. In the meantime, Mrs. Llewellyn, please continue. Your daughter lit a cigarette, poured herself a glass of water, and you graciously answered our summons. Then, when you came back?"

"Amelia was still sitting in this chair." The woman had not moved her eyes from Vance. "She was still smoking. But she complained of a severe headache over her eyes, and her face was greatly flushed. She said her whole head throbbed and that there was a ringing in her ears. She also said she felt dizzy and weak. I attached no importance to it: I put it all down to nervous excitement, and told her she'd better go to bed. She said she thought she would—that she felt miserable—and then she spoke a little incoherently about Virginia, and got up. She pressed her hands to her temples and started toward the door. She was almost there when she swayed from side to side, and fell to the floor. I went to her, shook her, and spoke to her. Then I think I screamed,—horrible things seemed to be happening tonight and I was unstrung for a moment. This gentleman"—she indicated Heath—"came in and immediately called the rest of you. That's all I can tell you."

"That's quite enough," murmured Vance. "Many thanks. You've explained a good deal. Perfect description of your son's collapse, too. Quite. Parallel. Only he went out on the west side of the city—your daughter on the east side. He was harder hit. Shallower breathing, faster pulse. But same symptoms. He's pulled through nicely. Your daughter will come out of it even better, once she has some medical treatment. . . ."

He slowly drew out his cigarette-case and carefully selected a *Régie*. When it was lighted he sent a perfect blue ring toward the ceiling.

"I wonder who'll be disappointed by the recovery. I wonder. . . . Interestin' situation. Interestin' but tragic. Tragic no end." He lapsed into gloomy thought.

Kinkaid had moved into the room, and now sat gingerly on the edge of the heavy fumed-oak centre-table.

"You're sure it's poison?" he asked, his fish-like eyes fixed on Vance.

"Poison? Yes, yes. Excitation symptoms, of course. But that won't do. Collapse, or faint, from natural causes, responds to an inverted head and smillin' salts. This is different. Same here as with your nephew. One difference, though. Lynn got the bigger dose."

Kinkaid's face was like a mask, and when he spoke again his lips scarcely moved.

"And like a damned fool I gave him a drink from my carafe."

Vance nodded.

"Yes. I noticed that. Grave blunder on your part—speakin' *ex post facto*."

The butler appeared at the door again.

"Pardon me, sir." He spoke directly to Vance. "I trust you will not think me presumptuous. I heard your inquiry regarding the water jugs, and I took it upon myself to waken Annie and ask her regarding them. She assured me, sir, she filled them all tonight, as usual, when she did the rooms shortly after dinner."

Vance looked at the gaunt, pallid man with open admiration.

"Excellent, Smith!" he exclaimed. "We're most grateful."

"Thank you, sir."

The sound of a bell came to us. The butler hastened away, and a few moments later Doctor Kane, still in dinner clothes and carrying a small medicine case, was ushered in. His color was even paler than when I had last seen him, and there were shadows under his eyes. He went directly to the bed where Amelia Llewellyn lay unconscious. There was a look of distress on his face that struck me as a personal rather than a professional one.

"Symptoms of collapse," Vance told him, standing at his side. "Thin, fast pulse, shallow breathing, pallor, *et cetera*. Drastic stimulants indicated. Caffein first—three grains,—then digitalis. Maybe the adrenalin won't be needed. . . . Don't ask questions, doctor. Work fast. My responsibility. Been through it once tonight already."

Kane followed Vance's instructions. I felt a bit sorry for him, though at the time I could not have explained my attitude. He impressed me as a pathetic character, a weakling dominated by Vance's stronger personality.

While Kane was in the bathroom preparing the hypodermic, Vance prepared Amelia Llewellyn's arm for the injection. When the caffein had been administered, Vance turned to us.

"We'd better wait downstairs."

"Are you including me?" Mrs. Llewellyn asked haughtily.

"It might be best," said Vance.

The woman acquiesced ungraciously, preceding us to the door.

A little while later Doctor Kane joined us in the drawing-room.

"She's reacted," he told Vance in a voice that was somewhat tremulous with emotion. "Her pulse is better and her color is more

normal. She's moving a little and trying to talk."

Vance rose.

"Excellent. . . . You put her to bed, Mrs. Llewellyn. . . . And you, doctor, please hover round a while and watch things." He moved toward the door. "We'll be back in the morning."

As we were going out, the wagon arrived to take away the body of Virginia Llewellyn. The drizzle had ceased, but the night was still damp and cold.

"Distressin' case," Vance commented to Markham, as he started the motor of his car and headed downtown. "Devilish work goin' on. Three persons poisoned—one of 'em quite dead; the two others under medical care. Who'll be next? Why are we here, Markham? Why is anything? And all eternity to dawdle about in. Depressin' thought. However. . . ." He sighed. "There's a great darkness. I can't find my way. Too many obstacles thrown in our path, clutterin' up the road. Lies and realities all shuffled together—and only one way open to us—the way of make-believe, leadin' to the worst crime of all. . . ."

"I don't get your meaning," Markham was gloomy and perturbed. "Naturally I feel some sinister influence—"

"Oh, it's far worse than that," Vance interjected. "What I was tryin' to say is that this case is a crime within a crime: *we* are supposed to commit the final horror. The ultimate chord in this macabre symphony is to be our conviction of an innocent person. The entire technique is based on a colossal deception. We are supposed to follow the specious and apparent truth—and it will not be the truth at all, but the worst and most diabolical lie of the whole subtle business."

"You're taking it too seriously," Markham endeavored to be matter-of-fact. "After all, both Lynn Llewellyn and his sister are recovering."

"Yes, yes," Vance nodded glumly, not taking his eyes from the shining macadam of the roadway. "There's been a miscalculation. Which merely makes it all so much more difficult to figure out."

"It happens, however—" began Markham; but Vance interrupted impatiently.

"My dear fellow! That's the damnable part of it. 'It happens.' Everything 'happens'. There's no design. Chaos everywhere. It happens that Kane prescribed rhinitis tablets containing the drug that gives the exact symptoms of Virginia Llewellyn's hideous death. It happens that Amelia Llewellyn was in the clothes closet at just the right moment to hear Virginia cry out and to witness her passing. It happens that Lynn Llewellyn and his wife were poisoned at practically the same moment, though they were on different sides of the city. It happens that Amelia drank the water in her mother's jug. It happens that every one was in the house tonight at dinner-time and thus had access to all the bathrooms and water-services. It happens that no water was in any of the carafes when we got to them. It happens that Kinkaid gave Lynn a drink from his carafe ten minutes before the chap collapsed. It happens that I received a letter and was on hand to witness Lynn's passing out. It happens that Doctor Kane was invited to dinner at the last moment. It happens that we were in the house when Amelia was poisoned. It happens that Kinkaid arrived at the house at just that moment. It happens the letter I received was postmarked Closter, New Jersey. It happens—"

"Just a moment, Vance. What's the point of that last remark about Closter?"

"Merely that Kinkaid has a hunting lodge on the outskirts of Closter and spends much of his time there, though I believe he closes it for the season before this time of year—generally in September."

"Good Heavens, Vance!" Markham sat up straight and leaned forward. "You're not intimating—"

"My dear fellow—oh, my dear fellow!" Vance spoke reprovingly. "I'm not intimating anything: just driftin' along vaguely in what the psychoanalysts call free association. . . . The only point I'm endeavorin' to make is that life is real and life is earnest, and that there's nothing real and nothing earnest about this case. It's tragic—fiendishly tragic—but it's a drama of puppets; and they're all being manipulated in a carefully prepared stage set—for the sole purpose of deception."

"It's the devil's own work," mumbled Markham hopelessly.

"Oh, quite. A clear case of Luciferian guilt. A soothin' idea. But quite futile."

"At least," submitted Markham, "you can eliminate Lynn Llewellyn's wife from the plot. Her suicide—"

"Oh, my word!" Vance shook his head. "Her death is the subtlest, most incalculable part of the plot. Really, y' know, Markham, it wasn't suicide. No woman, in the circumstances, commits self-destruction that way. She was an actress and vain,—Amelia explained that to us in no uncertain terms. Would she have made herself unlovely, with a generous application of skin food and a hair-net, for her last great dramatic scene on earth? Oh, no, Markham. No. She had gone to bed in the most approved conventional and slovenly domestic fashion, with all indications of having looked forward to the morrow—unpleasant as it might have turned out to be. . . . And why should she have called out in distress when the poison began to work?"

"But the note she left," Markham protested. "That was certainly indicative enough."

"That note would have been more convincing," Vance answered, "if it had been more in evidence. But it was hidden, so to speak—folded and placed under the telephone. *We*, d' ye see, were supposed to find it. But *she* was to die without knowing of its existence."

Markham was silent, and Vance continued after a pause.

"But we were not to believe it. That's the incredible part of it. We were to suspect it—to look for the person who might have prepared it and put it there for us."

"Good God, Vance!" Markham's voice was scarcely audible above the hum of the car. "What an astounding idea!"

"Don't you see, Markham?" (Vance had drawn up sharply in front of Markham's house.) "That note and the letter I received were typed in precisely the same inexpert way—obviously both of them were done by the same person: even the punctuation and the margination are the same. Do you think for one moment a distracted woman on the point of suicide would have sent me the letter I received? . . . And that reminds me. . . ."

He reached into his pocket and, taking out the letter, the suicide note, and the sheet of paper on which he had typed a few lines in the Llewellyn home, handed them to Markham.

"I say, will you have these checked for me? Get one of your bright young men to use his magnifying glass and scientific tests. I'd adore an official verification that all were done on the same machine."

Markham took the papers.

"That's easy," he said, and looked at Vance with questioning uncertainty. Then he got out of the car and stood for a moment on the curb. "Have you anything in mind for tomorrow?"

"Oh, yes." Vance sighed. "Life has a way of going on here and there. Everything returneth. One generation passeth away, but the sun also ariseth. It's all vanity and vexation of spirit."

"Pray abjure Ecclesiastes for the moment," Markham pleaded. "What about tomorrow?"

"I'll call for you at ten, and take you to the Llewellyn house. You should be there. Bounden duty and all that. Servant-of-the-people motif. Sad. . . ." He spoke lightly, but there was a look on his face that belied his tone. Markham, too, must have seen it and recognized its significance. "I could bear to have communion with Lynn and Amelia when they will have recovered. A bit of research, don't y' know. They're both survivors, as it were. Heroically rescued by your *amicus curiae*. Meanin' myself."

"Very well," acquiesced Markham with marked discouragement. "Ten o'clock, then. But I don't see just where questioning Lynn and Amelia Llewellyn will get you."

"I don't ask to see the distant scene—"

"Yes, yes," grunted Markham. "One step enough for you. I know, I know. Your Christian piety augurs ill for somebody. . . . Good night. Go home. I detest you."

"And a jolly old tut-tut to you."

The car sped dangerously down the slippery street toward Sixth Avenue.

## 8. THE MEDICINE CABINET

(Sunday, October 16; 10 a.m.)

At exactly ten o'clock in the morning Vance stopped his car in front of Markham's apartment. The weather had cleared somewhat; but there was still a chill in the air, and the sky was overcast. Markham was waiting for us in the lobby. He was scowling and impatient, and there was a troubled look in his eyes. The morning papers had carried brief stories of Virginia Llewellyn's death, with lurid headlines. They quoted a short, non-committal statement by Heath, and gave a half-column of family history. Neither Lynn Llewellyn's poisoning at the Casino nor Amelia Llewellyn's collapse at her home was mentioned,—the Sergeant must have tactfully avoided any mention of these two occurrences. But the story was startling enough: the very absence of details gave it an added mystery and stimulated public speculation. Suicide was the explanation advanced, and the suicide note was stressed—although, according to the accounts, the police had not divulged its contents. Many pictures—of Virginia Llewellyn, Mrs. Llewellyn and Kinkaid—accompanied the text. Markham carried the crumpled papers under his arm when he came out on the sidewalk.

"My dear Justinian!" Vance greeted him. "I'm amazed and delighted. You're actually up and about. And have you breakfasted too? Such touchin' devotion to your civic duties!"

"Furthermore," grumbled Markham in patent ill-humor, "I've roused one of our experts on this Sabbath morning and sent all those typewritten papers to the laboratory. Also I've routed Swacker<sup>[10]</sup> out of bed and told him to report at the office."

Vance wagged his head in derisive admiration.

"I'm positively staggered by your matutinal activities."

When we arrived at the Llewellyn house the door was opened for us by the butler. Heath was in the entrance hall, glum and officious. Snitkin and Sullivan were also there, smoking ponderously and looking bored.

"Anything new, Sergeant?" Markham asked.

"Call it new, if you like, sir." The Sergeant was irritable. "Three hours' sleep I've had, and the usual battle with the reporters. And nowhere to go from here. I've been hanging around waiting to hear from you." He shifted his cigar to the other side of his mouth. "Everybody's in the house. The old woman came downstairs at eight-thirty and shut herself up in that room with the books off the drawing-room—"

Vance turned to him.

"Really, now! And how long did she tarry there?"

"About half an hour. Then she went back upstairs."

"Any report on the young lady?"

"She's all right, I guess. She was walking around, and I heard her talking. Young Doc Kane came in half an hour ago. He's upstairs with her now."

"Have you seen Kinkaid this morning?"

Heath snorted.

"Sure, I've seen him. He came down bright and early. Wanted to give me a drink, and said he was going out. But I told him he'd have to stick around till I got orders from the District Attorney."

"Did he object?" asked Vance.

"Hell, no. Said that was fine with him. Seemed pleased. Said he could attend to everything by phone, ordered a gin rickey, and went back upstairs."

"I'd rather have enjoyed hearing his phone calls," murmured Vance.

"It wouldn't have done you any good," Heath told him, with a gesture of discouraged disgust. "I listened in on the phone down here. He talked to his broker at his home, and the fellow named Bloodgood, and the cashier at the Casino. All business stuff. Not even a dame."

"No out-of-town calls?" Vance put the question casually.

Heath took the cigar from his mouth and gave him a shrewd look.

"Yeah—one. He called a Closter number—"

"Ah!"

"But he didn't get any answer, and hung up."

"That's very disappointin'," commented Vance. "Do you remember the number?"

Heath gave a broad triumphant grin.

"Sure. And I found out all about it. It's the old boy's hunting lodge just outside of Closter."

"Stout fella!" Vance nodded admiringly. "Anything else happen around here, Sergeant?"

"The young guy blew in about twenty minutes ago. . . ."

"Lynn Llewellyn?"

Heath nodded indifferently.

"He looked groggy, but he isn't what you'd call an invalid. Stepped lively and wanted to pick a fight with me and Snitkin." The Sergeant smiled sourly. "I guess he hadn't heard the news—though, from all the dope I've heard around here, he wouldn't give a damn, anyway. I didn't spill anything to him—I simply told him, nice and sweet, he'd better go up and talk to mother. . . . And that's everything exciting that's happened."

Vance shook his head sadly.

"You're not very helpful this morning, Sergeant. And I had hopes. However. . . ." He looked at Markham and sighed pensively. "We're doomed to the role of beavers, old dear—just toilin', busy beavers. We'll tackle Lynn and Amelia. But first I think I'll take

another peep at Virginia's boudoir. Maybe we overlooked something last night." He went toward the stairs, and Markham and I followed.

As we approached the top landing the sound of a hysterical voice came to us from the direction of Virginia Llewellyn's room, though no words were distinguishable. But when we stepped into the upper hallway the whole tragic scene was revealed to us. Through the open door at the end of the corridor we could see Mrs. Llewellyn seated in a straight chair near the bed, and kneeling before her was Lynn Llewellyn. He was looking up at his mother excitedly and clutching her arms. The woman's head was bent forward and her hand was on his shoulder. They were both in profile, and apparently were not aware of our presence at the head of the stairs.

Lynn Llewellyn's high-pitched, sobbing voice now came to us distinctly.

"... Darling, darling," he was crying, "tell me you didn't do it! Oh, God, tell me it wasn't you! You know I love you, dearest—but I wouldn't have wanted that! ... You didn't do it, did you, mother? ... " The agony in the man's voice sent a chill over me.

Vance cleared his throat emphatically to apprise them of our presence in the hall, and both of them turned their heads quickly toward us. Lynn Llewellyn swiftly rose to his feet and moved out of our range of vision. When we had walked down the hall and entered the room, he was standing at the north window, his back to us. Mrs. Llewellyn had not left her chair, but she had drawn herself up erectly, and she nodded with rigid formality as we stepped across the threshold.

"We are sorry to intrude, madam," Vance said, with a bow. "But from what Sergeant Heath told us, we expected to find this room unoccupied. Otherwise, we would have asked to be announced."

"It doesn't matter," the woman returned wearily. "My son wished to come here, for some morbid reason. He has just heard of his wife's death."

Lynn Llewellyn had turned from the window and now stood facing us. His eyes were blood-shot and the lids were red; and he was wiping away the evidence of recent tears.

"Excuse my condition, gentlemen," he apologized, with a bow of recognition toward Vance. "The news was a terrible shock. It—it upset me ... and I'm not quite myself this morning, anyway."

"Yes, yes. We can understand that," Vance answered compassionately. "A tragic business. And I was at the Casino last night. That was a bad jolt you got. Your sister had a similar experience here last night. Glad you're both about."

Llewellyn nodded vaguely and looked around him with dazed eyes.

"I—I can't understand it," he mumbled.

"We're here to do what we can," Vance told him. "And we'll want to have a talk with you a little later. In the meantime would you mind waiting elsewhere? We've a few things to look into first."

"I'll wait in the drawing-room." He went heavily to the door, and as he passed his mother he paused and gave her a searching, appealing look which she returned with a cold meaningless stare.

When he had left the room Mrs. Llewellyn turned her eyes calculatingly toward Vance.

"Lynn," she said, with a twisted, mirthless smile, "has practically accused me of being responsible for the tragic events of this past night."

Vance nodded with understanding.

"I regret that we inadvertently overheard some of the things he said to you. But you must not forget, madam, that he may not be quite himself this morning."

The woman appeared not to have heard what Vance had said.

"Of course," she explained, "Lynn does not actually believe the terrible intimations beneath his words. The poor boy is suffering horribly. It has all been a great shock to him. He is reaching out blindly for some explanation. And he has a vague fear that perhaps I am responsible. I wish I could help him,—he is really suffering." Despite the deep concern indicated by her words, her voice had a harsh, artificial tone.

Vance regarded her a moment. His eyelids drooped over his cold gray eyes, giving him a lackadaisical expression.

"I quite understand your feelings," he said. "But why should your son suspect you?"

Mrs. Llewellyn hesitated before answering; then the muscles of her face stiffened as if with a sudden and distressing decision.

"I may as well tell you frankly that I was strongly opposed to his marriage. I did not like the girl—she was not worthy of him. And perhaps I have been too outspoken in my remarks to him; I fear now I have not sufficiently restrained my feelings in that regard. But I was unable to dissemble in a matter so vital to my son's happiness." She compressed her lips and then went on. "He may have misconstrued my attitude. He may have taken my remarks even more seriously than they were intended—overestimated the actual strength of my emotions."

Vance nodded discreetly.

"I see what you mean," he murmured. Then he added, without taking his gaze from the woman: "You and your son are unusually close to each other."

"Yes." She nodded with a somewhat abstracted glance. "He has always depended on me."

"A case of mother fixation, perhaps," suggested Vance.

"It might be that." She looked down at the floor and, after a moment, said: "It would, of course, account for his fears and suspicions regarding me."

Vance moved toward the mantel.

"Yes, that might be one explanation. But we sha'n't go into the possibility just now. Later, perhaps. In the meantime—"

The woman rose vigorously.

"I shall be in my own room—if you care to see me again." And she strode angrily to the door and closed it after her.

Vance studied the tip of his cigarette in lazy meditation.

"Now, what was the meanin' of all those intimate details? She was not in the least worried about herself, and actually seemed pleased that we had surprised the hysterical Lynn in his jittery genuflexion. I wonder. ... Painful and perplexin', Markham." He raised his head and surveyed the room dreamily. "Let's see if we can find anything new. Anything at all. The slightest suggestion. The whole

background of this case is beclouded. No suggestion of a color scheme. Really, Markham, I don't know anything. The mind is a total loss. Suspicious shadows, however. . . ."

He strolled to the dressing-table and looked over the array of cosmetics.

"The usual items," he murmured, opening the top drawer and peering in. "Yes—quite in keeping. Eye shadow, mascara, eyebrow pencil—all the accessories of vanity. And not used last night. Indicatin', as I said, an unexpected and not a premeditated demise." He closed the drawer and moved toward the mantel, pausing before a small hanging bookshelf. "All French novels of the cheaper variety. The lady had abominable liter'ry taste." He tested the old-fashioned china clock on the mantel. "Duly wound—and keeping excellent time." He leant over the grate. "Nothing," he complained dolefully. "Not even a cigarette butt." He moved on round the room, carefully observing each item of furniture and decoration, and finally came to a halt at the foot of the bed. "I fear there's nothing to help us here, Markham." He smoked despondently a moment, and then turned toward the rear of the room without enthusiasm. "The bathroom, once more," he sighed. "A mere precaution. . . ."

He went into the bathroom and spent some time going over it and reinspecting the medicine cabinet. When he came back into the bedroom his eyes were troubled.

"Deuced queer," he muttered to no one in particular. Then he lifted his gaze to Markham. "I'd swear some one has been shifting some of those bottles around in the medicine cabinet since I looked at them last night."

Markham was unimpressed.

"What makes you think that?" he asked impatiently. "And, even if it were so, what would be the significance?"

"I can't answer both of your questions," Vance returned. "But last night I got a very definite picture of the—what shall I call it?—compositional outlines of the bottles and boxes and tubes in the cabinet—a certain balance of arrangement of the angles and intersecting planes such as one gets in a Picasso painting. And now the proportions and relationships of the lines and squares are not the same. There's a slight distortion of last night's values: it's as if some stress had been obliterated or some linear form had been accentuated,—the picture has been touched up or modified in some way. But apparently nothing is missing from the cabinet—I've checked every item." He drew deeply on his cigarette. "And yet there is some accent lacking or transposed—an added crayon mark or a small erasure somewhere."

"It sounds esoteric," grumbled Markham.

"I dare say," Vance agreed. "Probably is. Anyway, I don't at all like it. Disturbin' to my æsthetic sensibilities." He shrugged and went again to the head of the bed.

He stood for some time gazing down thoughtfully at the night-table, with its ash-tray, telephone and silk-shaded electric lamp. Then he slowly pulled out the little drawer.

"My word!" He suddenly reached into the drawer and took out a blue-steel revolver. "That wasn't there last night, Markham," he said. "Amazin'!" He inspected the revolver and, replacing it carefully exactly where he had found it, turned about.

Markham was more animated now.

"Are you sure it wasn't there last night, Vance?"

"Oh, yes. Yes. No error of vision."

"Even so," said Markham, with a look of baffled impatience, "what possible bearing can it have on all these poisonings?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," Vance admitted placidly. "But nevertheless, it's of academic interest. . . . Suppose we go downstairs and have parlanche with the unhappy Lynn."

## 9. A PAINFUL INTERVIEW

(Sunday, October 16; 10:30 a.m.)

When we entered the drawing-room Lynn Llewellyn was stretched out in a low comfortable chair, smoking a pipe. On seeing us he struggled to his feet with apparent effort and leaned heavily against the centre-table.

"What do you make of it?" he asked in a husky voice, his bleary eyes moving from one to the other of us.

"Nothing yet." Vance scarcely looked at the man and walked toward the front window. "We were hopin' you might assist us."

"Anything you want." Llewellyn moved his arm vaguely in a gesture of docile compliance. "But I don't see how I can help you. I don't even know what happened to me last night. Guess I was winning too much." His tone had become bitter, and there was a sarcastic sneer on his lips.

"How much did you win?" asked Vance casually and without turning. "Over thirty thousand. My uncle told me this morning he had it cashed in the safe for me." The muscles in the man's jaw tightened. "But I wanted to break his damned bank."

"By the by,"—Vance came back toward the centre of the room and sat down by the table—"did you note any peculiar taste in the whisky or the water you drank last night?"

"No, I didn't." The answer came without hesitation. "I thought about that this morning—tried to recall—but there was nothing wrong as far as I could tell. . . . I was pretty much excited at the time, though," he added.

"Your sister drank a glass of water in your mother's room here last night," Vance went on, "and she collapsed with the same symptoms you showed."

Lynn Llewellyn nodded.

"I know. I can't figure it out. It's all a nightmare."

"Just that," agreed Vance. Then, after a pause, he glanced up. "I say, Mr. Llewellyn, has it occurred to you that your wife might have committed suicide?"

The man started sharply and, swinging round, glared at Vance with open-eyed astonishment.

"Suicide? Why—no, no. She had no reason—"

He broke off suddenly. "But you never can tell," he resumed in a strained, repressed voice. "It may be, of course. I hadn't thought of it. . . . Do you really think it was suicide?"

"We found a note to that effect," Vance told him quietly.

Llewellyn said nothing for a moment. He took a few unsteady steps forward; then he walked back and sank into the chair in which we had found him.

"May I see it?" he asked at length.

"We haven't it here now." Vance spoke in an offhand manner. "I'll show it to you later. It was typewritten—addressed to you—and spoke of her unhappiness here, and of your uncle's kindness to her. And she wished you the best of luck at roulette. Brief—to the point—and final. Neatly folded under the telephone."

Llewellyn did not move. He gazed straight ahead without comment or any facial indication of what he was thinking. Finally Vance spoke again.

"Do you, by any chance, own a revolver, Mr. Llewellyn?" he asked.

The man stiffened in his chair and looked at Vance with quick interrogation.

"Yes, I own one. . . . But I don't see the point."

"And where do you generally keep it?"

"In the drawer of the night-stand by the bed. We've had a couple of bad burglar scares."

"It wasn't in the drawer last night."

"Naturally. The fact is, I had it with me." Llewellyn was still studying Vance with a puzzled frown.

"Do you always carry it with you when you go out?" Vance asked.

"No—rarely. But I do take it with me, as a rule, when I go to the Casino."

"Why do you single out the Casino for this peculiar distinction?"

Llewellyn paused before answering, and a look of smouldering animosity came into his eyes.

"I never know what may happen to me there," he said at length, between locked teeth. "There's no love lost between my uncle and myself. He'd like to get my money, and I'd like to get his. To be quite truthful with you: I don't trust him. And the events of last night may or may not justify my suspicions. At any rate, I have my theory as to what happened."

"We sha'n't ask to hear it just now, Mr. Llewellyn," Vance replied coldly. "I have my ideas too. No use confusin' the issue with speculations. . . . So you carried your revolver to the Casino last night and then replaced it in the night-table drawer this morning: is that correct?"

"Yes! That's exactly what I did." Llewellyn spoke with a show of aggressiveness.

Markham put a question.

"You have a permit to carry a gun?"

"Naturally." Llewellyn sank back in his chair.

Vance got up again and stood looking down at him.

"What about Bloodgood?" he asked. "Is he another reason for your fears?"

"I don't trust him any more than I do Kinkaid—if that's what you mean," the man returned unhesitatingly. "He's under Kinkaid's thumb—he'd do anything he was told to do. He's as cold as a fish, and he's got plenty to win if he could stack his cards the way he wants to."



Vance nodded understandingly.

"Yes—quite. I see your point. Your mother practically told us he wants to marry your sister."

"That's right. And why not? It would be a good catch for him."

"Your mother further told us your sister has repeatedly refused his offers of marriage."

"That doesn't mean a thing." There was an undertone of bitterness in his voice. "Her enthusiasm for art doesn't go very deep. She's just temporarily bored with life. She'll get over it. And she'll marry Bloodgood eventually. She likes him in her cold-blooded superficial way." He paused and then added with a sneer: "A good combination they'll make, those two."

"Illuminatin' comments," murmured Vance. "And young Doctor Kane? . . ."

"Oh, he doesn't count. He's serious about Amelia, though, and he'll always be her slave. He's doomed for life to play *Cayley Drummle* to her *Paula Tanqueray*. She'd rather fancy it, too. Selfish as they come."

"A pathological household," commented Vance.

Llewellyn took no offense. He merely showed his teeth and said:

"That's just the word. Every one tangential to the norm. Like all old families with too much money and no object in life but to incubate hatred and hatch plots."

Vance looked at Llewellyn with vague, almost pathetic, curiosity.

"Do you know anything about poisons?" he asked unexpectedly.

The man chuckled unpleasantly: the question seemed to leave him entirely unimpressed.

"No," he said readily. "But there's evidently some one else around here who knows a hell of a lot about poisons."

"There are several fairly comprehensive volumes on the subject in the little library yonder," Vance remarked, with a casual wave of the hand.

"What!" Llewellyn started up. "Books on poison—here?" His eyes glared at Vance for a moment as if in surprised horror. Then he sank back and fumbled with his pipe.

"Does the fact astonish you?" Vance's voice was particularly mild.

"No, no; of course not," Llewellyn answered almost inaudibly. "For the moment perhaps—it brought things pretty close to home. Then I remembered my father's scientific interests . . . probably some of his old books. . . ."

A thoughtful frown had settled on Llewellyn's forehead: his eyes had narrowed to intense speculation. A train of unpleasant suspicions seemed to be running through his mind, and he held himself almost rigid.

Without appearing to do so, Vance watched him for several moments before speaking.

"That will be all for the present, Mr. Llewellyn," he said in polite dismissal. "You may go upstairs. If we need you further we'll notify you. You'd better stay in today and rest. Sorry to have upset you by mentioning the treatises on toxicology."

The man had risen and was already at the door.

"You didn't upset me exactly," he said, halting. "You see, Kane's a doctor, and Bloodgood took a degree in chemistry at college, and Kinkaid wrote a whole chapter on Oriental poisons in one of his travel books—"

"Yes, yes, I understand perfectly," Vance interrupted with a slight show of impatience. "They wouldn't have needed the aid of the books, of course. And if the books were used as source material for what happened yesterday, that might narrow the thing down to you and your mother and your sister. And you and your sister were both victims of the plot. So that leaves only your mother as the person who might have made use of the books. . . . Something like that went through your mind—eh, what?"

Llewellyn drew himself up aggressively.

"No, nothing of the kind!" he protested vigorously.

"My mistake," Vance muttered, with a curious note of sympathy in his voice. "By the by, Mr. Llewellyn, I meant to ask you: did you, by any chance, go to your medicine cabinet for any purpose this morning?"

The man shook his head thoughtfully.

"No-o. . . I'm sure I didn't."

"It doesn't matter. Some one did." Vance returned to his chair, and Llewellyn, with a shrug, left us.

"What do you make of him, Vance?" Markham asked.

"He's sufferin'." Vance sighed meditatively. "Full of morbid ideas. And worryin' abominably over mama. Sad case. . . ."

"He said he had a theory about last night. Why didn't you urge him to expound it to us?"

"It would have been too painful, revealin' only his state of mind. Yes, too painful. I'm burstin' with sorrow, as it is. I cannot bear much more, Markham. I want to go far away. I want to bask in sunshine. I want to see Santa Claus. I want to eat some real English sole. I want to hear Beethoven's C-sharp minor quartet. . . ."

## 10. THE POST-MORTEM REPORT

(Sunday, October 16; 11:15 a.m.)

Sergeant Heath appeared at the door.

"The young doc's just coming downstairs. Want to see him, sir?"

Vance hesitated; then nodded.

"Yes, ask him to come in here, Sergeant."

Heath disappeared and a moment later Doctor Kane entered the drawing-room. His face was drawn and haggard as if from insufficient rest, but the look of strain and apprehension had gone from his eyes. His manner was almost cheerful as he greeted us.

"How is your patient this morning?" Vance asked him.

"Practically normal, sir. I remained here a couple of hours after you gentlemen went last night, and Miss Llewellyn was resting quietly when I left. Naturally she feels weak this morning and is highly nervous; but her pulse and respiration and blood-pressure are normal."

"Have you any suggestion, doctor," Vance asked, "as to what drug it was that brought about her condition last night?"

Doctor Kane pursed his lips and looked into space.

"No," he returned at length, "—though I've naturally thought about the matter a good deal. Her symptoms were the usual ones of collapse—nothing distinctive about them—and, of course, there are a number of drugs that, therapeutically speaking, could have produced them. An overdose of any one of the various proprietary sleeping powders containing the barbiturates might have done it. But, you can understand, I shouldn't care to express an opinion offhand. I had intended to do a little research on the subject as soon as I return to my office."

Vance did not push the subject. He let the doctor go and then sent for the butler.

Smith was as imperturbable as ever, and his face was still pale.

"Please tell Miss Llewellyn," Vance said, "that we should like to have a few words with her, either in her own quarters or here in the drawing-room—whichever is more convenient for her."

The butler bowed and went out. On returning he informed Vance that Miss Llewellyn would see us in her room, and we went upstairs.

The girl was reclining on a chaise-longue, dressed in elaborately embroidered Japanese pyjamas. At her side stood a small red-lacquered tabouret on which were a complete cigarette service, a few art magazines, and a silver statuette of abstract design in imitation of Archipenko. Her greeting to us was a curt nod and a cynical attempt at a smile.

"Your visit, I understand from Doctor Kane, just missed coming under the head of 'viewing the remains.'"

"We are delighted," Vance returned seriously, "to find you so much better."

"But some one," she said bitterly, "surely will not take my recovery in so charitable a light." She shrugged slightly and made a grimace. "I'm beginning to feel like a visitor at the Borgias' palace. I was positively afraid to take my toast and coffee this morning."

Vance nodded understandingly.

"I doubt, though, that you need have any further fear. Something went radically wrong last night. The poisoner must have lost his way among unforeseen coincidences. And by the time he has reassembled his lines and planned another campaign of action, we hope to have the situation well in hand. We at least know now where we must look for indicat'ry activities."

Amelia Llewellyn glanced up quizzically and all cynicism faded from her face.

"That sounds," she remarked, "as if you knew more than you are divulging."

"Yes—quite. Considerably more. But not enough. Still, we're forrader, and always hoping. . . . You've seen your brother? He's quite recovered. And he got an uglier jolt than you did."

"Yes," the girl mused. "We're the two failures. It's quite like us, you know. We're always disappointing somebody."

"I trust," said Vance, "I sha'n't disappoint you in this case. In the meanwhile would you mind if I took a peep in your clothes closet and made a little experiment there?"

"Peep and experiment, by all means. I'd be delighted." She waved her arm almost gayly toward a door at her left.

Vance went to it and opened it. The space beyond was, as she had explained to us the night before, an old-fashioned passageway which had connected the two main rooms in the south wing of the house. There was a shoe-rack and a small cupboard on the right, and on the left hung a long row of dresses and gowns. Halfway down the passage there still remained the old marble-topped washbasin with its two high swan-necked spigots. At the opposite end of the improvised closet another door was visible. Vance walked to it and opened it, and we could see through into the large bedroom where Virginia Llewellyn had met her tragic end.

Vance came back to us and, turning to me, said:

"Van, go into the other room, close both doors and stand beside the bed. Then call to me in a fairly loud voice. When you hear me knock on the farther door, call again in the same tone of voice."

I went through the clothes closet into the farther room and, standing beside the bed on which Virginia Llewellyn had died, called out. After a few moments I heard Vance's knock on the door, and I called again. Then Vance opened the door.

"That's all, Van. Many thanks."

When we were again in Amelia Llewellyn's room, the girl gave Vance a satirical look.

"And what, Monsieur Lecoq," she asked, "did you learn?"

"Merely that you told us the truth regarding the acoustic possibilities between the two rooms," Vance returned lightly. "I could not hear Mr. Van Dine with both doors shut, but I did hear him distinctly while standing in the clothes closet."

The girl drew a deep dramatic sigh.

"I'm so glad to have my veracity proved for once. Mother's favorite criticism of me is that I would always rather lie than tell the truth."

"Speaking of your mother"—Vance sat down and regarded the girl with serious eyes—"I want you to tell us just how you came to drink the glass of water in your mother's room last night."

Amelia Llewellyn sobered quickly under Vance's grave tone.

"How does one ever come to take a drink of water?—I only know that I felt thirsty and instinctively reached for the water that stood at my side. I was going to wait there until mother came back. I was naturally upset and wanted to talk to some one—"

"Did you taste anything peculiar about the water?"

"No. It seemed perfectly all right."

"How much water was in the jug?"

"Barely a glassful. I vaguely remember wishing there had been more. But I was too lazy to get up. When mother returned I had a raging headache and my ears were pounding, and I felt terribly weak. My mind was confused, and I started for my own room. That's all I recall."

"You distinctly remember your mother's return to the room?"

"Oh, yes. We said something to each other—I don't recall just what it was. I probably complained about my headache—but everything was spinning around by that time."

"When you first felt thirsty—that is, before you took the drink of water—did you mention the fact to your mother?"

The girl thought a moment. Then she answered:

"No. Mother was at the dressing-table, beautifying herself for the interview with you. I don't think we spoke to each other then. I merely reached over and helped myself to what water there was in the jug, and mother swept grandly and haughtily from the room."

"What of the water in your own carafe last night?" Vance asked. "The maid said she filled it. But while you were unconscious in your mother's room, your carafe was inspected and found to be empty."

"Yes, I know it was empty. I drank all the water it contained while I was sketching earlier in the night." Her eyes opened a little wider. "Was my water poisoned too?"

Vance shook his head.

"No, it couldn't have been. Too much time elapsed after you had taken it. You would have felt the effects of the poison within half an hour, at the most. . . ."

Vance turned suddenly and went softly to the hall door. He turned the knob carefully and then swiftly drew the door inward. In the corridor, facing us, stood Richard Kinkaid.

Not a muscle of his face moved to show that Vance's sudden action had disconcerted him. He took his cigarette slowly from his mouth and bowed with curt formality.

"Good morning, Mr. Vance," he said in a cold steady voice. "I came down to inquire about my niece. But when I heard voices in the room I thought you and Mr. Markham might be here, and I didn't care to disturb you. But you evidently heard me. . . ."

"Yes, yes. I heard some one moving outside the door." Vance stood to one side. "We were just asking Miss Llewellyn a few questions. But we're through now. . . . She is much better this morning."

Kinkaid stepped into the room, and, after greeting his niece with a conventional phrase or two, he sat down.

"Any further developments?" he asked, lifting his head to Vance with a shrewd, calculating look.

"Oh, any number," Vance returned non-committally. "We're bringin' in the sheaves, as it were. But we're not rejoicin' just yet. . . . However, I'm glad you dropped in. I wanted to ask you, before we went, for Bloodgood's address. We're particularly anxious to have a little chat with the gentleman."

Kinkaid's jaw tightened, and the look in his eyes became harder. But there was no other indication that he was surprised by Vance's remarks.

"Bloodgood lives at the Astoria Hotel in 22nd Street," he said, and slowly broke the ashes of his cigarette in a tray at his side. "However," he added, with a slight note of contempt in his voice, "you're barking up the wrong tree there. But go ahead and question him, by all means. He'll be at his hotel all day—I just talked to him on the phone. But you'll be wasting your time—Bloodgood's as straight as a die."

"I really don't know the chap very well," Vance murmured. "But in view of the fact that it was he who ordered the plain water for Lynn Llewellyn last night at the Casino, it might be interestin' to have his views on the subject, don't y' know."

Amelia Llewellyn, who had perceptibly stiffened at the mention of Bloodgood's name, now stood up and stared at Vance defiantly, with blazing eyes.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded. "Are you accusing Mr. Bloodgood of giving the poison to Lynn?"

"My dear young lady!"

"For if you are," the girl went on in a cold angry tone, "I can tell you exactly who's responsible for everything that happened to this family last night."

Vance gazed at her calmly, and the chill of his tone matched hers.

"When the truth becomes known, Miss Llewellyn," he said, "your testimony will not, I fear, be needed." He bowed formally to her and to Kinkaid, and we took our departure.

When we were about to descend to the main floor Vance hesitated and then went down the hall toward Mrs. Llewellyn's room.

"There's one little matter I should like to mention to the lady of the house before we go," he explained to Markham, as he tapped on the door.

Mrs. Llewellyn received us with ill grace, and her manner was one of marked antagonism.

Vance apologized for disturbing her.

"I merely wished to tell you, as a matter of possible interest to you, that your son seemed greatly perturbed when I informed him of the volumes on toxicology in the library downstairs. He appeared to have been unaware of their existence."

"And how should that be of interest to me?" the woman retorted with frigid disdain. "My son does not read much—his literary needs are entirely satisfied by the theatre. I doubt if he is familiar with the titles of any of the books his father left. Nothing could be more alien to his interests than scientific research. And his perturbation over the existence of books on poisons in this house is, I assure you, perfectly natural in view of the experience through which he went last night."

Vance nodded as if satisfied with the explanation.

"That's quite plausible," he murmured. "And perhaps you can give us as colorable an explanation as to why you yourself spent part of this morning in the library."

"So my movements are being spied upon!" This was said with scathing and vindictive indignation; but a change quickly came over the woman's attitude. Her eyes contracted and a shrewd smile appeared on her lips. "The intimation beneath your words is, I suppose, that I myself was consulting these particular books on poisons."

Vance waited, and the woman went on.

"Well, that's exactly what I was doing. If it will help your inquiries: I was looking for some common drug that might account for the condition of my son and daughter last night."

"And did you find any reference to such a drug, madam?"

"No! I did not."

Vance left the matter there. He made his adieux and added:

"There will be no more spying—for the time being, at least. The police will be removed from your house, and you and your family are free to come and go as you please."

When we were again downstairs Markham drew Vance into the drawing-room.

"See here, Vance," he asked with deep concern, "aren't you being a bit hasty?"

"My dear Markham," Vance chided him, "I'm never hasty. Slow and plodding and cautious. The human tortoise. I must have reasons for everything I do. And I now have excellent reasons for temporarily removing all supervision from the Llewellyn domicile."

"Still," demurred Markham, "I don't like the situation here, and I think it should be watched."

"A virtuous idea. But not helpful." Vance contemplated Markham plaintively. "Watching won't help us. I was invited to watch Lynn's passing out. And we were all in the house watching last night when Amelia was smitten. Really, y' know, we can't be expected to supply every member of the Llewellyn family with a bodyguard indefinitely."

Markham studied Vance closely, as if trying to read the other's thoughts.

"That was a peculiar remark of the girl's about her knowing who's responsible for this affair. Do you believe her, perhaps?"

"Oh, my dear Markham!" Vance sighed dolefully. "It's too early to begin believing anybody. Our only hope lies in complete skepticism. Honest doubtin'—not thought highly of, but most efficacious at times. It gives the mind a chance for free functioning."

"Nevertheless," pursued Markham irritably, "you have something definite in mind when you want the police withdrawn."

"No, no; nothing definite," Vance returned, and smiled. "Just gropin'. Strainin' for illumination. . . . And I do want to see the *post-mortem* report. That, at least, will be definite. It may even prove revealin'."

Markham gave in reluctantly.

"Very well. I'll give Heath orders to withdraw temporarily and send the boys home."

"And tell him to pick up our croupier at the Astoria and bring him along to your office," said Vance. "I'm eager to grill him, as you public prosecutors would say. And I think the judicial and depressin' surroundings of the Criminal Courts Building might have the right psychological effect."

"What do you expect to find out from him?"

"Nothing—positively nothing," Vance replied, and then added: "But even negation might be of help. I have a psychic feelin' this case will eventually be solved by minus signs."

Markham grunted, and we went out into the hall where the Sergeant was waiting despondently.

Ten minutes later Vance and Markham and I were on our way downtown, Heath having been duly instructed as to the procedure Vance had requested.

As soon as we entered the District Attorney's dingy but spacious old office overlooking the drab gray walls of the Tombs, Markham rang for Swacker and inquired about the statement from Doctor Doremus and also about the report on the specimens of typing which had been sent to the scientific laboratory.

"The lab report has come in," Swacker told him, pointing to a sealed envelop on the desk; "but Doctor Doremus phoned at eleven to say that the autopsy report is delayed. I called back ten minutes ago, and one of the assistants told me the report was on the way. I'll bring it in as soon as it arrives."

Markham jerked his head curtly, and Swacker went out.

"Delayed—eh, what?" drawled Vance. "There shouldn't have been any trouble. Belladonna poisoning indicated. The toxicologist knew just what to look for. I wonder. . . . In the meantime, let's see what the bright boy with the magnifying glass has to offer."

Markham had already opened the envelop to which Swacker had referred. He laid the three specimens of typing to one side and perused the accompanying report. After a few moments he put that down too.

"Just what you suspected," he said to Vance without enthusiasm. "All the typing was done on the same machine, and within a reasonable period of time—that is, the ink on the ribbon was at the same stage of usage in all three, and it can't be stated with certainty which of the three was typed first. Also, the suicide note and the letter you received were probably typed by the same person. Peculiarities of pressure and punctuation, and consistencies in the errors when the wrong letters were struck, are the same in both. There's a lot of technical detail, but that's the gist of it." He picked up the report and held it out to Vance. "Do you care to see it?"

Vance made a negative gesture with his hand.

"No, I merely craved verification."

Markham leant forward.

"See here, Vance, what's the point about these two typewritten documents? Granting the possibility that the girl did not commit

suicide, what would have been the object of the person who poisoned her in sending you that letter?"

Vance became serious.

"Really, Markham, I don't know." He walked slowly up and down the room as he spoke. "If only that letter to me and the suicide note had been typed by two different people, the thing would be comparatively simple. It would merely mean that some one had planned to poison the girl in such a way as to make it appear as suicide, and that some one else, with an inkling that murder was afoot, had sent me a dramatic call for help. In such an event two conclusions might have been tenable: first, that the anonymous letter-writer feared that Lynn was to be the victim; and, second, that the writer suspected Lynn himself of having murderous designs on his wife and wanted me to keep an eye on him. . . ."

"And they were both victims," Markham interpolated glumly. "So that hypothesis doesn't get us anywhere. In any event, it's merely a speculation based on the false premise that two different people prepared the two documents. Why not come to the point?"

"Oh, my dear chap!" Vance moaned. "I'm strivin' desperately to come to the point—but, dash it all! I don't know what the point is. As the case stands now, the poisoner deliberately called my attention to the situation and even intimated strongly that Lynn's wife was not going to commit suicide, but would actually be murdered."

"That doesn't make sense."

"And yet, Markham, you have the substantiation of my apparently insane conclusion lying on your desk. There's the suicide note; there's the letter to me, filled with innuendoes and suspicions of foul play; and there's your report that the same hand typed them both."

He paused.

"And what of the next inevitable step in our ratiocination? As I have whispered into your reluctant ear, I think the murderer wishes us to look in the wrong direction for our culprit. He is, as it were, attempting the impossible feat of taking two tricks of the same suit with a singleton. And that's what makes the thing so subtle and fiendish."

"But it wasn't a singleton," Markham objected. "You overlook the fact that *three* people were poisoned. If your theory is correct, why couldn't the murderer merely have poisoned the girl and then poisoned the victim we were supposed to fix on? Why make us a party to his plan when he's apparently in the wholesale poisoning business?"

"A reasonable question," Vance nodded; "and one that has tortured me since last night. Such a procedure would have been the rational one. But, Markham, there's nothing rational about this crime. There isn't merely one straw-man confronting us, but a series of straw-men. And I have a horrible suspicion that they are arranged in a circle, with the actual murderer beyond the circumference. Our only hope lies in the fact that something has gone wrong. In any delicate and intricate mechanism, one little failure—one trifling slip in functioning—undermines the entire structure and renders the machine incapable of operating. This is not a plastic crime. Despite all its hyper-subtleties and divagations and convolutions, it's static and fixed in its conception. And therein lies both its strength and its weakness. . . ."

At this point Swacker tapped on the leather swinging door and pushed it open. In his hand was a thick envelop.

"The autopsy report," he said, placing it on Markham's desk and going out again.

Markham opened the envelop at once and glanced over the typewritten pages which were bound together in a blue folder. As he read, his face clouded and a puzzled look came into his eyes; and when he had reached the end of the last page there was a deep scowl on his forehead.

He raised his head slowly and fixed on Vance, who had seated himself before the desk, a look of baffled calculation.

"My dear Markham," Vance complained; "what dark secret are you hoarding?"

"There was no belladonna whatever found in the girl's stomach! And no quinin or camphor—which entirely eliminates the rhinitis tablets."

Vance lighted a cigarette with slow deliberation.

"Any details?"

Markham referred to the report.

"The exact findings are: Congestion of the lungs; considerable serum in the pleural cavities; blood mostly in the venous side of the circulation; right heart engorged, left heart comparatively empty; brain tissues and meninges congested; and the throat, trachea and oesophagus hyperemic. . . ."

"All symptoms of death from asphyxia." Vance looked out unhappily through the high windows to the south. "And no poison! . . . Does Doremus offer any opinion?"

"Nothing specific," Markham informed him. "He's professionally non-committal here. He merely states that the cause of asphyxia is as yet unknown."

"Yes, yes. Pending analysis of the liver, kidneys, intestines, and blood. That will take a couple of days. But some of the poison should be in the stomach, if it was taken orally."

"But Doremus states here that the history he received of the case and his findings on the immediate examination of the body, indicated an overdose of belladonna or atropin."

"We knew that last night." Vance reached over and, taking the report, went through it carefully. "Yes. As you say."

He settled down in his chair, brought his eyes slowly back to Markham's troubled gaze, and took a deep inhalation on his cigarette. Then he tossed the report back on Markham's desk with a despondent gesture.

"That tears it, old dear. A lady is given poison, presumably orally; but no traces of it are found. Two other persons are poisoned and recover. We are supposed to tag some innocent bystander for the heinous crime. . . . Oh, my aunt! What an astonishin' situation! . . ."

## 11. FEAR OF WATER

(Sunday, October 16; 12:30 p.m.)

Swacker looked in.

"Sergeant Heath's here with a gentleman named Bloodgood."

Markham glanced at Vance, who nodded, and told Swacker to show them in.

Bloodgood was in an unpleasant and sullen mood. A brown cigarette hung limply from his thick lips, and his hands were thrust deep in his trousers pockets. He nodded stolidly to Vance, without speaking, and barely acknowledged his introduction to Markham and myself. Slouching to the nearest chair, he sank into it heavily.

"Go ahead," he said indifferently. "Kinkaid phoned me you were going to put me on the carpet."

"Did he, now?" Vance was again gazing out of the high windows. "That's most interestin'. Did he warn you to be careful, or advise you what to say?"

Bloodgood bristled.

"No. Why should he? But he did say you had linked me up with Lynn Llewellyn's mishap last night."

"You linked yourself up, Mr. Bloodgood," Vance returned mildly, without turning his eyes from the gray skies beyond the dull window-panes. "We merely thought you might have some explanation or suggestion that would help us to get to the bottom of this devilish business."

Vance's tone, though assured and stern, was not unfriendly; and Bloodgood was evidently impressed by it, for he straightened up a little in his chair and dropped his ill-natured manner. Indeed, when he spoke I was again conscious of the man's poise and urbanity.

"There's really nothing I can explain, Mr. Vance. You're referring, I assume, to my instructions to the Japanese boy to bring Llewellyn plain water. . . . That was an unfortunate coincidence. I was merely being polite to a guest of the Casino—all in the line of duty. Kinkaid's a stickler for that sort of thing. I knew Llewellyn never drinks charged water, and I'd heard him order plain water earlier in the evening. Most of the boys know his tastes, but Mori hasn't been with us very long. And I'll say this for Llewellyn: he doesn't drink much when he's at the Casino. He's probably read somewhere that you must keep your brain clear when gambling. As if it mattered!" Bloodgood gave a snort of contempt. "Luck doesn't inquire into a man's mental state before striking."

"Quite so," murmured Vance. "And the law of probabilities operates on the sober and the inebriated alike. Yes. Wholly amoral. Consolin' thought. But I say, was there no motive behind your *politesse* to Llewellyn other than the desire to live up to your employer's standard of punctilio?"

"A sinister motive?" Bloodgood asked resentfully, becoming suddenly rigid.

"Really, y' know, I didn't specify." Vance was smoking placidly. "Why put the least charitable construction on my query? I trust the worm of conscience doth not begnaw thy soul."

Bloodgood relaxed, and the suggestion of a weary smile moved the corners of his mouth.

"I'll probably hang myself yet. I do a kindly act, and the recipient all but dies. You hand me a knife, and I pick it up by the blade." He shrugged. "The fact is, I wouldn't ordinarily have interfered with Llewellyn's beverages at the Casino—I'm not over-fond of the man—but I felt a little sorry for him last night. Kinkaid doesn't like him, and he's had the worst possible luck playing roulette. He rarely wins, and Kinkaid is inclined to gloat over the fact. Last night he had a run of good luck; he'd already won back a considerable amount of what he'd previously lost. Then he went to pieces—psychological reaction, I imagine—got nervous and unbalanced, and began doing the most preposterous things—covering his bets and even betting against himself, taking the short end of every percentage. He couldn't have lasted much longer. He needed a drink, if ever a man did; and when I saw the charged water, which he wouldn't have touched, I felt a sort of human inclination to help him out. So I ordered the plain water. In one way it was a good turn: he passed out some thirty thousand ahead. But my kindness evidently got *me* in wrong."

"Yes, things are like that. One never knows, does one? A whimsical world. No accountin' for it." Vance spoke impersonally. "By the by, do you know where the water, which you so charitably ordered, came from?"

"From the bar, I suppose."

"Oh, no. No. Not the bar. Mori was shunted on his errand of mercy. The water came from Kinkaid's private carafe."

Bloodgood sat up straight, and his eyes opened wide.

Vance nodded.

"Yes. Kinkaid told Mori to fetch the water from his office. Too many people at the bar, he explained to me. Unnecess'ry delay. Thinkin' only of Llewellyn. Every one so considerate of his welfare last night. Guardian angels. All very sympathetic. And then the ungrateful johnnie collapses with poison."

Bloodgood started to speak but quickly closed his lips, and, sinking back in his chair, looked straight ahead in gloomy silence.

After a short pause Vance crushed out his cigarette and turned his chair round so that he was facing Bloodgood.

"You know, of course," he asked, "of the death of Llewellyn's wife last night?"

Bloodgood nodded without shifting his eyes from their far-away focus.

"I saw the papers this morning."

"Do you believe it was suicide?"

Bloodgood jerked his head around and stared at Vance.

"Wasn't it? The papers said a suicide note was found. . . ."

"That's correct. Not entirely convincing, however."

"But she was quite capable of suicide," Bloodgood offered.

Vance did not pursue the point.

"I suppose," he said, "that Kinkaid told you over the phone that Miss Amelia Llewellyn also had a close call last night?"

Bloodgood leaped to his feet.

"What's that!" he exclaimed. "He said nothing about Amelia. What happened?" The man seemed highly perturbed.

"She took a glass of water—in her mother's room—and passed out very much as her brother did. No serious damage, though. She's quite all right this morning—we've just come from there. No cause for worry. . . . Please sit down. There are one or two other matters I wish to ask you about."

Bloodgood resumed his seat with seeming reluctance.

"You're sure she's all right?"

"Yes—quite. You might drop around to see her when you leave here. I'm sure she'll welcome a visit from you. Kinkaid's there too. . .

. And by the by, just what are your relations with Kinkaid, Mr. Bloodgood?"

The man hesitated and then said noncommittally:

"Purely business." When Vance did not speak Bloodgood went on. "There's a certain feeling of friendship involved, of course. I feel very grateful toward Kinkaid. If it weren't for him I'd probably be teaching chemistry or mathematics at a third of the salary I'm getting at the Casino, and being bored to death doing it. He's exacting, but he's generous enough. I can't say that I wholly admire him, but he has many likeable qualities, and he has always played the game aboveboard with me." Bloodgood stopped a moment and then added with a faint smile: "I think he likes me—and that fact, of course, tends to prejudice me in his favor."

"Do you attach any significance to his having ordered the water for Llewellyn from his own carafe?"

The question seemed to disturb Bloodgood considerably. He shifted in his chair and took a deep breath before answering.

"I don't know. Damn it, man, you have me wondering. It might be sheer coincidence—it's like Kinkaid to do things spontaneously like that: he has a very decent streak in him. He takes his losses like a gentleman and never complains when he gets set back. I know he runs his games straight; and, to tell the truth, I can't picture the man feeding a customer knock-out drops because the game's going against the house. Especially his own nephew."

"There could possibly have been reasons other than Llewellyn's winning last night," suggested Vance.

Bloodgood considered this for some time.

"I see what you mean," he replied at length. "With Amelia and Lynn and Lynn's wife out of the way . . ." He broke off and shook his head. "No! That doesn't check with Kinkaid's character. A gun, perhaps, in an emergency—I happen to know he shot himself out of some bad scrapes in Africa. But not poison. That's a woman's weapon. For all his inbreeding and subtleties of nature, Kinkaid's not a sneak."

"Forthright—eh, what?"

"Yes, just that. Either forthright or inactive. He does a thing or he doesn't. No *finesse*, in the psychological sense. That's why he's a great poker player and is only indifferent at bridge. He once said to me: 'Any woman can master bridge, but only a man can play good poker.' He's cold and ruthless and utterly without fear; and he's as shrewd as Lucifer himself. He'd stop at nothing to gain his ends. But he'd always be in the open. You could trust him even if he was out to get you. . . . Poison? No. That doesn't fit."

Vance smoked a while dreamily.

"You're a chemist, Mr. Bloodgood," he said finally, "and you've been rather close to Kinkaid. Tell me: is he, too, by any chance, interested in chemistry?"

For the first time during the interview Bloodgood appeared ill at ease. He shot a searching glance at Vance and cleared his throat nervously.

"I can't say that he is." His tone was not wholly convincing. "That's a subject that lies entirely outside his activities and interests." He stopped, and then added: "If there was any money in chemistry, of course, Kinkaid might be interested in the matter from the angle of pure speculation."

"Well, well," murmured Vance. "Always on the lookout. Cravin' a lucrative opening, so to speak. Yes. That always goes with the gambling instinct."

"Kinkaid realizes," supplemented Bloodgood, "that his present set-up can't last indefinitely. A gambling casino, at best, is only a temporary source of income."

"Quite. Our hyper-moral civilization. Sad. . . . But let's dismiss Kinkaid for the moment. . . . Tell us what you know of the youthful Doctor Kane. He was at the Llewellyns' for dinner last night, y' know, and Miss Llewellyn called him when Lynn's wife was stricken."

Bloodgood's face clouded.

"I've seen very little of the man," he replied stiffly; "and then only at the Llewellyns'. I believe he is interested in Miss Llewellyn. Comes of good family and all that. He's always been pleasant enough; has a congenial personality, but strikes me as something of a weakling. I'll say this, too, about him, since you've asked me: he has impressed me as being somewhat shifty at times, as if he were adding up numbers before answering a straight question or voicing an opinion."

"The *arrière-pensée* at work," suggested Vance.

Bloodgood nodded.

"Yes. Rather effeminate in his mental processes. Maybe, however, it's only his snobbery and his constant endeavor to please—the ingratiating manner that young doctors cultivate."

"What sort of chap was Lynn Llewellyn when you knew him at college?"

"He was all right. Pretty regular, but inclined to be wild. He wasn't much of a student—barely got by. He was too devoted to his good times, and lacked any serious goal. But I've never held that against him: it wasn't altogether his fault. His mother has always coddled him. She'd forgive anything he did and then turn round and make it possible for him to do it again. But she had the good sense to keep her hands on the purse strings. That's why the fellow gambles—he admits it frankly."

"He has an idea," put in Vance in a casual matter-of-fact tone, "that his mother may have been responsible for the poisonings last night."

"Good Heavens! Really?" Bloodgood seemed inordinately astonished. He sat pondering for several moments. Then he said: "I can

understand his attitude in a way, though. He himself used to refer to her as 'the noblest Roman dowager of them all.' And he wasn't far wrong. She was always the man of the family. She'd brook no interference with her plans from anybody."

"You're thinkin' of Agrippina?" asked Vance.

"Something like that." Bloodgood lapsed into silence again.

Vance got up, walked to the end of the room and back, and then stopped before Bloodgood.

"Mr. Bloodgood," he said, his eyes fixed lazily on the other, "three people were poisoned last night. One of them is dead; the two others have recovered. No poison was found in Mrs. Lynn Llewellyn's stomach. Two of the victims—Llewellyn and his sister—collapsed after taking a glass of water. And the water carafe at the dead woman's bedside was empty when we arrived—"

"Good God!" The exclamation was little more than a whisper, but it had the penetrating quality of utter horror. Bloodgood struggled to his feet. His face had suddenly gone pale, and his sunken eyes shone like two polished metal disks. His cigarette fell from his lips but he paid no attention to it. "What are you trying to tell me? All three were poisoned by water—"

"Why should that astound you so—even if it were true?" Vance asked in a steady, almost indifferent, voice, his calm searching gaze still on the man. "In fact, I was about to ask you, after having given you the details of last night's occurrences, whether you could suggest any explanation."

"No—no. None whatever." There was an unnatural timbre in Bloodgood's tone, and he was breathing as if with effort. "I—I was upset by the recurrence of the water, since I was the one who ordered it for Llewellyn."

Vance smiled coldly and took a step toward the man.

"That won't do, Mr. Bloodgood." There was a steely quality in his attitude and manner. "You'll have to find a better excuse for your emotional upheaval."

"But how can I, man, when it doesn't exist?" protested Bloodgood, fumbling in his pocket for another cigarette.

Vance went on relentlessly: "Item one: you were at the Llewellyn dinner last night, and had access to all the carafes in the house. Item two: the only carafe that we know positively wasn't poisoned, is Miss Llewellyn's. Item three: you have proposed marriage to Miss Llewellyn. Item four: you are a chemist. . . . And now consider these four items in the light of the fact that it was also you who ordered plain water for Llewellyn at the Casino. Have you anything to say?"

Bloodgood had drawn himself together while Vance spoke. He swallowed several times and moistened his lips with his tongue. His arms hung straight at his sides, and he gave the impression that every muscle in his body had gone taut. He lifted his head and looked squarely at Vance.

"I understand the situation perfectly," he said in a hollow, even voice. "Despite the fact that no poison has actually been put in evidence, I appear to have manœuvred the events of last night. I have no explanation to make. Nor have I anything further to say. You may take whatever action you choose. The table is wide open." He smiled inscrutably. "*Faites votre jeu, monsieur.*"

Vance studied the man without change of expression.

"I think I'll hold my chips for the next turn of the wheel, Mr. Bloodgood," he said. "The play isn't over, don't y' know. And I've a new system in mind." He nodded in formal dismissal and turned away. "You're free to visit Miss Llewellyn."

"I hope to God your new system is better than most," the man mumbled, and took his departure without another word.

Vance resumed his seat and, taking out another *Régie*, smoked a while in troubled meditation.

"Deuced queer, that chap," he ruminated. "He told me something highly important, but—dash it all!—I don't know what it is. He was quite rational and honest until I mentioned water. The idea of poison didn't upset him, but the idea of water did. A sort of psychic hydrophobia. Very puzzlin', Markham. . . . There's something in his mind—something vital to our understanding of this case. But there's no way to get him to talk. I know the type. He actually invited arrest rather than answer my queries. . . . Fear—that's what it was. He knew he was cornered, but he was also aware that we didn't know why he was cornered. A shrewd gambler. A rapid mental calculator and a percentage player."

Vance wagged his head dolefully.

"Not a consolin' thought. We're dealin' with subtleties, Markham; and we're blindfolded. Gropin' at nebulae. But he told us something! And we'll have to find out what it is. It's the key. Let us hope. Onward and upward, old dear. *Spes fovet, et fore cras semper ait melius.*"



## 12. VANCE TAKES A JOURNEY

(Sunday, October 16; 1:30 p.m.)

Vance rose rather deliberately and walked to the desk.

"Markham," he said, with unwonted seriousness, "there's only one way of attacking this problem. We must keep our eyes fixed on the known physical facts of the case and ignore everything that may tend to divert us. That's why I'm going to ask you now to put me in touch immediately with your official toxicologist."

Markham looked up with a frown.

"You mean today?"

"Yes." Vance spoke emphatically. "This afternoon, if possible."

"But it's Sunday, Vance," Markham demurred. "It may be impossible. . . . However, I'll see what can be done."

He rang for Swacker.

"See if you can locate Doctor Adolph Hildebrandt," he instructed the secretary when he appeared. "He has left the laboratory by this time. Try telephoning to his home."

Swacker went out.

"Hildebrandt's a good man," Markham told Vance. "One of the best in the country. He's the plodding German type, cautious and pontifical and highly academic. But he always seems to lumber through. Without him we'd never have got a conviction in the Waite and Sanford cases. . . . He may be at home now, and he may not. If this wasn't Sunday. . . . However—"

At this moment a buzzer rang and Markham answered the telephone on his desk. After a brief conversation he replaced the receiver.

"You're in luck, Vance. Hildebrandt's at home—he lives in West 84th Street—and he'll be in all afternoon. You heard what I told him: that we'll be around later."

"That may help," Vance murmured. "Or it may prove just a false scent. But there's no other starting point. . . . My word! I wish I knew what was on Bloodgood's mind. The case, alas! resolves itself into a guessing contest." He sighed and took a deep puff on his cigarette. "In the meantime, let's lift up our hearts. I know where the green-turtle soup and the Harvey's Shooting Sherry are excellent and where an *omelette aux rognons* is assembled with love and finesse. *Allons-y, mon vieux*. . . ."

We got into his car and he took us to a little French restaurant in West 72nd Street, near Riverside Drive.<sup>[11]</sup> After our frappéed *crème de menthe* we proceeded uptown to Doctor Hildebrandt's.

The doctor was a rotund man, completely bald, with a moon-shaped face, protruding ears and pale blue eyes at once somnolent and keen. He was attired in a shabby smoking-jacket, baggy trousers and a pair of flapping felt bedroom slippers. His soft shirt was open at the throat, and his heavy woolen socks, of the most fantastically colored design, lay in thick folds about his ankles. He was smoking an enormous wooden-stemmed meerschaum pipe which curved downward over his chest fully eighteen inches.

He answered our ring himself, and ushered us into a narrow, stuffy living-room crowded with eighteenth-century rococo furniture. Despite his gruff, somewhat aloof manner, he was pleasant and gracious, and he acknowledged Markham's presentation of Vance and me with grave courtesy.

Vance immediately broached the subject he had come to discuss.

"We are here, doctor," he said, "to ask you a few questions regarding poisons and their actions. We are confronted with a serious and apparently obscure problem in connection with the death of a Mrs. Llewellyn last night. . . ."

"Ah, yes." Doctor Hildebrandt took the pipe slowly from his mouth. "Doremus called me this morning and I was present at the autopsy. I made an analysis of the stomach for one of the belladonna group. But I didn't find anything. I'm making a complete chemical analysis of the other organs tomorrow."

"What we're particularly interested in," Vance went on, "is whether a poison could have been the cause of death and yet not be evident in an analysis; and also how the poison, in such a case, might have been administered."

Doctor Hildebrandt nodded ponderously.

"I may be able to help you. And, on the other hand, I may not. Toxicology is an elaborate and difficult science. There are still many phases of it that we know nothing about."

He returned the pipe to his mouth and puffed heavily on it for several moments, as if arranging his thoughts. Then he spoke in a didactic, classroom manner.

"You understand, of course, that poison, in the biological sense, does not exist in the body if the substance is entirely insoluble; for, in such a case, it resists absorption into the blood stream. The corollary is that the more soluble a substance the more readily it will be absorbed into the blood stream and so act upon the body."

"What of the dilution of a poison in water, doctor?" asked Vance.

"Water not only hastens the absorption of a poison, but generally augments its activity. However, in the case of a corrosive, water naturally reduces the toxic effect. But, on the other hand, the condition of the stomach must be taken into consideration in the case of all poisons taken by mouth. If there is food in the stomach at the time of ingestion, the absorption of the poison is delayed; but if there is no food in the stomach, absorption, as well as the action of the poison, takes place more quickly."

"In the Llewellyn case the stomach should have been relatively empty," Vance put in.

"It was. And we can assume that if a poison was absorbed through the stomach, there was a fairly prompt action."

"We believe we know the approximate time at which the poison was taken," said Vance, "but we are interested in having the time scientifically established."

Again Doctor Hildebrandt nodded.

"Yes, the time is most helpful in all cases where criminality is suspected. But the determination of the point is not easy, for, in such

cases, we have no actual evidence as to how, or under what conditions, the poison was taken. The time of administration depends entirely on the type of poison taken and on the symptoms observed. Nearly all the common poisons act quickly, although I can recall several physiological exceptions in which the action of the poison was delayed for hours after ingestion. But, generally speaking, the symptoms of poisons taken by mouth appear within an hour. In most cases, if the stomach is empty, the symptoms appear within ten or fifteen minutes after the administration. This is particularly true in the case of belladonna, or atropin, poisoning."

"What," asked Vance, "of a poison that is taken orally and whose presence is nevertheless not found in the stomach later?"

Doctor Hildebrandt cleared his throat judicially.

"Such a condition might be encountered with any number of poisons taken by mouth. It would simply mean that the system had absorbed all of the poison taken into the stomach. But there would, of course, be deposits of the poison in the blood and the tissues. Unfortunately, in too many cases of criminal poisoning, only the stomach is given to the toxicologist for chemical examination. Findings from the stomach alone are inconclusive, for, as I say, the rapid absorption of the poison may have left no traces of it in that organ. Naturally, the toxicologist who is given only the stomach for examination may assume that whatever poison he finds there is what might be called a surplus of the poison which has actually been ingested and absorbed by the system. But this is certainly not direct proof. That is why the other organs of any person suspected of having died by poisoning should be chemically analyzed—the liver, the kidneys, the intestines, perhaps even the brain and spinal cord. When poison is taken into the system orally it is first absorbed through the stomach. Then it is circulated in the blood. And finally it is deposited in the tissues of the liver, kidneys and other organs. You understand, of course, that poisons may be introduced into the body in other ways than by mouth; and in such cases there would naturally be no traces of the poison in the stomach."

"Ah!" Vance leaned forward. "That is one of the things we wish to know. In view of the fact that Mrs. Llewellyn died within a very short time after taking the poison, and there were no traces of it found in her stomach, I wish to ask you by what means, other than by ingestion, this poison—presumably belladonna—might have been administered."

Doctor Hildebrandt looked off into space thoughtfully.

"It could have been administered parenterally—that is, by hypodermic direct into the blood stream. Or it might have been absorbed through the mucous membranes of the nose or through the conjunctivæ. In either case there would, of course, be no traces found in the stomach."

Vance smoked for a moment meditatively. Finally he put another question.

"Is there no case in which poison may have been taken orally and produced death, and yet left no traces in any organ of the body?"

The doctor brought his eyes back and let them rest on Vance.

"There are poisons which, when absorbed by the body, have no chemical action on the blood; and there are others that are not turned into insoluble compounds when they come in contact with the tissues. Such poisons are quickly eliminated from the system. If a victim of poisoning lives a sufficiently long time after taking such a poison, all traces of the lethal drug may entirely disappear from the body. But there is no indication that such was the case with the Llewellyn woman. With her the violent symptoms of poisoning appeared shortly after induction; and, as I understand, there were no processes of elimination."

"But," pursued Vance, "even in cases where no poison is found in any organ, would there not be organic changes in the body which would indicate the nature of the poison taken?"

"In certain cases, yes." Doctor Hildebrandt's gaze again drifted into space. "Such indications, however, are very unreliable. You see, various types of diseases can produce effects on the organs similar to those produced by certain poisons. If, however, the lesions discovered are identical with those produced by a poison which the person is supposed to have received, then one may assume that the lesions are the result of the poison. On the other hand, certain cases have come under my own observation where it was definitely known that a specific poison was taken, and yet the organs did not show any of the lesions which one would ordinarily have expected to find. In the famous Heilmeyer case, for instance, it was known that death was caused by arsenic; yet neither the stomach nor the intestines were irritated, and the mucous membrane was even paler than it would have been normally."

Vance smiled despondently and shook his head.

"Toxicology, I see, is not a science which one might call even remotely mathematical. Still, there must be some way of reaching a definite conclusion from a given set of conditions. For instance, even though no traces of poison were found in the system, is it not possible to determine, by a person's symptoms and *post-mortem* appearances, what poison was taken?"

"That," returned Doctor Hildebrandt, "is as much a medical problem as a toxicological one. However, I will say this: the symptoms of many diseases closely simulate the symptoms of certain types of poisoning. For example, the symptoms of gastro-enteritis, cholera morbus, ulceration of the duodenum, uremia and acute acidosis, are fairly well duplicated by the symptoms of poisoning by arsenic, aconite, antimony, digitalis, iodine, mercury, and the various corrosive acids and alkalis. The convulsions accompanying tetanus, epilepsy, puerperal eclampsia and meningitis, are also caused by camphor, cyanides and strychnin. Dilated pupils, which are present in diseases that produce optic atrophy or a weakness of the oculomotor nerve, also follow poisoning by the belladonna group, cocaine, and gelsemium; whereas contraction of the pupil, such as is common in tabes, for instance, is likewise caused by opium, morphine and heroin. Opium, paraldehyde, carbon dioxide, hyoscin and the barbitals produce coma; but so do cerebral hemorrhage, epilepsy and brain injuries. The delirium we find in cases of organic brain diseases and nephritis may often be duplicated by the administration of atropin, cocaine, Cannabis indica, or hasheesh, and various other poisons. Nitrobenzene, aniline and opium and its derivatives, produce cyanosis; yet so do diseases of the cardiac and respiratory system. Paralysis follows the taking of cyanides and carbon monoxide, but it is also produced by brain tumor and apoplexy. Then there's the question of respiration. Opium gives a slow respiration, but so do uremia and brain hemorrhage. And the belladonna group of poisons produce rapid respiration, such as is normally found in hysteria and lesions of the medulla oblongata."

"My word!" Vance smiled. "The farther we go, the more remote infallibility becomes."

The doctor grinned broadly.

"You know Goethe, yes? *Eigentlich weiss man nur wenn man wenig weiss; mit dem Wissen wächst der Zweifel.*"

"That's hardly helpful, though," Vance sighed. "I want to know more, not less."

"Toxicology is not entirely a hopeless science," the doctor answered good-naturedly. "If a poison is found in the organs of a dead person, and the pathology of the case corresponds accurately to the symptoms produced by that poison, one is justified in accepting as a fact that the person died of that particular poison."

Vance nodded.

"Yes. I can see that. But, as I understand you, the absence of any determinable poison in the organs does not mean that death was not due to the actual administration of poison. Now, is it possible that poison could actually be in the organs analyzed and yet resist detection by the chemical analyst?"

"Oh, yes. There are several toxic substances for which chemistry has not yet found the means of determination. Furthermore, you must not overlook the fact that there are poisons which, when they come in contact with certain chemicals in the human body, are converted into harmless substances which one would ordinarily expect to find in the body."

"Then it is possible to poison some one deliberately, without fear of leaving any trace of the method of murder?"

Doctor Hildebrandt inclined his head slightly.

"Yes, that is possible. If one could successfully introduce common sodium into the stomach—"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Vance. "But the perforation of the stomach walls by the combustion of sodium was not the sort of thing I had in mind. What I wanted to ask is this: are there actual poisonous substances which might produce death and yet leave no trace?"

"Yes, there are such poisons," Doctor Hildebrandt returned slowly, taking his pipe from his mouth again. "For instance, there are various vegetable poisons which neither produce a specific lesion nor are chemically identifiable. And certain organic poisons may be converted into constituents commonly present in the body. Moreover, certain volatile poisons can be entirely dissipated by the time the toxicologist gets the organs for examination.<sup>[12]</sup> I am not mentioning the mineral acids which might cause corrosion and be eliminated from the system before death sets in, as I understand this type of poison does not interest you."

"I was thinking particularly," said Vance, "of some poison easily obtained, that could be given in a glass of water without its presence being detected by the victim."

Doctor Hildebrandt considered this for a moment. Then he shook his head gravely.

"No-o. I'm afraid the drugs and chemicals I have in mind would not satisfy all the conditions you impose."

"Still, doctor," Vance persisted, "is it not possible that a new poison may have been discovered recently which would meet my hypothetical requirements?"

"Certainly, that is possible," the doctor admitted. "New poisons are constantly being discovered."

Vance was silent for a while; then he asked:

"Would a lethal dose of atropin or belladonna, in a glass of water, be easily detected by any one who drank the mixture?"

"Oh, yes. There would be a distinctly bitter taste to the water." The doctor turned his eyes lazily to Vance. "Have you reason to believe that the poison in the Llewellyn case was given in water?"

Vance hesitated before answering.

"We are still only speculating on that point. The fact is, two persons besides Mrs. Llewellyn were poisoned last night, but they recovered. And both of them had taken a glass of water shortly before collapsing. And the carafe at Mrs. Llewellyn's bedside was empty when we arrived."

"I see," the doctor mumbled, nodding slowly. "Well, perhaps after my chemical analysis of the other organs tomorrow, I can tell you more."

Vance rose.

"I'm deeply grateful to you, doctor. There is nothing else I have in mind at the moment. The case just now seems pretty well obscured. By the by, when will your report be completed?"

Doctor Hildebrandt got up ponderously and accompanied us to the door.

"That's hard to say. I'll begin work the first thing in the morning, and if I have any luck, I may have the report by tomorrow night."

We took our leave and Vance drove us direct to his apartment. He was quiet and apparently absorbed in thought. Moreover, he appeared troubled, and Markham made no attempt at conversation until we had settled ourselves in the library. Currie came in and lighted a fire in the grate, and Vance ordered a service of *Napoléon* cognac. It was then that Markham put his first question to Vance since leaving the doctor's apartment.

"Did you learn anything—that is, did anything new suggest itself to you during your interview with Hildebrandt?"

"Nothing definite," Vance replied unhappily. "That's the queer part of this case. I feel as though I were almost touching something vital, and then it eludes me. Several times this afternoon, as the doctor dissertated, I felt that he was telling me something that I needed to know—but I couldn't put my finger on it. Ah, Markham, if only I were psychic!"

He sighed and warmed his cognac between his hands, inspiring its fumes through the narrow opening of the large pot-bellied *inhalateur*.

"But there's one motif that runs all through the events of last night—the water motif."

Markham looked at him thoughtfully.

"I noticed that several of your questions were centred about that theme."

"Oh, yes. Yes. They would be, y' know. Water runs through every act of this devilish drama. Llewellyn orders a whisky and insists upon plain water; but he doesn't drink it when it's brought to him. Later Bloodgood orders it for him, and Kinkaid sends the boy to his office to get the water. Then Kinkaid himself wants a drink of water, and the carafe's empty; so he sends it to the bar to be filled. Virginia Llewellyn's carafe is empty when we arrive at the house. Amelia Llewellyn takes the last glass of water from her mother's carafe and collapses. Her own carafe is later found to be empty—though she explained that point. Then Bloodgood gets emotional and enters the silence at the mere mention of water. Everywhere we turn—water! 'Pon my soul, Markham, it's like some hideous charade. . . ."

"You think, perhaps, all these victims were poisoned through water?"

"If I thought that, the whole problem would be simple." Vance made a hopeless gesture with his hand. "But there's no main thread

holding these various repetitions of water together. Lynn Llewellyn drank whisky as well as water. Virginia Llewellyn could, of course, have been poisoned by water; but if the poison she took was belladonna or atropin—as the *post-mortem* signs indicated—she would have tasted the poison and not emptied the entire carafe. The only one of the three victims who we can say, with any degree of certainty, was poisoned by water, is Amelia. But even she tasted nothing amiss; and she had emptied her own carafe earlier in the evening without any untoward effects. . . . It's deuced queer. It's as if water had deliberately been introduced into this case to lead us somewhere. Any murder planned as subtly as this one seems to have been planned, doesn't present a recurring sign-post at every turn unless it has been calculated. Some of it may be coincidence, of course. But not all. That couldn't be. And Bloodgood's perturbation at the mention of water. . . . We have a key, Markham. But—dash it all!—we can't find the door. . . ."

He made a despairing gesture.

"Water. What a silly notion. . . . If only it were something besides water! Water can't injure any one, unless one were submerged in it. Why water, Markham? . . . Two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen . . . simple, element'ry formula—"

Vance suddenly stopped speaking. His eyes were fixed before him, and automatically he set down his cognac glass. He leaned forward in his chair, and then he sprang to his feet.

"Oh, my aunt!" He swung round toward Markham. "Water isn't necess'rily H<sub>2</sub>O. We're dealing here with the unknown. Subtleties." His eyelids drooped in speculation. "It could be, don't y' know. It may be we are supposed to take the water trail—for a reason. . . . We have a chemist, and a doctor, and a gambler-financier, and books on toxicology, and hatreds, and jealousies, and an *Edipus complex*, and three cases of poisoning—and water everywhere. . . . I say, Markham, busy yourself with something for a while. Read, think, sleep, fidget, play *solitaire*—anything. Only, don't talk."

He turned swiftly and went to a section of his book-shelves where he kept his scientific journals and pamphlets. For half an hour he rummaged among them, pausing here and there to read some paragraph or glance through some article he had found. At length he replaced all the periodicals and documents and rang for Currie.

"Pack my bag," he directed when the old English butler appeared. "Overnight. Informal. And put it in the car. I'm drivin'."

Markham stood up and faced Vance.

"See here!" He showed his annoyance. "Where are you going, Vance?"

"I'm takin' a little trip," Vance returned, with an ingratiating smile. "I'm seekin' wisdom. The water trail beckons. I'll be back in the morning, either wiser or sadder—or both."

Markham looked at him for a moment.

"What have you in mind?" he asked.

"Perhaps only a fantastic dream, old dear," smiled Vance.

Markham knew Vance too well to attempt to elicit any further explanation from him at that moment.

"Is your destination also a secret?" he asked with modified irritation.

"Oh, no. No." Vance went to his desk and filled his cigarette-case. "No secret. . . . I'm going to Princeton."

Markham stared at him in amazement. Then he shrugged, and wagged his head mockingly.

"And you a Harvard man!"

### 13. AN AMAZING DISCOVERY

(Monday, October 17; 12 noon)

It was nearly noon the next day when Vance returned to New York. I was busily engaged on routine work when he came into the library, and he barely nodded to me as he passed through to the bedroom. I could plainly see, by his look of concentration and his eager movements, that something urgent was on his mind. A short while later he emerged in a gray Glen Urquhart plaid suit, a subdued green Homburg hat and heavy blucher shoes.

"It's a miserable day, Van," he remarked. "There's rain in the air, and we are going into the country. Put away your bookkeeping and come along. . . . But I must see Markham first. Phone his office that I'll be there in twenty minutes—there's a good fellow."

While I got in touch with the District Attorney's office, Vance rang for Currie and gave instructions regarding dinner.

Markham was alone when we arrived at the Criminal Courts Building.

"I've held up my appointments waiting for you," he greeted Vance. "What's the report?"

"My dear Markham—oh, my dear Markham!" protested Vance, sinking into a chair. "Must I make a report?" He became serious and looked thoughtfully at Markham. "The fact is, I have practically nothing to report. A very disappointin' trip."

"Why did you go to Princeton at all?" Markham asked.

"To visit an old acquaintance of mine," Vance returned. "Doctor Hugh Stott Taylor—one of the great chemists of our day. He's the Chairman of the Department of Chemistry at the University. . . . I spent a couple of hours with him last night, inspecting the Frick Chemical Laborat'ry."

"Just a general tour of inspection?" Markham asked, watching Vance shrewdly. "Or something specific?"

"No. Not general." Vance inhaled on his cigarette. "Quite specific. I was interested, d' ye see, in heavy water."

"Heavy water!" Markham sat bolt upright in his chair. "I've come across a reference somewhere to heavy water—"

"Yes—yes. Of course. There has been considerable about it in the papers. Amazin' discovery. One of the great events in modern chemistry. Fascinatin' subject."

He lay back in his chair and stretched his legs out before him.

"Heavy water is a compound in which the hydrogen atom weighs twice as much as the hydrogen atom in ordin'ry water. It's really a liquid in which at least ninety per cent of the molecules consist of oxygen combined with the recently discovered heavy hydrogen. The formula is  $\text{H}^2\text{H}^2\text{O}$ , though it is now generally referred to scientifically as  $\text{D}_2\text{O}$ . The interestin' thing about it is that it looks and tastes like ordin'ry water. Actually, there is about one part of heavy water in five thousand parts of ordin'ry water; but because of the loss in the process of extraction, it comes nearer to requiring ten thousand parts of plain water to produce one part of the heavy water. In certain laborat'ries they have treated as much as three hundred gallons of ordin'ry water to produce one ounce of heavy water. The actual discovery of heavy water was made by Doctor Harold C. Urey of Columbia University. But a large part of the practical research in this new and amazin' compound has been done by the scientists at Princeton. The apparatus in the Frick Chemical Laborat'ry is the first that's been devised for the production of heavy water on any appreciable scale. And when I say 'appreciable scale' I'm speaking relatively; for Doctor Taylor told me last night that the daily output even at their plant is less than a cubic centimeter. But they're hopin' to step up production to about a teaspoonful a day. At present Princeton has on hand less than half a pint of this precious fluid. The cost of production is enormous; and because of the demand for samples of the liquid by scientists all over the country, the price asked for it is over a hundred dollars a cubic centimeter. A teaspoonful would cost over four hundred dollars, and a quart about a hundred thousand dollars. . . ."

He glanced up at Markham and continued.

"There are great commercial possibilities in this new commodity. Doctor Taylor tells me that already there is a chemical firm out west which has begun to market it." [13]

Markham was profoundly interested, and he did not once take his eyes from Vance.

"You think, then, this heavy water is the answer to Saturday night's poisonings?"

"It may be one of the answers," Vance returned slowly, "but I doubt if it is the final answer. Too many things militate against its giving us the entire explanation. To begin with, its cost is almost prohibitive, and there is too little of it available to account for the recurrent water motif in the Llewellyn case."

"But what of its toxic effect on the human system?" Markham asked.

"Ah! Exactly. Unfortunately, no one knows what effects liberal quantities of heavy water, taken internally, would have upon a human being. Indeed, the very small amounts of heavy water obtainable have made experimentation in this direction practically impossible. One can only speculate. Professor Swingle, at Princeton, has proved that heavy water is lethal to small fresh-water fish like the *Lebistes reticulatus*; and the tadpole of the green frog and the flat-worm have been shown to survive but a short time when placed in heavy water. The growth of seedlings in heavy water is retarded or entirely suspended; and this inhibit'ry effect on the functioning of the life protoplasm has led some experimenters in San Francisco to the hypothesis that the indications of old age and senility are caused by the normal accumulation of heavy water in the body."

Vance smoked a moment and then added:

"However, I am not satisfied that these speculations have any direct bearing on our particular problem. On the other hand, I'm rather inclined to think, Markham, that we are *intended* to work along just those lines. In any event, they may lead us to the truth."

"Just what do you mean by that?" demanded Markham.

"I met and talked with one of Doctor Taylor's bright young assistants last night—a Mr. Martin Quayle—an expert chemist, conscientious and resourceful, and a great asset to the doctor's staff. Personally, however, I shouldn't care to trust him too far. He has an inordinately ambitious nature. . . ."

"What has this fellow Quayle to do with my question?" snapped Markham.

"Quayle, d' ye see, was a classmate of Bloodgood's. Two aspirin' young chemists. Very good friends. Everything *gemütlich*."

Markham studied Vance thoughtfully for a moment. Then he shook his head.

"I feel there's a vague connection somewhere in that information," he said; "but I still can't see what possible bearing it has on the problem we're trying to solve."

"Neither can I," Vance admitted cheerfully. "I merely put the fact forward in lieu of anything more definite."

Markham had suddenly become irritable. He struck the desk with his fist.

"That being the case," he grumbled, "what have you gained by your mysterious trip to Princeton?"

"I really don't know," Vance returned blandly. "I'll admit I'm frightfully disappointed. I had hoped for much more. But I'm not entirely disconsolate. There's an elusive theme running through the water song, and I hope to know more about it tonight. I'm taking another trip this afternoon—into the country, this time. Behold these rustic togs in which I am incased. I'm countin' on the thought of Quayle to guide my gropin' footsteps."

Markham inspected Vance shrewdly for a brief time. Then he snorted and gave him a wry smile.

"The rigmarole of the Delphic oracle; the perfect fortune-telling manner; the crystal-gazer at work. I should be used to it by now. . . . So you're taking a jaunt into the country?"

"Yes," Vance murmured dulcetly. "Up Closter way—"

Markham leaped to his feet.

"What's that!" he fairly bellowed.

"Oh, my dear Markham, don't startle me so. You have far too much energy." Vance sighed. "I say, would you ask Swacker to find out what companies supply water and electric power to the domiciles in and around Closter?"

Markham spluttered and compressed his lips. Then he rang for his secretary and repeated Vance's request to him.

When Swacker had gone out again, Vance turned to Markham and continued.

"And when you get the names, will you write me a jolly sort of letter of introduction to the managers? I'm seekin' information—"

"What information?"

"If you must know," said Vance sweetly, "I wish to inquire into the amount of water and electricity consumed by a certain prominent citizen in the vicinity of Closter."

Markham sank back in his chair.

"Good God! Do you think that Kinkaid—?"

"My dear fellow!" Vance interrupted. "I'm not thinkin'. Too great an effort." He sighed elaborately and would say no more.

A few minutes later Swacker came in with the information that Closter and its environs were supplied by the Valley Stream Water Company and the Englewood Power and Light Company, both with offices in Englewood.

Markham dictated the letters Vance had asked for; and ten minutes later we were headed for Englewood, a few miles from Closter.

Englewood is only a short distance from New York, and, thanks to Vance's expert driving, we reached that flourishing little town in less than half an hour. Vance inquired the way to the offices of the Valley Stream Water Company and, once there, sent in his letter to the manager. We were received by a pleasant, serious man of about forty—a Mr. McCarty—in a small private office.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked, after shaking hands. "We will be glad to help in any way we can."

"I'm particularly interested," Vance told him, "in finding out how much water is consumed by a Mr. Richard Kinkaid, near Closter."

"That information is easily obtained." He went to a steel filing cabinet and, after a moment's search, took from it a small manila-colored meter-reading card. Returning to his desk, he glanced at the record and then raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Ah, yes," he said, after a moment, as if suddenly remembering something. "I recall the circumstances now. . . . Mr. Kinkaid has a one-inch meter and uses a great quantity of water. His rate, in fact is based on the 40,000 to 400,000 cubic-feet-per-year schedule. . . ."

"And Mr. Kinkaid has nothing more than a moderate-sized hunting lodge," supplied Vance.

Mr. McCarty nodded.

"Yes, I realize that. The amount of water service used by Mr. Kinkaid is sufficient for a manufacturing plant. The large consumption was called to my attention over a year ago. I could not understand the figure, and of course I investigated. But I found that the customer was satisfied; and therefore we had no alternative but to continue the service."

"Tell me, Mr. McCarty," continued Vance; "is there any variation in the amount of water consumed by Mr. Kinkaid according to the time of year? That is, are his meter readings higher in the spring and summer months than in winter, when the lodge is closed?"

"No," the manager replied, his eyes still scanning the figures, "there is practically no variation. According to the card, as much water is consumed in the winter months as in the summer months."

At length he glanced up at Vance.

"Do you think we should look into the matter further?"

"Oh, no. No. I shouldn't look into it," Vance returned casually. "By the by, how long has this excessive consumption of water been going on?"

The manager looked down at the card again, turned it over, and scanned the figures on the reverse side.

"The water connections were installed over a year ago—in August, to be exact—and the heavy consumption began almost immediately."

Vance rose and extended his hand to the manager.

"Thank you very much, sir. That's really all I want to know. I appreciate your kindness."

From the offices of the Valley Stream Water Company, we went to the offices of the Englewood Power and Light Company, a few blocks away. Again Vance sent his letter in to the manager—a Mr. Browning—and once more we were received without delay. When Vance told him that he wished to check on Kinkaid's consumption of electric current, he gave Vance a curiously shrewd look.

"It is not our custom, you understand, sir, to give out information of this nature," he said in a dignified conservative manner. "But, in the circumstances, I feel justified in telling you that Mr. Kinkaid—who is well known hereabouts—arranged with me, over a year ago,

for a sufficient capacity to properly meet his requirements—which, I may add, were far in excess of the usual demand in connection with a house or hunting lodge of that size. Negotiations were completed for a supply to meet the demand of five hundred kilowatts instead of the customary five kilowatts."

"Thank you for that information, sir," Vance offered a cigarette to Mr. Browning and took one himself. "But when Mr. Kinkaid arranged with you for this large supply of current, did he tell you for what purpose it was going to be used?"

"I naturally asked him that question," the manager returned, "and he explained merely that he required such a capacity for experimental purposes."

"You did not push the matter further?"

"Mr. Kinkaid informed me," the other replied, "that the experimental work which was to be done was of a more or less confidential nature; and my detailed interest in it naturally ended at that point. You appreciate the fact, of course, that our business, as well as our ideal, is to give the best possible service to the public."

"Your attitude, sir," returned Vance, with a slight inclination of the head, "is quite correct. I am most grateful to you for your confidence."

Mr. Browning rose.

"I'm sorry I can give you no more information—unless you would like to know the exact amount of power consumed."

"No, thank you," said Vance, starting for the door. "You've told me all that we need to know at present." And he took his departure.

When we were again in the car, Vance sat at the wheel for several minutes in indecisive abstraction. Then he took out his cigarette-case and, with great deliberation, lit another of his *Régies*.

"I think, Van," he said slowly, "we'll take a look at Kinkaid's retreat. I have a general idea where it is. If we go astray we can make inquiries."

He turned the car about and headed back toward the Hudson River. When we were again on route 9-W Vance turned north along the Palisades.

"There should be a narrow roadway somewhere within the next few miles, and there may be a sign to guide us," he said. "Keep your eye out. If we miss it we'll have to go to Closter and inquire our way from there."

But this was not necessary, for about two miles farther on we came upon a rustic weather-beaten guide-post at the entrance to a tree-lined private driveway leading away from the river, which told us that Kinkaid's hunting lodge was somewhere beyond.

Turning into this roadway, we came almost immediately to a densely wooded stretch of country. We were now in Bergen County, somewhere between Closter township and the New York state line, near that section of New Jersey called Rockleigh. Following this private road for perhaps half a mile, we suddenly came to a clearing in the centre of which stood an old two-story stone cottage, such as might have been built originally as a private residence. There was a look of utter desolation about it. The windows had been boarded up and there was a general air of desuetude about the small front porch and the massive door which was the main entrance to the lodge. Behind the house, on the right, was a metal garage. Vance drove his car into the dense thicket on the left and got out.

"It looks a bit deserted—eh, what, Van?" he commented as we approached the front door.

He pulled the old-fashioned brass knob several times; but though we could hear the tinkling of a bell within, there was no answer to his summons.

"I'm afraid there's no one here," he said. "And I had passionately hoped to gain access. Let's see what the rear of the place holds in store for us."

We walked down the pathway to the north, but instead of going directly to the back of the lodge, Vance continued on toward the garage. The door was slightly ajar, but on the latch hung a large padlock. Vance gave this padlock his careful attention and then glanced into the garage.

"Signs of recent life," he murmured. "There's no car, but there's neither dust nor rust on the lock. Moreover, there are marks of automobile tires on the roadway, as well as traces of fresh oil on this cement flooring. Conclusion: the inhabitant or inhabitants of the lodge have only recently departed. Destination and time of his, or their, return, problematical."

He looked up at the rear elevation of the lodge and smoked in speculative silence.

"I wonder . . ." he murmured at length. "It might be done. I say, Van, do you feel in a house-breakin' mood?"

He approached the small screened porch at the back of the house and mounted the short flight of wooden steps that led to it. The door was not latched and we stepped into the porch. There was a door leading into the lodge, and beside it a small pantry window. Both, however, were locked.

"Wait here a minute," Vance directed; and he disappeared down the porch steps into the rear yard. A few moments later he returned with a chisel from the tool-box of his car. "I have always had a suppressed urge to be a burglar," he said. "Now let's see. . . ."

He worked the flat blade of the chisel between the two small sections of the pantry window, and after a few minutes of manipulation, he succeeded in throwing the circular bolt which held them locked. Then, by inserting the chisel under the lower sash, he was able to raise it. There was an empty wooden box standing in a corner of the porch, and this Vance placed beneath the window. Standing on it, he managed, with considerable effort, to squeeze himself through the narrow opening; and a moment later I heard a heavy thump as he disappeared into the darkness inside. In another minute, however, his face appeared at the window.

"No damage done, Van," he announced. "Come along in. I'll help you through."

I pulled my hat over my ears and worked myself forward through the window. Vance took me under the shoulders and drew me into the narrow dark pantry.

"My word!" he sighed. "Burglary is far too strenuous an undertaking. I was quite right in renouncin' the career. . . . Now we must look for the cellar door. I doubt if there will be anything to interest us on the main floors."

The cellar door was easily found. It led directly off the kitchen which was divided from the pantry by a swinging door. Vance led the way down the stairs, holding his pocket cigarette lighter before him.

"Oh, I say!" I heard his voice from the semi-darkness ahead. "That's a curious door for an innocent hunting lodge."

I was directly behind him now, at the foot of the stairs, and, looking over his shoulder, I saw through the flickering light of the

cigarette lighter's tiny flame an enormous solid-oak door, comparatively new. There was neither door-knob nor lock, but where the knob would ordinarily have been was a large iron drop bolt. Vance lifted the heavy bolt and pushed the door inward. From the black depths beyond there came an acrid chemical odor and a continuous, insistent hum, as of motors; and far off in the blackness I could see several tiny shimmering blue streaks of flame, as of Bunsen burners.

Vance stepped through the doorway and fumbled around on the adjoining wall. Finally he found the electric switch. There was a click; and a brilliant illumination from a dozen or more suspended electric bulbs replaced the darkness.

An astonishing sight met my eyes. The stone cellar, though originally it must have been nearly sixty feet square, had been extended on two sides, so that we now found ourselves in an underground room at least a hundred feet wide and a hundred and twenty feet long. It was filled with rows of enormous tables covered with thousands of small circular glass jars. At the rear of the cellar was a series of electric generators; and on some of the tables and wide shelves about the walls were elaborate collections of bottles and intricate chemical paraphernalia.

Vance looked about him and moved here and there among the heavily laden tables.

"My word!" he murmured. "Doctor Taylor would be green with envy if he could see this laborat'ry. Amazin'! . . ."

He walked across the room to a series of tables whose apparatus was quite unlike the rest, and where I had seen the blue flames.

"Heavy water, Van," he explained, indicating several cone-shaped bottles at the end of a long series of tubes, valves and cells. "There must be over a quart of it here. Large-scale production, this. If it's pure, Kinkaid has a fortune in those bottles. . . . Do you see how it's made, Van? A fascinatin' process."

He looked over the apparatus closely.

"The method of production used here is the same as the one devised by the chemists at Princeton—the first one, by the by, of any real practical value. Electrolyte from commercial electrolytic cells is first distilled to remove the carbonate and hydroxide. Sodium hydroxide is added, and then the solution is electrolyzed in those cells."

He pointed to several tables far down the room, containing innumerable hydrometer jars which were cooled by immersion in large shallow tanks of running water.

"The electrodes, you can see, are bent twice at right-angles to form anode and cathode in the neighboring cells; and the potential of the direct current is supplied from those motor generators over there. It takes about three days to diminish the electrolyte to about twelve per cent of its original volume; and then this concentrated electrolyte is partially neutralized by bubbling carbon dioxide through it. After that it is distilled and added to another group of cells—those on that series of tables at the rear—containing water of the same grade but still with the original sodium hydroxide content. Three successive electrolyses are carried out, which result in water containing about two and a half per cent of the heavy hydrogen isotope. From this stage onward the hydrogen contains the heavy isotope which is recovered by the apparatus on these tables."

He waved his hand over the elaborate chemical array in front of which we were standing.

"The mixed electrolytic gas passes from those cells at the right through this spray trap, then through this T-tube which, you observe, is immersed in mercury to form a safety valve for releasing excessive pressure; and finally it flows out through that capillary glass nozzle where it burns as a flame."

Vance dropped his cigarette to the floor and crushed it out with his toe.

"And that is the final step, Van, in the production of the world's most expensive liquid. The water formed by the combustion is condensed in this inclined quartz tube—"

There came to us the sound of soft rapid footsteps on the cellar stairs. Vance swung suddenly about and rushed forward. But he was too late. The great oak door had been drawn violently shut, and almost simultaneously the heavy iron bolt was thrown into its socket with a metallic thud.

Above the din of the motors and the flow of the running water in the shallow tanks we could distinctly hear the angry but triumphant chuckle of some one on the stairs.



## 14. THE WHITE LABEL

(Monday, October 17; 3 p.m.)

Vance stood staring at the blank heavy door, a wry smile on his lips.

"Pon my soul, Van!" he murmured. "And I abhor melodrama. Moreover, we've had no lunch—and it's three o'clock. Unpleasant but interestin' situation." He drew up a small deal chair and, sitting down despondently, smoked thoughtfully.

Suddenly every light in the cellar was extinguished, and we were left in a black chemical-laden darkness.

"Our turnkeys have thrown the main switch," Vance sighed. "Well, well. Can you bear it, Van? I'm deuced sorry to have involved you in this fantastic predicament. . . . But let us see if our captors are communicative."

He went to the door and rapped on it loudly several times with the back of his chair. Footsteps again descended the stairs, and a muffled, unidentifiable voice asked:

"Who are you—and what do you want here?"

"I regret that I am Mr. Vance," Vance called back. "And I'd jolly well like some *homard à la Turque* and a bottle of light *Chauvenet*."

"You're going to get something worse than that," came the muffled voice which, despite its faintness, was harsh and vindictive. "How many of you are there?"

"Only two," Vance told him. "Quite harmless. Tourists. Sightseers in the wilds of Jersey."

"Harmless burglars—that's good!" And the voice chuckled viciously. "Anyway, you'll be harmless when I finish with you. I'll be calling on you in a minute—as soon as I notify the State Troopers." And we could hear ascending footsteps on the stairs.

Vance beat on the door again with his chair.

"Just a moment," he called out.

"Well, what'll it be now?" The voice seemed farther away this time.

"Before you annoy the *gendarmes*," Vance said, "I may as well inform you that the New York police know exactly where I am and why I came here. Also, I have an appointment with District Attorney Markham at five o'clock, and if I do not put in an appearance, this hunting lodge will be the scene of a most thorough tour of inspection. . . . But don't let the fact upset you. I have much to meditate on for the next few hours." I could hear him replacing the chair and sitting down. Then, by the tiny flash of his cigarette lighter, I could see him lighting a fresh *Régie*.

There was a short silence followed by footsteps on the stairs and the low murmur of voices. In a few moments the lights in the cellar blazed forth again and the motors resumed their hum. Shortly afterward came the sound of the iron bolt being lifted; and the ponderous oak door swung slowly inward.

At the foot of the stairs stood Kinkaid. His face looked more like a mask than ever.

"I didn't know it was you, Mr. Vance," he said in an icy tone entirely without modulation, "or I should not have acted so inhospitably. I drove up and noticed that the pantry window had been forced open. I took it for granted there were burglars here, and when I saw lights in the cellar I ordered the door bolted."

"That's quite all right," Vance returned dulcetly. "My social error—not yours."

Kinkaid held the door open and stood to one side. We mounted the stairs to the kitchen, and Kinkaid led the way into the lounge room. Beside a massive table at one side stood a heavy-set man of about thirty-five, with flaming red hair and a sullen, serious face. He wore puttees, a canvas work suit, and a heavy gray flannel shirt.

"Mr. Arnheim," Kinkaid announced casually, by way of introduction. "He's in charge of the laboratory that you've just been inspecting."

Vance turned to the man and bowed slightly.

"Ah! A classmate of Bloodgood's and Quayle's?"

Arnheim gave a slight start, and his eyes clouded.

"Well, what of it?" he grumbled roughly.

"That'll be all, Arnheim," said Kinkaid, and dismissed the man with a wave of the hand.

Arnheim walked back to the kitchen and we heard him go down the steps to the cellar. Kinkaid sat down and scrutinized Vance with his fish-like eyes.

"You appear fairly well acquainted with my affairs," he commented.

"Oh, no. No. Only the obvious facts," Vance assured him pleasantly. "I was seekin' more data when you arrived."

"It's lucky for you," said Kinkaid, "that it turned out as it did. Arnheim's a bad boy when it comes to uninvited guests in the laboratory. I'm on my way to Atlantic City for a few days and Arnheim drove over to Closter to fetch me here."

Vance raised his eyebrows.

"Deuced queer route from New York to Atlantic City, don't y' know."

Kinkaid's face hardened, and his eyes became mere slits.

"It's not so damned queer," he retorted. "I wanted to go over some business with Arnheim before leaving, so I took the train to Closter and had him meet me there. He's driving me to Newark later to catch the seven o'clock train to Atlantic City. . . . Does that explain my itinerary satisfactorily?"

"After a fashion, yes," Vance nodded. "It might be. Quite logical when explained. Gettin' away from the turmoil of the wicked city for a while—eh, what?"

"Who the hell wouldn't—after what I've been through?" Kinkaid had modified his tone, and spoke almost petulantly. "I've shut down the Casino for a while, out of respect for Virginia." He sat upright in his chair and fixed Vance with a vicious look. "Believe it or not, sir; but I'd like to get my hands on the brute that killed her."

"Noble sentiment," Vance murmured non-committally. "Primitive but noble. By the by, her water carafe was empty when we arrived at the house Saturday night."

"So my nephew informed me. But what of it? No crime in drinking a glass of water, is there?"

"No," admitted Vance. "Nor in manufacturing heavy water. . . . Amazin' plant you have here."

"The finest plant in the world," asserted Kinkaid with obvious pride. "It was Bloodgood's idea. He saw the possibilities of commercializing heavy water, put it up to me, and I told him to go ahead—that I'd finance it. In another month or so we'll be ready to market it."

"Yes—quite. Most enterprisin' chappie, Mr. Bloodgood." Vance nodded, his eyes on Kinkaid in dreamy absorption. "So Bloodgood worked out the idea, went to Quayle in the Frick Laborat'ry and got all the necess'ry data and plans; then he looked up Arnheim and put him in charge of operations. Three ambitious young chemists—all good friends—reaching out, so to speak. Very neat."

Kinkaid smiled shrewdly.

"You seem to know as much about my enterprise as I do. Did Bloodgood tell you?"

"Oh, no." Vance shook his head. "He very dexterously avoided the subject. A bit too strenuous in his avoidance, though. Aroused my suspicions. I toddled down to Princeton last night. Put various things together. Your hunting lodge was indicated. So I toddled out."

"Why are you so interested in my laboratory?" Kinkaid asked.

"The water motif, don't y' know. Far too much water bubblin' up here and there in this poisoning case."

Kinkaid sprang to his feet, and his face became an ugly red.

"What in hell do you mean by that?" he demanded thickly. "Heavy water isn't a poison."

"No one knows, don't y' know," returned Vance mildly. "It might be. No way of tellin' yet. Interestin' subject. . . . Anyway, water was indicated. I've simply been following the sign-posts."

Kinkaid was silent for some time. At length he nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, I can see what you mean now." He shot Vance a penetrating glance. "Did you find out anything?"

"Nothing I hadn't suspected," Vance answered evasively.

"Too bad your housebreaking was without gratifying results."

"Housebreaking—oh, yes. To be sure." Vance shrugged. "Were you thinkin' of preferrin' charges?"

Kinkaid chuckled.

"No, I'll let it go this time." He spoke almost good-naturedly.

"Thanks awfully," Vance murmured, rising. "That being the case, I think Mr. Van Dine and I will stagger along. Sorry to appear in such haste, but I'm dashed hungry. No lunch, d' ye see." He went to the door and paused. "By the by, where will you be stayin' in Atlantic City?"

Kinkaid showed interest in the question.

"You think you may want to reach me?" he asked. "I'll be at the Ritz."

"A pleasant visit," returned Vance; and we went out to the car.

It was barely half-past four when we arrived home. Vance ordered tea and a change of clothes. Then he telephoned to Markham.

"I've had a jolly afternoon," he told the District Attorney. "Went housebreakin'. Got myself and Van locked in a dark cellar—same like a shillin' shocker. Mentioned your name. Open sesame. Was ceremoniously—not to say apologetically—released. Had a chat with Kinkaid. And here I am about to imbibe some of Currie's excellent *Taiwan*. . . . Kinkaid, by the by, is making quarts of heavy water at his Jersey hunting lodge. Large, elaborate plant. Bloodgood's idea—aided and abetted by another classmate, a gruff chappie named Arnheim. Kinkaid doesn't seem particularly annoyed that I uncovered his secret. Even forgave me for making forcible entry. He's headed just now for relaxation at Atlantic City. . . . The water trail progresses. I'm carryin' a bucket or two of cold water, figuratively speaking, to the Llewellyn domicile in a little while. . . . A queer case, Markham. But light is beginning to break. Not a blindin' illumination. Still, sufficiently bright to show me my way about. . . . Dinner at my humble diggin's at eight-thirty, what? . . . Then we'll hear the Brahms Third at Carnegie Hall. It's Rimsky-Korsakov the first half, and I'd infinitely prefer *canard Molière* and a *Château Haut-Brion*. . . . I'll pour forth all the news when I see you. . . . And I say, Markham, bring along Hildebrandt's report, if it's ready. . . . Cheerio."

At about six o'clock Vance presented himself at the Llewellyn residence. The butler admitted us with frigid dignity. Apparently he was not surprised at our call.

"Whom do you wish to see, sir?"

"Who might be here, Smith?" Vance asked.

"Every one is here, sir, except Mr. Kinkaid," the butler informed him. "Mr. Bloodgood and Doctor Kane are also here. The gentlemen are in the drawing-room with Mr. Lynn, and the ladies are upstairs."

Lynn Llewellyn, evidently having heard us in the hall, appeared at the drawing-room door, and invited us in.

"I'm glad you've come, Mr. Vance." He still seemed peaked and depressed, but his manner was eagerly expectant. "Have you found out anything yet?"

Before Vance could answer, Bloodgood and Doctor Kane came forward to greet him; and, the amenities over, Vance sat down by the centre-table.

"I've found out a few things," he said to Llewellyn. Then he turned directly to Bloodgood. "I've just come from Closter. I visited the hunting lodge and had a chat with Kinkaid. Interestin' cellar at the lodge."

Llewellyn walked to the table and stood beside Vance.

"I've always suspected the old boy had good wines at the lodge," he complained. "But he's never asked me out to sample any of them."

Bloodgood's eyes were on Vance. He ignored Llewellyn's remarks.

"Did you meet any one else there?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," Vance told him. "Arnheim. Energetic chap. It was he who locked us in the cellar. Kinkaid's orders, of course. Very

annoyin'." He leaned back and met Bloodgood's gaze. "I met another classmate of yours last night—Martin Quayle. I was paying a flying visit to Doctor Hugh Taylor. Also had a peep at the Frick Laboratory."

Bloodgood moved a step, but his eyes did not shift. After a moment he asked:

"Did you learn anything?"

"I learned a great deal about water," Vance returned, with a faint smile.

"And did you learn perhaps," asked Bloodgood, in a cold steady voice, "who is responsible for what happened here Saturday night?"

Vance inclined his head affirmatively and took a deep inhalation on his cigarette.

"Yes. I think I learned that, too."

Bloodgood frowned and rubbed his hand across his chin.

"What steps do you intend to take now?"

"My dear fellow!" Vance sighed reproachfully. "You know perfectly well I can take no steps. It's rather difficult to learn certain facts, don't y' know, but much more difficult to prove them. . . . Could you, by any chance, help us?"

Bloodgood leaned over angrily.

"No, damn it!" His words fairly exploded. "It's *your* problem."

"Oh, quite—quite." Vance spread his hands hopelessly. "A sad and complicated situation. . . ."

Doctor Kane, who had been listening intently, shook himself, as if out of a bad dream, and got to his feet.

"I must be running along," he announced, looking nervously at his wrist-watch. "Office hours at six, you know; and I've two uterine cases waiting for diathermy." He shook hands all round and went out hurriedly.

Bloodgood paid scant attention to the doctor's departure. His interest was still focussed on Vance.

"If you know who's guilty," he said quietly, "and can't prove it, perhaps you intend to drop the case?"

"No, no," returned Vance. "Persistence—my watchword. And perseverance. Never say die, and that sort of thing. 'God is with those who persevere.' Comfortin' thought. And 'the waters wear the stones,' as Job put it. Interestin' comment, that. Water again, you observe. . . . The fact is, Mr. Bloodgood, I'll have sufficient proof before long. There's a chemical report due from the official toxicologist tonight. He's a clever man. I'll have something to go on by tomorrow."

"And if there is no poison found?" asked Bloodgood.

"Better yet," Vance told him. "That'll simplify matters. But I'm sure there'll be poison—somewhere. Too much subtlety in this case. That's its weakness. But I like extended decimals. So much easier to write *pi* than hundreds of digits."

"I see what you mean." Bloodgood looked at his watch, and rose. "You'll excuse me. I've a seven o'clock train to catch to Atlantic City. Kinkaid wants me there. He's making the train at Newark." He bowed to us stiffly and went toward the hall.

At the door he stopped and turned.

"Any objection," he asked Vance, "to my telling Kinkaid what you've said to me about knowing who poisoned Virginia?"

Vance hesitated before answering. Then he said:

"No, none whatsoever. A good idea. Kinkaid's entitled to know. And I say, you might add that tomorrow will end the case."

Bloodgood caught his breath and stared at Vance.

"You're sure you want me to tell him that?"

"Oh—quite." Vance exhaled a series of smoke rings. "I presume you, too, are stopping at the Ritz?"

Bloodgood did not answer for some time. Finally he said:

"Yes. I'll be there." And, turning on his heel, he went out quickly.

He had no more than disappeared when Lynn Llewellyn sprang up and clutched at Vance's arm excitedly. His eyes were glittering and he was shaking from head to foot.

"My God!" he panted. "You don't really think—"

Vance rose quickly and shook him off.

"Don't be hysterical," he said contemptuously. "Go and tell your mother and sister that I'd like to see them for a moment."

Llewellyn, abashed and shamefaced, muttered an apology, and went from the room. When he returned, a few minutes later, he informed Vance that the women were both in Amelia Llewellyn's room and that they would see him there.

Vance went immediately upstairs, where Mrs. Llewellyn and her daughter were waiting for him.

After a brief greeting Vance, keeping his eyes on Mrs. Llewellyn, said to them:

"I think it only fair to tell you ladies what I have already told the other persons concerned in this case. I believe I know who is responsible for this hideous situation. I know who poisoned your son, madam, and who put the poison in your carafe, from which Miss Llewellyn drank. And I also know who poisoned your daughter-in-law and wrote the suicide note. At the present moment I can do nothing about it, as I haven't the necessary legal proof. But I am hoping that by tomorrow I may have sufficient facts in hand to warrant my taking definite measures. My findings will cause both of you much agony; and I wish you to be prepared."

Both women remained silent, and Vance bowed unhappily and went quickly from the room. But, instead of returning directly to the main floor, he turned down the hall toward the room in which Virginia Llewellyn had died.

"I want to take one more look around, Van," he said to me, entering the bedroom. I followed him in, and he closed the door noiselessly.

For five minutes he walked about the room, looking meditatively at each item of furniture. He lingered over the dressing-table; he again inspected the books on the hanging shelves; he opened the drawer of the night-stand and inspected its contents; he tried the door of the passageway that led to Amelia Llewellyn's room; and finally he walked into the bathroom. He looked about him, sniffed the perfume in the atomizer, and then opened the small mirrored door of the medicine cabinet. He gazed inside for several minutes but touched nothing. At length he snapped the door shut and came back into the bedroom.

"There's nothing more to be learned here, Van," he announced. "Let's go home and wait for the dawn."

As we passed the drawing-room door, we could see Lynn Llewellyn sitting in a chair by the fireplace, his head in his hands. Either he did not hear us, or he was too stunned by Vance's recent statements to bother with the conventional courtesies of hospitality, for he

made no sign that he was aware of the fact that we were leaving the house.

Markham arrived at Vance's apartment at half-past seven.

"I feel the need of a few rounds of cocktails before dinner," he remarked. "This case has been bothering me all day. And your cryptic phone call didn't exactly elevate my spirits. . . . Give me the whole story, Vance. Why and how did you come to be locked in a cellar? It sounds incredible."

"On the contr'ry, it was quite reasonable," Vance smiled. "Van and I were housebreakers. We used a chisel as a jimmy to effect our entry into Kinkaid's hunting lodge. Most lurid."

"Thank God you got back safely." Markham spoke lightly, but there was a troubled expression in his eyes as he looked at Vance. "My jurisdiction doesn't extend to Jersey, you know."

Vance rang for Currie and ordered dry Martinis with Beluga caviar *canapés* and a glass of *Dubonnet* for himself.

"If you must have cocktails. . . ." he sighed, and shrugged. "Forgive me if I don't partake."

While Markham and I were having our cocktails, Vance, sipping his *Dubonnet*, related in detail the events of that memorable day. When he had finished Markham shook his head in consternation.

"And where," he asked, "did it all lead you?"

"To the poisoner," said Vance. "But knowing your legalistic mind, I can't present you with the guilty person yet. You couldn't do a thing. A grand jury would only hand up a presentment chiding you for being over-ambitious." He became serious. "By the by, any report from Hildebrandt?"

Markham nodded.

"Yes; but it's not final. He phoned me just before I left the office and told me he'd been working all day but hadn't found any traces of poison yet. He seemed rather worried, and said he was going to keep at it tonight. It seems he's analyzed the liver, kidneys and intestines without any indicative results; and he is going to work on the blood, lungs and brain. He's apparently extremely interested in the case."

"I'd hoped for something more tangible by this time," said Vance, rising and pacing up and down. "I can't understand it," he murmured, his chin forward on his chest. "There should have been poison found, don't y' know. My whole theory is totterin', Markham. I've nothing else to go on."

He sat down again and smoked for a while in silence.

"I looked over Virginia Llewellyn's boudoir again today, hopin' to hit on something; but nothing had happened to point a guidin' finger, except that the medicine chest has righted itself artistically. It's now as it was when I first beheld it. Everything in place. Pattern balanced again. Composition quite correct."

"Did you discover what it was that upset your æsthetic sensibilities yesterday?" Markham put the question without much interest.

"Yes. Oh, yes. There was a spot missin' yesterday—a white square. Nothing more significant than a druggist's label on a tall blue bottle. A bottle of eyewash. Some one had evidently taken the bottle out, after I had first inspected the cabinet, and put it back with the label at the rear or to one side. So, instead of my seeing yesterday a compositional value of a tall blue bottle with a large white label, I saw merely the blank blue rectangle of the bottle. But today the white label on the bottle was to the front as originally."

"Very helpful," Markham commented ironically. "Does that, by any chance, come under the head of legal evidence?"

Before Markham had finished speaking Vance was on his feet.

"By Jove!" He tried to keep the eager excitement out of his voice. "That reversed label may be what I was hoping for when I asked you to withdraw the police from the Llewellyn house. I didn't know what might happen if every one there was relieved of supervision and restrictions. But I thought *something* might happen. And the change in the position of that bottle is the only thing that has happened. I wonder. . . ."

He swung about and went toward the telephone. A few moments later he was talking with Doctor Hildebrandt at the city's chemical laboratory in the morgue.

"Before trying anything else, doctor," he said, "make an analysis of the conjunctivæ, the lachrymal sacs, and the mucous membrane of the nose. Test for the belladonna group. It may save you further investigation. . . ."

## 15. THE TWO-O'CLOCK APPOINTMENT

(Tuesday, October 18; 9:30 a.m.)

Vance arrived at the District Attorney's office at half-past nine the next morning. After the chamber music at Carnegie Hall the night before, Markham had gone directly home, and Vance had stayed up until long past midnight, reading sections here and there in various medical books. He had seemed nervous and expectant, and after a Scotch and soda I had gone to bed, leaving him in the library; but I was still awake when he turned in some two hours later. The events of the day had stimulated my mental processes, and it was nearly dawn when I fell asleep. At eight Vance awakened me and asked if I wished to participate in the activities he had planned for the day.

I got up at once and found him in excellent mood when I joined him in the library for breakfast.

"Something final and revealin' should happen today, Van," he greeted me cheerfully. "I'm countin' on the conjunctivas and the psychology of fear. I've told every one connected with the case, with the exception of Kinkaid, all I know; and Bloodgood can be relied upon to relay my remarks to him in his seaside retreat. I'm hopin' that some of the seeds sown by my comments fell into good ground and will bring forth fruit, perchance an hundredfold—though I'd be jolly well satisfied with the sixtyfold or even the thirtyfold. . . . We're heading for Markham's office as soon as you encompass those poached eggs. I could bear seein' Hildebrandt's latest report. . . ."

Markham had been in his office only a short time when we arrived. He was studying a typewritten sheet of paper, and did not rise when we entered.

"You guessed it," he informed Vance immediately. "Hildebrandt's report was on my desk when I got in."

"Ah!"

"Conjunctivæ, lachrymal sacs and mucous membranes of the nose all saturated with belladonna. Also belladonna in the blood. Hildebrandt says there's no doubt now as to the cause of death."

"That's most interestin'," said Vance. "I was reading last night of a case of death in a four-year-old child by the instillation of belladonna in the eyes."

"But that being the case," Markham objected, "where does your heavy water fit in?"

"Oh, it fits in perfectly," Vance returned. "We weren't supposed to learn of the belladonna in the membrane of the eyelids and the anterior part of the eyeball. We were supposed to plunge into heavy water, head first, so to speak. The poisoner's toxicology was quite all right in an academic sense, but it didn't provide for all possible eventualities."

"I don't pretend," Markham retorted irritably, "to understand your cryptic remarks. Doctor Hildebrandt's report, however, is sufficiently definite, but it doesn't help us in the legal sense."

"No," admitted Vance. "Legally speaking, it makes the case more difficult. It could still be suicide, don't y' know. But it wasn't."

"And it is your theory," Markham asked, "that belladonna was also the poison taken by Lynn Llewellyn and his sister?"

"Oh, no," Vance shook his head emphatically. "That was something entirely different. And the distressin' part of the whole affair is that we have no proof of murderous intent in any of the three poisonings. But at least we know where we stand now, with that report of Hildebrandt's on the records. . . . Any other news, perchance?"

"Yes," nodded Markham. "A rather peculiar piece of news. I don't attach any particular importance to it, however. But the first thing this morning, before I got here, Kinkaid phoned from Atlantic City. Swacker spoke to him. He said he was called back to New York unexpectedly—some business at the Casino—and if I cared to meet him there, and bring you along, he thought he could give us some further information about the Llewellyn case."

Vance was deeply stirred by this information.

"Did he mention any specific time?"

"He told Swacker that he was going to be very busy all day, and said two o'clock would be most convenient for him."

"Did you, by any chance, call him back?"

"No. He informed Swacker he was taking a train immediately. And I didn't know where he was stopping, anyway. Moreover, I saw no necessity for phoning him; and, in any event, I wouldn't have done anything till I spoke to you. You seem to have some ideas about the case, which, I'll admit, have not suggested themselves to me. . . . What do you make of his invitation? Do you think it's likely he's handing out any vital information?"

"No, I don't think so." Vance lay back and, half closing his eyes, pondered the matter for several moments. "Queer situation. He's deuced casual about it. He may be just worried about my discovery of his heavy-water enterprise yesterday, and wants to set himself right in case we suspect anything. He can't be seriously upset, though, or he'd come here to your office, instead of risking our disappointing him at the Casino. . . ."

Vance sat up suddenly.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "There's another way of lookin' at it. Casual—yes. But too dashed casual. Same like the rest of the case. No one actin' rationally. Always too much or too little of everything. No balance."

He got to his feet and walked to the window. There was a perturbed look in his eyes, and a deep frown on his forehead.

"I've been hopin' for something to happen—expectin' it to happen. But this isn't it."

"What did you think might happen, Vance?" Markham asked, studying Vance's back with a troubled look.

"I don't know," Vance sighed. "But almost anything but this." He tapped out a nervous tattoo on the dingy window-pane.

"I rather thought we were in for something sudden and startling. But the prospect of chatting with Kinkaid at two o'clock doesn't especially thrill me. . . ."

He turned round quickly.

"My word, Markham! This *may* be exactly what I wanted." There was a flash of expectant fire in his eyes. "It *could* work out that way, don't y' know. I was lookin' for more subtleties. But it's too late for them now. I should have seen that. The case has reached the

forthright stage. . . . I say, Markham, we'll keep that appointment."

"But, Vance—" Markham started to protest, but the other interrupted him hurriedly.

"No, no. We must go to the Casino and learn the truth." He took up his hat and coat. "Call by for me at half-past one."

He went toward the door and Markham looked after him questioningly.

"You're sure of your ground?"

Vance paused with one hand on the door-knob.

"Yes. I think so." I had rarely seen him so serious.

"And what are you doing till half-past one?" inquired Markham, with a dry, shrewd smile.

"My dear Markham! You have a most suspicious nature." Vance's manner changed suddenly and he smiled back at Markham with bland good-nature. "*Imprimis*, I'm going to do a bit of telephonin'. That annoyin' chore accomplished, I shall betake myself to 240 Centre Street and have a heart-to-heart talk with the doughty Sergeant Heath. Then I am going shoppin'; and later I shall pay a fleeting visit to the Llewellyn home. After that I shall drop in at Scarpotti's and have eggs *Eugénie*, an artichoke salad and—"

"Good-by!" snapped Markham. "I'll see you at one-thirty."

Vance left me outside the Criminal Courts Building and I went direct to his apartment where I busied myself with certain routine work which had been accumulating.

It was a little after one when Vance returned. He seemed abstracted and, I thought, in a state of mental and physical tension. He said very little, and did not once refer to the situation that I knew was uppermost in his mind. He walked up and down the library for perhaps ten minutes, smoking, and then went into the bedroom where I could hear him telephoning. I could not distinguish anything he said; but when he returned to the library he seemed in more cheerful spirits.

"Everything is going well, Van," he said, and sat down before his favorite Cézanne water-color. "If only this case works out half as well as that beautiful organization," he murmured. "I wonder. . . ."

Markham arrived at just half-past one.

"Here I am," he announced aggressively and with a show of irritation; "though I see no reason why we couldn't have had Kinkaid come to the office and tell us what's on his mind."

"Oh, there's a good reason," said Vance, regarding Markham affectionately. Then he looked away. "I hope there's a good reason. I'm not sure—really. But it's our only chance, and we must take it. There's a fiend at large."

Markham took a slow, deep breath.

"I think I know how you feel. Anyway, I'm here. Shouldn't we be starting?"

Vance hesitated.

"Suppose there's danger?"

"Never mind that." Markham spoke gruffly. "As I said, I'm here. Let's carry on."

"There's one thing I must warn you and Van against," Vance said. "Don't drink anything at the Casino—under any conditions."

We went down to the car, and fifteen minutes later we had turned into West 73rd Street and were headed toward Riverside Drive. Vance drew up directly in front of the Casino entrance, and we got out of the car and went up the stone steps leading to the glass-enclosed vestibule. Vance looked at his watch.

"Exactly one minute after two," he remarked. "In the circumstances, that might be called punctuality."

He pressed the small ivory bell-button at the side of the bronze door, and, taking out his cigarette-case, selected a *Régie* with great care and lighted it. In a few moments we could hear the lock being turned. Then the door swung inward, and we stepped into the semi-darkness of the reception hall.

I was a little surprised to see that it was Lynn Llewellyn who opened the door for us.

"My uncle was hoping you might come," he said after greeting us pleasantly. "He expects to be rather busy, and asked me to come over to help him. He's waiting in his office. Will you be so good as to come up?"

Vance murmured his thanks, and Llewellyn led the way toward the rear of the reception hall and up the wide stairway. He walked through the upper hallway into the Gold Room and, after knocking gently on Kinkaid's office door, he opened it and bowed us in.

I had barely become aware of the fact that Kinkaid was not in the office when the door slammed shut and the key was turned in the lock. I turned round apprehensively, and there, just inside the door, stood Llewellyn, slightly crouched, with a blue-steel revolver in his hand. He was moving the muzzle threateningly back and forth, keeping all three of us covered. A vicious change seemed to have come over the man. His eyes, half-closed but sinister and keen as daggers, sent a chill through me. His lips were contorted in a cruel smile. And there was a tense sureness in the poised swaying of his body, from which emanated the menace of some deadly power.

"Thank you for coming," he said in a low, steady voice, the sneer still on his lips. "And now, you dicks sit down in those three chairs against the wall. Before I send you all to hell I've got something to say to you. . . . And keep your hands in front of you."

Vance looked at the man curiously and then let his eyes rest on the revolver in his hand.

"There's nothing else to do, Markham," he said. "Mr. Llewellyn seems to be master of ceremonies here."

Vance was standing between Markham and me, and he resignedly seated himself in the middle chair. The three chairs had been placed in a row against the panels at one end of the office in obvious anticipation of our arrival. Markham and I sat down on either side of Vance and, following his example, placed our hands on the flat arms of the chairs. Llewellyn moved forward cautiously, like a cat, and stood about four feet in front of us.

"I'm sorry, Markham, for having got you into this," Vance murmured despondently. "And you, too, Van. But it's too late now for regrets."

"Spit out that cigarette," Llewellyn ordered, his eyes on Vance.

Vance obeyed, and Llewellyn crushed it out with his foot, without even glancing at the floor. "And don't make the slightest move," he went on. "I'd hate to have to drill you through before I tell you a few things."

"And we'd like to hear them, don't y' know," Vance said in a curiously suppressed voice. "I thought that I'd seen through all your system playing; but you're cleverer than I suspected."

Llewellyn chuckled softly.

"You didn't think far enough. You thought my capital was exhausted—that I'd have to give up, a loser. But I still have six chips to play—these little steel chips here." He patted the cylinder of the revolver lovingly with his left hand. "And I'm placing two of them on each one of you. Does that play win?"

Vance nodded.

"Yes. It might. But at least you had to give up your subtleties in the end, and resort to direct methods. It wasn't, after all, the perfect crime. Only by turning gunman can you cover the bets you lost. Not an entirely satisfactory finale. A bit humiliatin', in fact, to one who regards himself as diabolically clever."

There was a devastating contempt in Vance's voice.

"You see, Markham," he added in an aside, "this is the gentleman who murdered his wife. But he wasn't quite clever enough to achieve his ultimate goal. His beautifully worked-out system went wrong somewhere."

"Oh, no," Llewellyn interjected. "It didn't go wrong. I merely have to carry the play a little further—one more turn of the wheel."

"One more turn." Vance smiled dryly. "Yes—quite. You will have to add three more murders to your scheme in order to cover the first."

"I won't mind that," said Llewellyn, with a vicious snarl. "In fact, it'll be a pleasure."

He stood, poised and alert, without the slightest trace of nervousness. The revolver in his hand was steady, and his gaze was cold and unfaltering. I watched him, fascinated. Everything about him seemed to personify swift and ineluctable death. The man possessed a power which seemed doubly terrible because of the soft, almost effeminate, contour of his features. There was an abnormal quality in him far more terrifying and sinister than the known and understandable terrors of life. He kept his eyes fixed on Vance; and after a moment he asked:

"Just how much do you know? I'll fill in the gaps for you. It will take less time that way."

"Yes, you would have to gratify your vanity," returned Vance. "I'd counted on that. A weakling at heart."

Llewellyn's lips twisted into a grim, evil smile.

"Do you think for one moment I haven't the nerve to shoot the three of you?" He tried to laugh, but only a harsh guttural sound issued from his throat.

"Oh, no. No." Vance spoke despondently. "I'm thoroughly convinced you intend to kill us. But that act will merely prove the desperation of your weakness. So simple to shoot people. The most illiterate and cowardly gangster is thoroughly proficient in that respect. It takes courage and intelligence to achieve one's end without the violence of direct physical action and, at the same time, to escape detection."

"I've outwitted all of you," Llewellyn boasted, in a hard, rasping tone. "And this little climax here is subtler than you think. I've a perfect alibi for this afternoon. If it interests you, I'm now driving through Westchester with my mother."

"Yes. Of course. I suspected something of the kind. Your mother was not at home when I went there this morning—"

"You were at the house this morning?"

"Yes. Dropped in for a moment. . . . Your mother would perjure herself for you, unfortunately. She has suspected you were guilty from the first, and has done everything she could to cover you and throw suspicion elsewhere. And your sister, too, had an inkling of the truth."

"That may, or may not, be," the man snarled. "Anyway, suspicions can't hurt anybody. It's proof that counts—and no one could prove anything."

Vance nodded.

"Yes. There's something in that. . . . By the by, you went to Atlantic City last night, didn't you?"

"Naturally. But no one knows I was there. I merely went to telephone on behalf of my dear uncle. That was simple enough; and it worked rather well, didn't it?"

"Yes. Apparently. Here we are, if that's what you mean. Lucky for your plan Mr. Markham's secret'ry doesn't know either your voice or Kinkaid's."

"That's why I was careful to phone before the eminent District Attorney had arrived at his office." He spoke with infinite sarcasm, and grinned exultantly.

Vance nodded slightly, his eyes still focused intently on the vicious-looking revolver now pointed straight at him.

"It's plain that you understood all I said to you at your home yesterday evening."

"That was easy," said Llewellyn. "I knew, when you were pretending to address your remarks to Bloodgood, that you were really talking to me, trying to tell me how much you knew. And you thought I'd be making some move soon to checkmate your knowledge, didn't you?" A sneer came and went on his lips. "Well, I did make a move, didn't I? I got you here—and I'm going to shoot you all. But that wasn't just the move you expected."

"No." Vance sighed unhappily. "I can't say that it was. The phone call and the appointment puzzled me considerably. I couldn't see why Kinkaid should have taken alarm. . . . But tell me, Llewellyn: how do you know this little party of yours is going to be a success? Some one in the building may hear the shots—"

"No!" Llewellyn, his deadly vigil unrelaxed, smiled with shrewd self-satisfaction. "The Casino is closed indefinitely, and there's no one here. Kinkaid and Bloodgood are both away. I took a key to the place from Kinkaid's quarters at home weeks ago, thinking I might need it if he tried to hold up my winnings some time." Again he made a rasping noise in his throat. "We're entirely alone here, Vance, with no danger of interruption. The party will be a success—for me."

"I see you've thought things out pretty thoroughly," murmured Vance in a discouraged tone. "You seem to be in complete control of the situation. What are you waiting for?"

Llewellyn chuckled.

"I'm enjoying myself. And I'm interested in knowing just how much of my scheme you were able to figure out."

"It hurts you, doesn't it," returned Vance, "to think that any one should have seen through your plot?"

"No," snarled Llewellyn. "I'm just interested. I know you saw through some of it, and I'll tell you the rest before I put you away."

"That, of course, will come under the head of boasting," said Vance quietly. "It'll help build up your ego—"

"Never mind that!" Llewellyn's calm, cold tone was more terrifying than violent anger. "Tell your story—I want to hear it. And you'll tell it, too. As long as you can talk you're not dead—and every one likes to hang on to life, if only for a few more minutes. . . . And keep your hands on the arms of your chair—all three of you—or I'll shoot you to hell in a split second."



## 16. THE FINAL TRAGEDY

(Tuesday, October 18; 2:15 p.m.)

Vance looked at Llewellyn with critical tranquillity for several moments. Finally he spoke.

"Yes, you're quite right. As long as I continue to talk you'll let me live—since you feel I can feed your vanity. . . ."

"Vance!" Markham spoke for the first time since we had entered the Casino. "Why pander to this murderer? He's made up his mind, and there's apparently nothing to be done." His tone was husky and strained, but it held an undercurrent of courage and resignation which increased my admiration for him.

"You may be right, Markham," said Vance, his eyes gazing steadily at Llewellyn. "But there can be no harm in talking to our executioner before he pulls the trigger."

"Come on! Talk." Llewellyn spoke with exaggerated calm. "Or shall I tell the story myself?"

"No, that's not necessary—except for a few details here and there. . . . As I see it: you decided to get rid of your wife and to put the onus of the deed on your uncle. Your wife was an encumbrance: both you and your mother disliked her—and you'd feel a little surer of a full inheritance if your wife was out of the way. As for Kinkaid, you never liked him, anyway; and, by eliminating him as a possible inheritor, you would be eliminating him also as another source of irritation. You resent him passionately because of his superiority to you and his open contempt for you. Quite the usual attitude of inferior johnnies of your type. So you set to work, with your vain, egotistic mind, to outline for yourself the perfect crime which would do away with all the factors that stood in the way of your free functioning. And you planned your coup, as you thought, so that, whatever might happen, suspicion would point away from yourself. . . . Clever idea. But you didn't have the intelligence to perfect the plan."

Vance paused, his contemptuous eyes holding the menacing gaze of Llewellyn. Then he went on:

"You conceived the idea of poison as the criminal agent because it was indirect and underhand and therefore obviated the need of courageous enterprise. That is your nature, of course. You knew your wife was using an eye-wash every night. And you'd read in your father's books on toxicology—which you probably consulted expressly for your purpose—that it was possible to effect death through the absorption of belladonna into the mucous membranes of the eyes and nose. It was a simple enough matter for you to dissolve a quantity of belladonna or atropin tablets in the eye-wash. But you weren't sufficiently versed in modern toxicological methods—perhaps the fact that your father's books are not quite up-to-date was responsible for your ignorance—to know that today the stomach is not the only organ given to the analyst for examination. There used to be a mistaken idea that only an analysis of the stomach was necessary to prove or disprove a supposed poisoning; but in later books of research that point is gone into more thoroughly. You should have read Webster, or Ross, or Withaus and Becker, or Autenrieth. However, you did give us considerable trouble until my attention was attracted by the bottle of eye-wash in your bathroom medicine chest—"

"What's that?" Llewellyn's eyes opened a little wider, but their relentless vigilance did not relax. "You asked me about that medicine cabinet once."

"Oh, yes. At that time, though, I was merely gropin'. After you had taken the bottle of eye-wash and emptied it, Sunday morning, when you returned from the hospital, you put it back sideways, so that the label was not visible. I noted that something was wrong—though I didn't know just what. That's why we gave every one in your home perfect freedom of action all day Sunday. . . . By the by, you went to the pharmacist's Sunday—didn't you?—and had the eye-wash bottle refilled with its original harmless solution, fearing an empty bottle might attract attention."

"I'll say yes. Go on."

"Thanks awfully for putting that bottle back with the label to the front. That gave me the clue—and the toxicologist's chemical analysis verified my theory. I knew then that your wife had died from the absorption of belladonna through the eyes and that some one in the house had been manipulating the eye-wash bottle to cover his tracks."

"All right, that's one step. And I suppose you think Amelia and I were poisoned with belladonna, too."

"No. Oh, no. Not belladonna. Even I know more about toxicology than to think that. You poisoned yourself with nitroglycerin."

Llewellyn's head jerked back a little.

"How did you know that?" he asked, scarcely moving his lips.

"Simple deduction," Vance told him. "Doctor Kane told me you had a bad heart and that he had prescribed nitroglycerin tablets for you. You probably took one too many at some time, and it made you a little groggy. So you looked up the action of nitroglycerin and found that an overdose would knock you out without doing you any lasting harm. So, after setting the stage at home, you fed yourself a good dose of the tablets and passed temporarily out of the picture, in full view of an audience. No way of ascertaining what the poison was, of course. Merely symptoms of collapse. I figured that was what you'd done the moment Kane told me of the nitroglycerin tablets."

"And Amelia?"

"The same thing. Only she was another unlooked-for development. You didn't intend the poison for her, don't y' know. You had planned that your mother should take the water from the carafe in which you had dissolved the nitroglycerin. But your sister upset your plans."

"You think I wanted to poison my mother?"

"Oh, no," said Vance. "Quite the contrary. You wanted her to appear as one of the victims of the plot—like yourself—so that she would be eliminated as a possible suspect."

"Yes!" A curious light shone in Llewellyn's eyes. "My mother had to be protected. I had to think of her as well as of myself. Too many people knew she didn't like my wife; and she is a hard, aggressive woman in many ways. She might have been suspected."

"That seems rather obvious," Vance returned. "And when you learned that your sister had taken the nitroglycerin, you tried another

way to eliminate your mother from being suspected. When you heard us on the stairs Sunday morning, you enacted a touchin' Œdipus scene for our benefit, pretending you thought your mother might be guilty. A double subtlety. It tended further to eliminate you, and gave your mother the opportunity to convince us she was innocent. A bit cowardly, since it might actually have involved her. But effective—in a dramatic sense, of course. . . . Is there anything else you care to know regarding my conclusions?"

Llewellyn glowered maliciously for a moment; then he gave a barely perceptible nod.

"What did you think about the rhinitis tablets and the suicide note?"

"Just what you wanted me to think about them," Vance said. "They constituted one of the basic outlines of your plot. I'll admit it was well done. But I went a little farther than you intended me to go. You wanted me to accept Kinkaid as the reality; but I recognized him as your dummy victim."

Llewellyn frowned and his eyes narrowed dangerously. There was a colossal hatred in his expression. Then he grinned cunningly.

"So you saw through the suicide theory at once, did you?" he said. "Yes, that was what I intended. And was Kinkaid suggested to you immediately?"

"More or less," Vance admitted. "A bit too obvious, though."

"And the heavy water?"

"Oh, yes. That naturally followed, once I'd done a bit of figuring. As you intended. Your whole scheme was rather transparent as soon as one or two of the main factors had resolved themselves. The structure was well thought out, but some of the details were unconvincing. Lack of knowledge and research on your part, don't y' know. Quite childish, when added up. From the first I had you in mind as a possibility. . . ."

"You're lying," Llewellyn snarled. "Let's hear your reasoning."

Vance took a deep breath and shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"As you say, while I continue talking I remain this side of eternity. Ah, well, a few more moments. . . . In the circumstances I'm deuced grateful for the smallest favors. And I couldn't bear to depart this life leavin' you in a state of mental suspense."

His voice had become as cold and steady as Llewellyn's.

"Your letter to me, begging for my presence at the Casino Saturday night, was your first miscalculation. It was clever, however; but it was not quite clever enough. Obviously insincere—as was intended; but it said too much, revealin' more or less the character of the writer. A shrewd, tricky and effeminate brain conceived it, thereby indicatin' the type of person to look for. And really, y' know, it wasn't necessary to have me witness your collapse at the Casino: any one could have given me the details. But we'll let that pass. . . . You typed that letter, as well as the suicide note, rather badly, so as to indicate some one unfamiliar with the machine—to wit: Kinkaid. You then posted the letter in Closter, to focus attention on your uncle's hunting lodge near-by. But that, too, was overdoing it; for if Kinkaid had actually sent the letter, he would have posted it anywhere but in Closter. It's a minor point, however, and one that I don't hold against you, for other things were to transpire which would more than have counteracted so trivial an error. . . . The contents of the rhinitis bottle were emptied to lend a sort of left-handed substantiation of Kinkaid's guilt. You knew, of course, no belladonna would be found in the stomach, and the fact would naturally point to a spurious suicide. Your manipulation of the water carafes was intended to give the impression that it was through the medium of water that the poisons had been administered. That, of course, was the second sign-post—the Closter postmark being the first—that led to the heavy-water motif. Once the suicide theory had been exploded and the fact that Kinkaid was manufacturing heavy water was discovered, suspicion against him would have been pretty strong. And you and your mother would have been automatically eliminated—provided she had taken the nitroglycerin you prepared for her. . . . Am I correct in my reasoning thus far?"

"Yes," Llewellyn admitted grudgingly. "Go ahead."

"No one, of course," continued Vance, "knows what effect heavy water would have on human beings, if taken internally in large quantities, for there hasn't been enough of it available to make experiments along those lines, even if it were feasible to do so. But there has been considerable speculation as to the possible toxic effects of heavy water; and, while it could not have been proved scientifically that heavy water had been given you and your wife and your mother—had she drunk the water instead of your sister—there would have been a very powerful presumption of Kinkaid's guilt. And this presumption, taken with the other evidence you had fabricated, would have placed him in a predicament from which extrication would have been practically impossible. You knew, of course, that the nature of the poison supposed to have been given to you and your mother could not be determined because you would both have escaped its fatal effects. So your dear Uncle Richard was in for it. . . . By the by, how did you find out about Kinkaid's private enterprise at the hunting lodge?"

Llewellyn's eyes gleamed shrewdly.

"There's a fireplace running up from my room to his, and I have often been able to hear him and Bloodgood talking up there."

"Ah!" Vance smiled disgustedly. "So you've added eavesdropping to your other accomplishments! You're not an admirable character, Llewellyn."

"At least I achieve my ends," the man retorted, without the slightest show of shame.

"It appears that way. Perhaps I'm too critical. But there's one thing I'll admit I don't understand. Maybe you'll be so good as to enlighten me. Why didn't you simply poison both your wife and Kinkaid and save yourself the trouble of all these elaborate subtleties?"

Llewellyn made a condescending grimace.

"That would not have been so easy to work out,—Kinkaid's always on his guard. Moreover, his death in addition to my wife's would have tended to cast suspicion on me. Why take the chance? Anyway, I'd rather sit around and watch him sweat. Ruin him first—and then send him to the chair." A malicious fanaticism shone in his eyes.

"Yes," nodded Vance. "I see your point. Playin' safe and gettin' more satisfactory results. Very cleverly and subtly conceived. But we might not have run upon the heavy-water idea, y' know."

"If you hadn't, I'd have helped you out. But I counted on you. That's why I sent you the letter. I knew the police would miss the heavy water; but I've always admired the way your mind works in your investigations. You and I really have many qualities in

common."

"I'm abominably flattered," murmured Vance. "And you did point up the water motif rather well, don't y' know. But Kinkaid and Bloodgood certainly played into your hands in the first act of your thrillin' drama here at the Casino."

Llewellyn chuckled.

"Didn't they? That was a stroke of luck. But it wouldn't have mattered. I'd already ordered plain water so you could hear me. And I was going to raise hell about the charged water if Bloodgood hadn't suddenly gone Chesterfieldian. You remember, too, that I waited until Kinkaid was standing near the table before ordering my second drink."

"Yes, I noticed that. Very clever. You played your cards well. Too bad you didn't read up on toxicology a little more."

"That doesn't matter now." Llewellyn snorted deprecatingly. "It's worked out better this way. Kinkaid will have three corpses right here in his office to explain away. He won't have a chance in the world, for even if he can prove an alibi he can't prove he didn't hire one of his henchmen to shoot you. And that's better than having him arrested on suspicion and tried on the circumstantial evidence of one poisoning on Park Avenue."

"So we, too, played into your hands," remarked Vance despondently.

"You did—beautifully." Llewellyn leered at Vance in triumph. "The cards are running for me these days. But luck and intelligence always go together."

"Oh, quite. . . . And when you have shot us you will join mother in the country to establish an unassailable alibi. Mr. Markham's secret'ry will testify that Kinkaid made an appointment with us here at two. You'll be able to give testimony about my talk with Bloodgood last night, and Kane will substantiate it. You'll also tell all you know of the heavy water, and Arnheim will have to admit I was at the hunting lodge. Our bodies will be found here; and since everything will point directly to Kinkaid, he'll be arrested and sent up." Vance nodded admiringly. "Yes. As you say. He hasn't a chance—whether it's eventually proved he did it himself or hired some one to do it for him. In any case, he's ruined. . . . Very pretty. I can't see a flaw in the reasoning."

"No." Llewellyn smiled. "I rather fancy it myself."

Markham was glaring at the man.

"You unspeakable fiend!" he blurted.

"Words, Mr. District Attorney—only words," the other returned in a tone of terrifying softness.

"Yes, Markham," said Vance. "Such epithets merely flatter the gentleman."

Llewellyn's lip curled hideously.

"Was there anything else you were in the dark about, Vance? I'd be glad to explain it."

"No." Vance shook his head. "I think the ground is pretty well ploughed up."

Llewellyn grinned with triumphant self-satisfaction.

"Well, I did it; and I got away with it. I planned everything from the start to the finish. I carried murder a little farther than it's ever been carried before. I supplied you with four suspects and kept well in the background myself. It didn't matter to me where you stopped. The farther you went, the farther you got from the truth. . . ."

"You forget we found you at last," Vance put in casually.

"But that's my greatest triumph," Llewellyn boasted. "I failed in a minor detail or two on my knowledge of poisons, and gave you a clue. But I met your suspicions with even a cleverer coup. I turned what you considered my defeat into one great culminating triumph." There was a maniacal gleam of egoism in his steady eyes. "And now we'll close the book!"

The muscles of his face relaxed into a cold, deadly mask. There was an almost hypnotic glint in his pale blue eyes. He took a short step nearer to us, and with marked deliberation aimed with his revolver. The muzzle pointed directly at the pit of Vance's stomach. . . .

In any great final moment of this kind, in which all the life one has known is on the point of being wiped out, and when the thing called consciousness—to which we all cling with our innermost instincts—is about to be obliterated, it is curious how our minds receive and register the homely common sounds of the world about us—sounds that go unheeded in the ordinary course of events. As I sat there, in that terrible moment, I was aware that somewhere in the distance a woman's shrill voice was calling: I could hear the sound of a steam whistle on some boat in the Hudson: I was aware that, outside in the street, the brakes of an automobile had been violently thrown on: I was conscious of the low rumble of the traffic on the near-by avenue. . . .

Vance drew himself up a little in his chair and leaned forward. His eyes were narrowed and grim, but there was a contemptuous sneer on his lips. For a moment I thought he was preparing to leap up and grapple with Llewellyn. But if such had been his intention, he was too late. At that moment Llewellyn, his revolver still pointed steadily at Vance's stomach, pulled the trigger twice in rapid succession. There were two deafening detonations in the small office; and, accompanying them, two tongues of fire flashed from the muzzle of Llewellyn's revolver. A wave of horror passed over me and paralyzed every muscle in my body. . . .

Vance's eyes closed slowly. One hand went to his mouth. He coughed chokingly. His hand fell to his lap. He seemed to go limp, and his head drooped. Then he pitched slowly forward on his face and lay in a distorted heap at Llewellyn's feet. My eyes, which felt as if they were bulging from their sockets, were focused on Vance in wild helpless horror.

Llewellyn glanced down at him quickly, without change of expression. He stepped a little to one side, at the same time taking precise aim at Markham, who sat as if petrified.

"Stand up!" Llewellyn ordered.

Markham took a deep audible breath and rose vigorously to his feet. His shoulders were squared defiantly, and not for a moment did his steady, aggressive gaze falter.

"You're only a policeman at heart," Llewellyn said. "I think I'll shoot you in the back. Turn around."

Markham did not move.

"Not for you, Llewellyn," he returned calmly. "I'll take anything you've got to give me facing you."

As he spoke I heard a curious unfamiliar sliding noise at the other end of the little office, and I instinctively glanced in that direction. A startling sight met my eyes. One of the wide wooden panels in the opposite wall had apparently disappeared and in the opening stood Kinkaid, a large blue automatic in his hand. He was leaning slightly forward; and he held the gun at his hip pointed directly at

Llewellyn.

Llewellyn also had heard the noise, for he turned partly and glanced suspiciously over his shoulder. Then there were two resounding explosions. But this time they came from Kinkaid's gun. Llewellyn stopped short in mid-movement. His eyes opened in glazed astonishment, and the revolver he held fell from his fingers. He stood as if frozen for perhaps two full seconds. Then all his muscles seemed to go limp: his head drooped, and he crumpled to the floor. Realizing what had happened, both Markham and I were too stunned to move or speak.

In the brief, terrible silence that followed, a startling and extraordinary thing happened. For a moment I felt as though I were witnessing some strange and uncanny bit of magic: a fantastic miracle seemed to be taking place. My fascinated gaze had followed Llewellyn's collapse, and my eyes had shifted to the still form of Vance. And then Vance moved and rose leisurely to his feet. Removing the handkerchief from his breast pocket, he began dusting himself.

"Thanks awfully, Kinkaid," he drawled. "You've saved us a beastly lot of trouble. I heard your car drive up and tried to hold the johnnie off till you got upstairs. I was hopin' you'd hear the shots and would take a pop at him yourself. That's why I let him think he had killed me."

Kinkaid narrowed his eyes angrily. Then his expression changed, and he laughed gruffly.

"You wanted me to shoot him, did you? That's all right with me. Glad of the opportunity. . . . Sorry I didn't get here sooner. But the train was a little late, and my taxi was held up in traffic."

"Pray don't apologize," said Vance. "You arrived at exactly the right moment." He knelt down beside Llewellyn and ran his hand over the body. "He's quite dead. You got him through the heart. You're an excellent shot, Kinkaid."

"I always was," the other returned dryly.

Markham was still standing like a man in a daze. His face was pale, and there were large globules of perspiration on his forehead. He managed now to speak.

"You're—you're sure you're all right, Vance?"

"Oh, quite." Vance smiled. "Never better. I'll have to die some time, alas! But, really, I wouldn't let a pathological degenerate like Llewellyn choose the time for my demise." His eyes turned to Markham contritely. "I'm deuced sorry to have caused you and Van all this agitation. But I had to get Llewellyn's confession on the records. We didn't have any overwhelming evidence against him, don't y' know."

"But—but—" Markham stammered, still apparently unable to accept the astonishing situation.

"Oh, Llewellyn's revolver had nothing but blank cartridges in it," Vance explained. "I saw to that this morning when I visited the Llewellyn domicile."

"You knew what he was going to do?" Markham looked at Vance incredulously and rubbed his handkerchief vigorously over his face.

"I suspected it," said Vance, lighting a cigarette.

Markham sank back into his chair, like an exhausted man.

"I'll get some brandy," Kinkaid announced. "We can all stand a drink." And he went out through the door which led to the bar.

Markham's eyes were still on Vance, but they had lost their startled look.

"What did you mean just now," he asked, "when you said you had to get Llewellyn's confession on the records?"

"Just that," Vance returned. "And that reminds me. I'd better disconnect the dictaphone now."

He went to a small picture hanging over Kinkaid's desk and took it down, revealing a small metal disk.

"That's all, boys," he said, apparently addressing the wall. Then he severed the two wires attached to the disk.

"You see, Markham," he elucidated, "when you told me this morning of the supposed telephone call from Kinkaid I couldn't understand it. But it soon came to me that it was not Kinkaid at all who had phoned, but Llewellyn. It was from Llewellyn that I was expecting some move, after the remarks I had poured indirectly into his ear last night. I'll admit I wasn't expecting anything quite as forthright and final as this little act: that's why I was puzzled at first. But once the idea dawned on me, I could see that it was both a logical and subtle move. Premise: you and I were in the way. Conclusion: you and I would have to be put out of the way. And, inasmuch as we were being lured to the Casino, it was not particularly difficult to follow Llewellyn's syllogism. I was pretty sure he had actually gone to Atlantic City to make the telephone call—it's difficult, don't y' know, to simulate a long-distance call from a local station. Therefore, I knew I had several hours in which to make arrangements. I called Kinkaid at Atlantic City at once, told him all the circumstances, and asked him to come immediately to New York. I also found out from him how I could get into the Casino to install a dictaphone. That's why I called on the doughty Sergeant. He and some of the boys from the Homicide Bureau and a stenographer are in an apartment of the house next door, and have taken down everything that has been said here this afternoon."

He sat down in a chair facing Markham and drew deeply on his cigarette.

"I'll admit," he went on, "that I wasn't quite sure what method Llewellyn would use to put us out of his way and throw suspicion on his loving uncle. So I warned you and Van not to drink anything,—there was, of course, the possibility that he would use poison again. But I thought that he *might* use his revolver; and so I purchased a box of blanks, went to his home this morning on a perfectly silly pretext, and when I was alone in his bedroom I substituted the blanks for the cartridges in his revolver. There was the chance that he would have noticed this substitution if he examined the gun from the front; but I saw that the blanks were in place before I took my seat beside you a while ago. Otherwise I would have practised a bit of jiu-jitsu on the johnnie immediately. . . ."

Kinkaid reentered the office with a bottle of brandy and four glasses. Setting the tray on his desk, he filled the glasses and waved his hand toward them, inviting us to help ourselves.

"Shall I, Vance?" Markham asked, with a grim smile. "You told us not to drink anything here."

"It's quite all right now." Vance sipped his *Courvoisier*. "From the very first I have regarded Mr. Kinkaid as our most valuable ally."

"The hell you say!" Kinkaid grumbled good-naturedly. "After all you put me through!"

At this moment there came to us the sound of a slamming door, followed by heavy, hurrying footsteps on the stairs. Kinkaid stepped to the office door leading into the Gold Room, and opened it. On the threshold stood Heath, a Colt revolver in his hand. Behind him,

crowding forward, were Snitkin, Hennessey and Burke. Heath's eyes, fixed on Vance, were wide in childlike amazement.

"You're not dead!" he almost shouted.

"Far from it, Sergeant," Vance returned. "But please put away that gun. Let's not have any more shootin' today."

Heath's hand dropped to his side, but his astonished eyes did not leave Vance's face.

"I know, Mr. Vance," he said, "you told me that I wasn't to get upset at anything I heard over the dictaphone, and to stay on the job till you gave me the sign-off. But when I heard what that baby said, and then the shots and you falling, I beat it right over."

"It was sweet of you," returned Vance. "But unnecessary." He waved his hand toward the limp figure of Lynn Llewellyn. "There's the chappie. No trouble. Shot through the heart. Quite dead. You'll have to get him to the morgue, of course. But that'll be that. Everything worked out beautifully. No pother. No trial. No jury. Justice triumphant nevertheless. Life goes on. But why?"

I doubt if Heath heard anything Vance said. He continued to stare open-mouthed.

"You're sure—you're not hurt?" The words seemed to come from his lips in an automatic expression of his apprehension.

Vance set down his cognac glass and, going to Heath, put his hand affectionately on the other's shoulder.

"Quite sure," he said softly. Then he wagged his head in mock commiseration. "Frightfully sorry to disappoint you, Sergeant."

\* \* \* \* \*

The murder of Virginia Llewellyn, as you perhaps remember, occupied the front pages of the country's press for several days, but it soon gave way to other scandals. Most of the major facts of the case became public property. But not all of them. Kinkaid was, of course, exonerated for the shooting of Lynn Llewellyn: Markham saw to it that the affair was not even brought before the Grand Jury.

The Casino was permanently closed within a year, and the beautiful old gray-stone house was torn down to make way for the construction of a modern skyscraper. By that time Kinkaid had amassed a small fortune; and the manufacture of heavy water has occupied him ever since.

Mrs. Llewellyn recovered from the shock of her son's death in far shorter time than I had thought possible. She threw herself more energetically than ever into social-welfare work, and I see her name frequently in the papers in connection with her philanthropic activities. Bloodgood and Amelia Llewellyn were married the week after Kinkaid had closed the doors of the Casino for all time, and they are now living in Paris. (Mrs. Bloodgood, incidentally, has given up her artistic career.) I met Doctor Kane on Park Avenue recently. He had an air of great importance, and informed me he was rushing to his office to give a woman patient a diathermic treatment.

THE END

## Footnotes

[1] The records of the Joint Expedition to Mesopotamia, undertaken by the University of Pennsylvania and the British Museum, under the directorship of Doctor C. Leonard Woolley, had recently appeared.

[2] Vance owned some exceptionally fine pointers and setters which had made many notable wins for him in the various trials in the East. They had been trained by one of the country's leading experts, and returned to Vance perfectly broken to field work. Vance took great pleasure in handling the dogs himself.

[3] It is interesting to note that this same method of selecting and training dealers has been followed at Agua Caliente.

[4] Kinkaid even employed the European roulette wheels with only the single "0".

[5] I imagine Kinkaid got his idea for these enormous attendants from the impressive giants in the entrance-hall of the Savoy dining-room in London.

[6] Snitkin and Hennessey were two of the members of the Homicide Bureau who had participated in several of Vance's famous criminal cases.

[7] Sergeant Ernest Heath, of the Homicide Bureau, had been officially in charge of all the cases which Vance had investigated.

[8] The same room, it flashed through my mind, in which the momentous and dramatic poker game was played in the "Canary" murder case.

[9] Doctor Emanuel Doremus, the Chief Medical Examiner of New York.

[10] Swacker was Markham's secretary.

[11] This was the same restaurant to which Vance took us during the investigation of the Kennel murder case, and where he bored Markham almost to the point of distraction with a long dissertation on Scottish terrier characteristics, blood-lines and pedigrees.

[12] Doctor Hildebrandt, in answering Vance's question, mentioned specifically several poisons which leave no trace in the human body, but I am purposely not recording them here. Modern medical scientists and toxicologists will know those referred to; and I deem it both unnecessary and unwise to make such dangerous knowledge public property.

[13] As I write this record of the Casino murder case, I note, in a dispatch to *The New York Times*, that the Imperial Chemical Industries, an important British organization, have begun the commercial production of heavy water and hope in time to be able to supply it to chemists, physicists and physicians the world over, at about fifty dollars a teaspoonful.

## 09. GARDEN

### 1. THE TROJAN HORSES

(Friday, April 13; 10 p.m.)

There were two reasons why the terrible and, in many ways, incredible Garden murder case—which took place in the early spring following the spectacular Casino murder case[1]—was so designated. In the first place, the scene of this tragedy was the penthouse home of Professor Ephraim Garden, the great experimental chemist of Stuyvesant University; and secondly, the exact *situs criminis* was the beautiful private roof-garden over the apartment itself.

It was both a peculiar and implausible affair, and one so cleverly planned that only by the merest accident—or, perhaps I should say a fortuitous intervention—was it discovered at all. Despite the fact that the circumstances preceding the crime were entirely in Philo Vance's favor, I cannot help regarding it as one of his greatest triumphs in criminal investigation and deduction; for it was his quick uncanny judgments, his ability to read human nature, and his tremendous flair for the significant undercurrents of the so-called trivia of life, that led him to the truth.

The Garden murder case involved a curious and anomalous mixture of passion, avarice, ambition and horse-racing. There was an admixture of hate, also; but this potent and blinding element was, I imagine, an understandable outgrowth of the other factors. However, the case was amazing in its subtleties, its daring, its thought-out mechanism, and its sheer psychological excitation.

The beginning of the case came on the night of April 13. It was one of those mild evenings that we often experience in early spring following a spell of harsh dampness, when all the remaining traces of winter finally capitulate to the inevitable seasonal changes. There was a mellow softness in the air, a sudden perfume from the burgeoning life of nature—the kind of atmosphere that makes one lackadaisical and wistful, and, at the same time, stimulates one's imagination.

I mention this seemingly irrelevant fact because I have good reason to believe these meteorological conditions had much to do with the startling events that were imminent that night and which were to break forth, in all their horror, before another twenty-four hours had passed.

And I believe that the season, with all its subtle innuendoes, was the real explanation of the change that came over Vance himself during his investigation of the crime. Up to that time I had never considered Vance a man of any deep personal emotion, except in so far as children and animals and his intimate masculine friendships were concerned. He had always impressed me as a man so highly mentalized, so cynical and impersonal in his attitude toward life, that an irrational human weakness like romance would be alien to his nature. But in the course of his deft inquiry into the murders in Professor Garden's penthouse, I saw, for the first time, another and softer side of his character. Vance was never a happy man in the conventional sense; but after the Garden murder case there were evidences of an even deeper loneliness in his sensitive nature.

But these sentimental side-lights perhaps do not matter in the reportorial account of the astonishing history I am here setting down, and I doubt if they should have been mentioned at all but for the fact that they gave an added inspiration and impetus to the energy Vance exerted and the risks he ran in bringing the murderer to justice.

As I have said, the case opened—so far as Vance was concerned with it—on the night of April 13. John F.-X. Markham, then District Attorney of New York County, had dined with Vance at his apartment in East 38th Street. The dinner had been excellent—as all of Vance's dinners were—and at ten o'clock the three of us were sitting in the comfortable library, sipping *Napoléon* 1809—that famous and exquisite cognac brandy of the First Empire.[2]

Vance and Markham had been discussing crime waves in a desultory manner. There had been a mild disagreement, Vance discounting the theory that crime waves are calculable, and holding that crime is entirely personal and therefore incompatible with generalizations or laws. The conversation had then drifted round to the bored young people of post-war decadence who had, for the sheer excitement of it, organized crime clubs whose members tried their hand at murders wherein nothing was to be gained materially. The Loeb-Leopold case naturally was mentioned, and also a more recent and equally vicious case that had just come to light in one of the leading western cities.

It was in the midst of this discussion that Currie, Vance's old English butler and major-domo, appeared at the library door. I noticed that he seemed nervous and ill at ease as he waited for Vance to finish speaking; and I think Vance, too, sensed something unusual in the man's attitude, for he stopped speaking rather abruptly and turned.

"What is it, Currie? Have you seen a ghost, or are there burglars in the house?"

"I have just had a telephone call, sir," the old man answered, endeavoring to restrain the excitement in his voice.

"Not bad news from abroad?" Vance asked sympathetically.

"Oh, no, sir; it wasn't anything for me. There was a gentleman on the phone—"

Vance lifted his eyebrows and smiled faintly. "A gentleman, Currie?"

"He spoke like a gentleman, sir. He was certainly no ordinary person. He had a cultured voice, sir, and—"

"Since your instinct has gone so far," Vance interrupted, "perhaps you can tell me the gentleman's age?"

"I should say he was middle-aged, or perhaps a little beyond," Currie ventured. "His voice sounded mature and dignified and judicial."

"Excellent!" Vance crushed out his cigarette. "And what was the object of this dignified, middle-aged gentleman's call? Did he ask to speak to me or give you his name?"

A worried look came into Currie's eyes as he shook head.

"No, sir. That's the strange part of it. He said he did not wish to speak to you personally, and he would not tell me his name. But he asked me to give you a message. He was very precise about it and made me write it down word for word and then repeat it. And the moment I had done so he hung up the receiver." Currie stepped forward. "Here's the message, sir." And he held out one of the small memorandum sheets Vance always kept at his telephone.

Vance took it and nodded a dismissal. Then he adjusted his monocle and held the slip of paper under the light of the table lamp. Markham and I both watched him closely, for the incident was unusual, to say the least. After a hasty reading of the paper he gazed off into space, and a clouded look came into his eyes. He read the message again, with more care, and sank back into his chair.

"My word!" he murmured. "Most extr'ordin'ry. It's quite intelligible, however, don't y' know. But I'm dashed if I can see the connection..."

Markham was annoyed. "Is it a secret?" he asked testily. "Or are you merely in one of your Delphic-oracle moods?"

Vance glanced toward him contritely.

"Forgive me, Markham. My mind automatically went off on a train of thought. Sorry—really." He held the paper again under the light. "This is the message that Currie so meticulously took down: 'There is a most disturbing psychological tension at Professor Ephraim Garden's apartment, which resists diagnosis. Read up on radioactive sodium. See Book XI of the *Aeneid*, line 875. Equanimity is essential.'...Curious—eh, what?"

"It sounds a little crazy to me," Markham grunted. "Are you troubled much with cranks?"

"Oh, this is no crank," Vance assured him. "It's puzzlin', I admit; but it's quite lucid."

Markham sniffed skeptically.

"What, in the name of Heaven, have a professor and sodium and the *Aeneid* to do with one another?"

Vance was frowning as he reached into the humidor for one of his beloved *Régie* cigarettes with a deliberation which indicated a mental tension. Slowly he lighted the cigarette. After a deep inhalation he answered.

"Ephraim Garden, of whom you surely must have heard from time to time, is one of the best-known men in chemical research in this country. Just now, I believe, he's professor of chemistry at Stuyvesant University—that could be verified in *Who's Who*. But it doesn't matter. His latest researches have been directed along the lines of radioactive sodium. An amazin' discovery, Markham. Made by Doctor Ernest O. Lawrence, of the University of California, and two of his colleagues there, Doctors Henderson and McMillan. This new radioactive sodium has opened up new fields of research in cancer therapy—indeed, it may prove some day to be the long-looked-for cure for cancer. The new gamma radiation of this sodium is more penetrating than any ever before obtained. On the other hand, radium and radioactive substances can be very dangerous if diffused into the normal tissues of the body and through the blood stream. The chief difficulty in the treatment of cancerous tissue by radiation is to find a selective carrier which will distribute the radioactive substance in the tumor alone. But with the discovery of radioactive sodium tremendous advances have been made; and it will be but a matter of time when this new sodium will be perfected and available in sufficient quantities for extensive experimentation...."[3]

"That is all very fascinating," Markham commented sarcastically. "But what has it to do with you, or with trouble in the Garden home? And what could it possibly have to do with the *Aeneid*? They didn't have radioactive sodium in the time of Aeneas."

"Markham old dear, I'm no Chaldean. I haven't the groggiest notion wherein the situation concerns either me or Aeneas, except that I happen to know the Garden family slightly. But I've a vague feeling about that particular book of the *Aeneid*. As I recall, it contains one of the greatest descriptions of battle in all ancient literature. But let's see..." Vance rose quickly and went to the section of his bookshelves devoted to the classics, and, after a few moments' search, took down a small red volume and began to riffle the pages. He ran his eye swiftly down a page near the end of the volume and after a minute's perusal came back to his chair with the book, nodding his head comprehensively, as if in answer to some question he had inwardly asked himself.

"The passage referred to, Markham," he said after a moment, "is not exactly what I had in mind. But it may be even more significant. It's the famous onomatopoeic *Quadrupedumque putrem cursu quatit ungula campum*—meanin', more or less literally: 'And in their galloping course the horsehoof shakes the crumbling plain.'"

Markham took the cigar from his mouth and looked at Vance with undisguised annoyance.

"You're merely working up a mystery. You'll be telling me next that the Trojans had something to do with this professor of chemistry and his radioactive sodium."

"No. Oh, no." Vance was in an unusually serious mood. "Not the Trojans. But the galloping horses perhaps."

Markham snorted. "That may make sense to you."

"Not altogether," returned Vance, critically contemplating the end of his cigarette. "There is, nevertheless, the vague outline of a pattern here. You see, young Floyd Garden, the professor's only offspring, and his cousin, a puny chap named Woode Swift—he's quite an intimate member of the Garden household, I believe—are addicted to the ponies. Quite a prevalent disease, by the way, Markham. They're both interested in sports in general—probably the normal reaction to their professorial and ecclesiastical forebears: young Swift's father, who has now gone to his Maker, was a D.D. of sorts. I used to see both young johnnies at Kinkaid's Casino occasionally. But the galloping horses are their passion now. And they're the nucleus of a group of young aristocrats who spend their afternoons mainly in the futile attempt to guess which horses are going to come in first at the various tracks."

"You know this Floyd Garden well?"

Vance nodded. "Fairly well. He's a member of the Far Meadows Club and I've often played polo with him. He's a five-goaler and owns a couple of the best ponies in the country. I tried to buy one of them from him once—but that's beside the point.[4] The fact is, young Garden has invited me on several occasions to join him and his little group at the apartment when the out-of-town races were on. It seems he has a direct loud-speaker service from all the tracks, like many of the horse fanatics. The professor disapproves, in a mild way, but he raises no serious objections because Mrs. Garden is rather inclined to sit in and take her chances on a horse now and then."

"Have you ever accepted his invitation?" asked Markham.

"No," Vance told him. Then he glanced up with a far-away look in his eyes. "But I think it might be an excellent idea."

"Come, come, Vance!" protested Markham. "Even if you see some cryptic relationship between the disconnected items of this message you've just received, how, in the name of Heaven, can you take it seriously?"

Vance drew deeply on his cigarette and waited a moment before answering.

"You have overlooked one phrase in the message: 'Equanimity is essential,'" he said at length. "One of the great race-horses of today happens to be named Equanimity. He belongs in the company of such immortals of the turf as Man o' War, Exterminator, Gallant Fox,



and Reigh Count.<sup>[5]</sup> Furthermore, Equanimity is running in the Rivermont Handicap tomorrow."

"Still I see no reason to take the matter seriously," Markham objected.

Vance ignored the comment and added: "Moreover, Doctor Miles Siefert<sup>[6]</sup> told me at the club the other day that Mrs. Garden had been quite ill for some time with a mysterious malady."

Markham shifted in his chair and broke the ashes from his cigar.

"The affair gets more muddled by the minute," he remarked irritably. "What's the connection between all these commonplace data and that precious phone message of yours?" He waved his hand contemptuously toward the paper which Vance still held.

"I happen to know," Vance answered slowly, "who sent me this message."

"Ah, yes?" Markham was obviously skeptical.

"Quite. It was Doctor Siefert."

Markham showed a sudden interest.

"Would you care to enlighten me as to how you arrived at this conclusion?" he asked in a satirical voice.

"It was not difficult," Vance answered, rising and standing before the empty hearth, with one arm resting on the mantel. "To begin with, I was not called to the telephone personally. Why? Because it was some one who feared I might recognize his voice. Ergo, it was some one I know. To continue, the language of the message bears the earmarks of the medical profession. 'Psychological tension' and 'resists diagnosis' are not phrases ordinarily used by the layman, although they consist of commonplace enough words. And there are two such identifying phrases in the message—a fact which eliminates any possibility of a coincidence. Take this example, for instance: the word *uneventful* is certainly a word used by every class of person; but when it is coupled with another ordinary word, *recovery*, you can rest pretty much assured that only a doctor would use the phrase. It has a pertinent medical significance—it's a *cliché* of the medical profession...To go another step: the message obviously assumes that I am more or less acquainted with the Garden household and the race-track passion of young Garden. Therefore, we get the result that the sender of the message is a doctor whom I know and one who is aware of my acquaintance with the Gardens. The only doctor who fulfills these conditions, and who, incidentally, is middle-aged and cultured and highly judicial—Currie's description, y' know,—is Miles Siefert. And, added to this simple deduction, I happen to know that Siefert is a Latin scholar—I once encountered him at the Latin Society club-rooms. Another point in my favor is the fact that he is the family physician of the Gardens and would have ample opportunity to know about the galloping horses—and perhaps about Equanimity in particular—in connection with the Garden household."

"That being the case," Markham protested, "why don't you phone him and find out exactly what's back of his cryptography?"

"My dear Markham—oh, my dear Markham!" Vance strolled to the table and took up his temporarily forgotten cognac glass. "Siefert would not only indignantly repudiate any knowledge of the message, but would automatically become the first obstacle in any bit of prying I might decide to do. The ethics of the medical profession are most fantastic; and Siefert, as becomes his unique position, is a fanatic on the subject. From the fact that he communicated with me in this roundabout way I rather suspect that some grotesque point of honor is involved. Perhaps his conscience overcame him for the moment, and he temporarily relaxed his adherence to what he considers his code of honor...No, no, that course wouldn't do at all. I must ferret out the matter for myself—as he undoubtedly wishes me to do."

"But what is this matter that you feel called upon to ferret out?" persisted Markham. "Granting all you say, I still don't see how you can regard the situation as in any way serious."

"One never knows, does one?" drawled Vance. "Still, I'm rather fond of the horses myself, don't know."

Markham seemed to relax and fitted his manner to Vance's change of mood.

"And what do you propose to do?" he asked good-naturedly.

Vance sipped his cognac and then set down the glass. He looked up whimsically.

"The Public Prosecutor of New York—that noble defender of the rights of the common people—to wit: the Honorable John F.-X. Markham—must grant me immunity and protection before I'll consent to answer."

Markham's eyelids drooped a little as he studied Vance. He was familiar with the serious import that often lay beneath the other's most frivolous remarks.

"Are you planning to break the law?" he asked.

Vance picked up the lotus-shaped cognac glass again and twirled it gently between thumb and forefinger.

"Oh, yes—quite," he admitted nonchalantly. "Jailable offense, I believe."

Markham studied him for another moment.

"All right," he said, without the slightest trace of lightness. "I'll do what I can for you. What's it to be?"

Vance took another sip of the *Napoléon*.

"Well, Markham old dear," he announced, with a half smile, "I'm going to the Gardens' penthouse tomorrow afternoon and play the horses with the younger set."

## 2. DOMESTIC REVELATIONS

(Saturday, April 14; noon.)

As soon as Markham had left us that night, Vance's mood changed. A troubled look came into his eyes, and he walked up and down the room pensively.

"I don't like it, Van," he murmured, as if talking to himself. "I don't at all like it. Siefert isn't the type to make a mysterious phone call like that, unless he has a very good reason for doing so. It's quite out of character, don't y' know. He's a dashed conservative chap, and no end ethical. There must be something worrying him deeply. But why the Gardens' apartment? The domestic atmosphere there has always struck me as at least superficially normal—and now a man as dependable as Siefert gets jittery about it to the extent of indulging in shillin'-shocker technique. It's deuced queer."

He stopped pacing the floor and looked at the clock.

"I think I'll make the arrangements. A bit of snoopin' is highly indicated."

He went into the anteroom, and a moment later I heard him dialing a number on the telephone. When he returned to the library he seemed to have thrown off his depression. His manner was almost flippant.

"We're in for an abominable lunch tomorrow, Van," he announced, pouring himself another pony of cognac. "And we must torture ourselves with the viands at a most ungodly hour—noon. What a time to ingest even good food!" He sighed. "We're lunching with young Garden at his home. Woode Swift will be there and also an insufferable creature named Lowe Hamble, a horsy gentleman from some obscure estate on Long Island. Later we'll be joined by various members of the sporting set, and together we'll indulge in that ancient and fascinatin' pastime of laying wagers on the thoroughbreds. The Rivermont Handicap tomorrow is one of the season's classics. That, at any rate, may be jolly good fun..."

He rang for Currie and sent him out to fetch a copy of *The Morning Telegraph*.

"One should be prepared. Oh, quite. It's been years since I handicapped the horses. Ah, gullible Youth! But there's something about the ponies that gets in one's blood and plays havoc with the saner admonitions of the mind...I think I'll change to a dressing-gown."<sup>[7]</sup>

He finished his *Napoléon*, lingering over it fondly, and disappeared into the bedroom.

Although I was well aware that Vance had some serious object in lunching with young Garden the following day and in participating in the gambling on the races, I had not the slightest suspicion, at the time, of the horrors that were to follow. On the afternoon of April 14 occurred the first grim act of one of the most atrocious multiple crimes of this generation. And to Doctor Siefert must go, in a large measure, the credit for the identification of the criminal, for had he not sent his cryptic and would-be anonymous message to Vance, the truth would probably never have been known.

I shall never forget that fatal Saturday afternoon. And aside from the brutal Garden murder, that afternoon will always remain memorable for me because it marked the first mature sentimental episode, so far as I had ever observed, in Vance's life. For once, the cold impersonal attitude of his analytical mind melted before the appeal of an attractive woman.

Vance was just re-entering the library in his deep-red surah-silk dressing-gown when Currie brought in the *Telegraph*. Vance took the paper and opened it before him on the desk. To all appearances, he was in a gay and inquisitive frame of mind.

"Have you ever handicapped the ponies, Van?" he asked, picking up a pencil and reaching for a small tablet. "It's as absorbin' an occupation as it is a futile one. At least a score of technical considerations enter into the computations—the class of the horse, his age, his pedigree, the weight he has to carry, the consistency of his past performances, the time he has made in previous races, the jockey that is to ride him, the type of races he is accustomed to running, the condition of the track and whether or not the horse is a mudder, his post position, the distance of the race, the value of the purse, and a dozen other factors—which, when added up, subtracted, placed against one another, and eventually balanced through an elaborate system of mathematical checking and counter-checking, give you what is supposed to be the exact possibilities of his winning the race on which you have been working. However, it's all quite useless. Less than forty per cent. of favorites—that is, horses who, on paper, should win—verify the result of these calculations. For instance, Jim Dandy beat Gallant Fox in the Travers and paid a hundred to one; and the theoretically invincible Man o' War lost one of his races to a colt named Upset. After all your intricate computations, horse-racing still remains a matter of sheer luck, as incalculable as roulette. But no true follower of the ponies will place a bet until he has gone through the charmin' rigmarole of handicapping the entries. It's little more than abracadabra—but it's three-fourths of the sport."

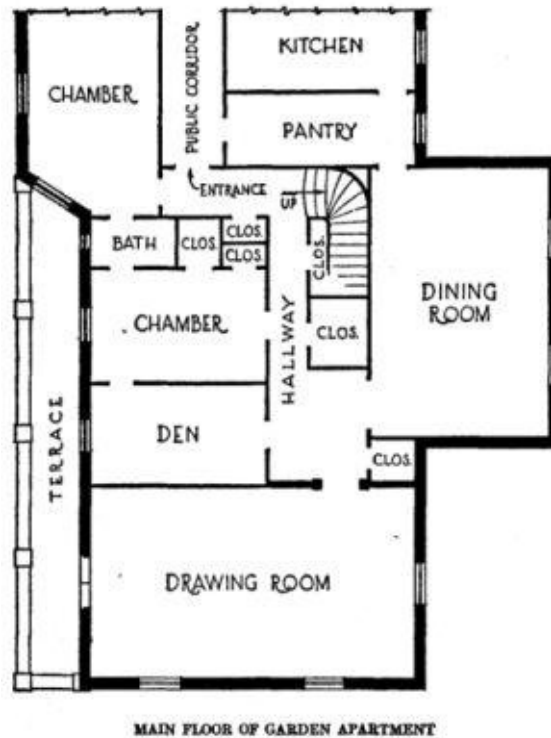
He gave me a waggish look.

"And that's why I shall sit here for another hour or two at least, indulging one of my old weaknesses. I shall go to the Gardens' tomorrow with every race perfectly calculated—and you will probably make a choice and collect the rewards of innocence." He waved his hand in a pleasant gesture. "Cheerio."

I turned in with a feeling of uneasiness.

Shortly before noon the next day we arrived at Professor Garden's beautiful skyscraper apartment, and were cordially, and a little exuberantly, greeted by young Garden.

Floyd Garden was a man in his early thirties, erect and athletically built. He was about six feet tall, with powerful shoulders and a slender waist. His hair was almost black, and his complexion swarthy. His manner, while easy and casual, and with a suggestion of swagger, was in no way offensive. He was not a handsome man: his features were too rugged, his eyes set too close together, his ears protruded too much, and his lips were too thin. But he had an undeniable charm, and there was a quiet submerged competency in the way he moved and in the rapidity of his mental reactions. He was certainly not intellectual, and later, when I met his mother, I recognized at once that his hereditary traits had come down to him from her side of the family.



"There are only five of us for lunch, Vance," he remarked breezily. "The old gentleman is fussing with his test-tubes and Bunsen burners at the University; the mater is having a grand time playing sick, with medicos and nurses dashing madly back and forth to arrange her pillows and light her cigarettes for her. But Pop Hammle is coming—rum old bird, but a good sport; and we'll also be burdened with beloved cousin Woode with the brow of alabaster and the heart of a chipmunk. You know Swift, I believe, Vance. As I remember, you once spent an entire evening here discussing Ming celadons with him. Queer crab, Woody."

He pondered a moment with a wry face.

"Can't figure out just how he fits into this household. Dad and the mater seem inordinately fond of him—sorry for him, perhaps; or maybe he's the kind of serious, sensitive guy they wish I'd turned out to be. I don't dislike Woode, but we have damned little in common except the horses. Only, he takes his betting too seriously to suit me—he hasn't much money, and his wins or losses mean a lot to him. Of course, he'll go broke in the end. But I doubt if it'll make much difference to him. My loving parents—one of 'em, at least—will stroke his brow with one hand and stuff his pockets with the other. If I went broke as a result of this horse-racing vice they'd tell me to get the hell out and go to work."

He laughed good-naturedly, but with an undertone of bitterness.

"But what the hell!" he added, snapping his fingers. "Let's scoop one down the hatch before we victual."

He pushed a button near the archway to the drawing-room, and a very correct, corpulent butler came in with a large silver tray laden with bottles and glasses and ice.

Vance had been watching Garden covertly during this rambling recital of domestic intimacies. He was, I could see, both puzzled and displeased with the confidences: they were too obviously in bad taste. When the drinks had been poured, Vance turned to him coolly.

"I say, Garden," he asked casually, "why all the family gossip? Really, y' know, it isn't being done."

"My social blunder, old man," Garden apologized readily. "But I wanted you to understand the situation, so you'd feel at ease. I know you hate mysteries, and there's apt to be some funny things happening here this afternoon. If you're familiar with the set-up beforehand, they won't bother you so much."

"Thanks awfully and all that," Vance murmured. "Perhaps I see your point."

"Woode has been acting queer for the past couple of weeks," Garden continued; "as if some secret sorrow was gnawing at his mind. He seems more bloodless than ever. He suddenly goes sulky and distracted for no apparent reason. I mean to say, he acts moonstruck. Maybe he's in love. But he's a secretive duffer. No one'll ever know, not even the object of his affections."

"Any specific psychopathic symptoms?" Vance asked lightly.

"No-o." Garden pursed his lips and frowned thoughtfully. "But he's developed a curious habit of going upstairs to the roof-garden as soon as he's placed a large bet, and he remains there alone until the result of the race has come through."

"Nothing very unusual about that." Vance made a deprecatory motion with his hand. "Many gamblers, d' ye see, are like that. The emotional element, don't y' know. Can't bear to be on view when the result comes in. Afraid of spillin' over. Prefer to pull themselves together before facing the multitude. Mere sensitiveness. Oh, quite. Especially if the result of the wager means much to them...No...no. I wouldn't say that your cousin's retiring to the roof at such tense moments is remarkable, after what you've volunteered about him. Quite logical, in fact."

"You're probably right," Garden admitted reluctantly. "But I wish he'd bet moderately, instead of plunging like a damned fool

whenever he's hot for a horse."

"By the by," asked Vance, "why do you particularly look for strange occurrences this afternoon?"

Garden shrugged.

"The fact is," he replied, after a short pause, "Woody's been losing heavily of late, and today's the day of the big Rivermont Handicap. I have a feeling he's going to put every dollar he's got on Equanimity, who'll undoubtedly be the favorite...Equanimity!" He snorted with undisguised contempt. "That rail-lugger! Probably the second greatest horse of modern times—but what's the use? When he does come in he's apt to be disqualified. He's got wood on his mind—in love with fences. Put a fence across the track a mile ahead, with no rails to right or left, and he'd very likely do the distance in 1:30 flat, making Jamestown, Roamer and Wise Ways look like cripples.[8] He had to cede the win to Vanderveer in the Youthful Stakes. He cut in toward the rail on Persian Bard at Bellaire; and he was disqualified for the same thing in Colorado, handing the race over to Grand Score. In the Urban he tried the same rail-diving, with the result that Roving Flirt won by a nose...How's any one to know about him? And there's always the chance he'll lose, rail or no rail. He's not a young horse any more, and he's already lost eighteen races to date. He's up against some tough babies today—some of the greatest routers from this country and abroad. I'd say he was a pretty bad bet; and yet I know that nut cousin of mine is going to smear him on the nose with everything he owns."

He looked up solemnly.

"And that, Vance, means trouble if Equanimity doesn't come in. It means a blow-up of some kind. I've felt it coming for over a week. It's got me worried. To tell you the truth, I'm glad you picked this day to sit in with us."

Vance, who had been listening intently and watching Garden closely as he talked, moved to the front window where he stood smoking meditatively and gazing out over Riverside Park twenty stories below, at the sun-sprayed water of the Hudson River.

"Very interestin' situation," he commented at length. "I agree in the main with what you say regarding Equanimity. But I think you're too harsh, and I'm not convinced that he's a rail-lugger because of any innate passion for wood. Equanimity always had shelly feet and a quarter crack or two, and as a result often lost his plates. And, in addition, he had a bad off fore-ankle, which, when it began to sting at the close of a gruelling race, caused him to bear in toward the rail. But he's a great horse. He could do whatever was asked of him at any distance on any kind of track. As a two-year-old he was the leading money-winner of his age; as a three-year-old he already had foot trouble and was started only three times; but as a four-year-old he came back with a new foot and won ten important races. The remarkable thing about Equanimity is that he could either go right to the front and take it on the Bill Daly, or come from behind and win in the stretch. In the Futurity, when he was left at the post and entered the stretch in last place, he dropped two of his plates and, in spite of this, ran over Grand Score and Sublimato to win going away. It was a bad foot that kept him from being the world's outstanding champion."

"Well, what of it?" retorted Garden dogmatically. "Excuses are easy to find, and if, as you say, he has a bad foot, that's all the more reason for not playing him today."

"Oh, quite," agreed Vance. "I myself wouldn't wager a farthing on him in this big Handicap. I spent some time porin' over the charts last night after I phoned you, and I decided to stay off Equanimity in today's feature. My method of fixing the ratings is no doubt as balmy as any other system, but I couldn't manipulate the ratios in his favor..."

"What horse do you like there?" Garden asked with interest.

"Azure Star."

"Azure Star!" Garden was as contemptuous as he was astonished. "Why, he's almost an outsider. He'll be twelve or fifteen to one. There's hardly a selector in the country who's given him a play. An ex-steeplechaser from the bogs of Ireland! His legs are too weak from jumping to stand the pace today. And at a mile and a quarter! He can't do it! Personally, I'd rather put my money on Risky Lad. There's a horse with great possibilities."

"Risky Lad checks up as unreliable," said Vance. "Azure Star beat him badly at Santa Anita this year. Risky Lad entered the stretch in the lead and then tired to finish fifth. And he certainly didn't run a good mile race at the same track when he finished fifth again in a field of seven. If I remember correctly, he weakened in last year's Classic and was out of the money. His stamina is too uncertain, I should say..." Vance sighed and smiled. "Ah, well, *chacun à son cheval*...But as you were sayin', the psychological situation hereabouts has you worried. I gather there's a super-charged atmosphere round this charmin' aerie."

"That's it, exactly," Garden answered almost eagerly. "Super-charged is right. Nearly every day the mater asks, 'How's Woody?' And when the old gentleman comes home from his lab at night he greets me with a left-handed 'Well, my boy, have you seen Woody today?'...But I could die of the hoof-and-mouth disease without stirring up such solicitude in my immediate ancestors."

Vance made no comment on these remarks. Instead he asked in a peculiarly flat voice: "Do you consider this recent hyper-tension in the household due entirely to your cousin's financial predicament and his determination to risk all he has on the horses?"

Garden started slightly and then settled back in his chair. After he had taken another drink he cleared his throat. "No, damn it!" he answered a little vehemently. "And that's another thing that bothers me. A lot of the golliwogs we're harboring are due to Woode's cuckoo state of mind; but there are other queer invisible animals springing up and down the corridors. I can't figure it out. The mater's illness doesn't make sense either, and Doc Siefert acts like a pompous old Buddha whenever I broach the subject. Between you and me, I don't think he knows what to make of it himself. And there's funny business of some kind going on among the gang that drifts in here nearly every afternoon to play the races. They're all right, of course—belong to 'our set,' as the phrase goes, and spring from eminently respectable, if a trifle speedy, environments..."

At this moment we heard the sound of light footsteps coming up the hall, and in the archway, which constituted the entrance from the hall into the drawing-room, appeared a slight, pallid young man of perhaps thirty, his head drawn into his slightly hunched shoulders, and a melancholy, resentful look on his sensitive, sallow face. Thick-lensed *pince-nez* glasses emphasized the impression he gave of physical weakness.

Garden waved his hand cheerily to the newcomer.

"Greetings, Woody. Just in time for a spot before lunch. You know Vance, the eminent sleuth; and this is Mr. Van Dine, his patient and retiring chronicler."

Woode Swift acknowledged our presence in a strained but pleasant manner, and listlessly shook hands with his cousin. Then he picked up the bottle of Bourbon and poured himself a double portion, which he drank at one gulp.

"Good Heavens!" Garden exclaimed good-humoredly. "How you have changed, Woody!...Who's the lady now?"

The muscles of Swift's face twitched, as if he felt a sudden pain.

"Oh, pipe down, Floyd," he pleaded irritably.

Garden shrugged indifferently. "Sorry. What's worrying you today besides Equanimity?"

"That's enough worry for one day." Swift managed a sheepish grin; then he added aggressively: "I can't possibly lose." And he poured himself another drink. "How's Aunt Martha?"

Garden narrowed his eyes.

"She's pretty fair. Nervous as the devil this morning, and smoking one cigarette after another. But she's sitting up. She'll probably be in later to take a crack or two at the prancing steeds..."

At this point Lowe Hammle arrived. He was a heavy-set, short man of fifty or thereabouts, with a round ruddy face and closely cropped gray hair. He was wearing a black-and-white checked suit, a gray shirt, a brilliant green four-in-hand, a chocolate-colored waistcoat with leather buttons, and tan blucher shoes the soles of which were inordinately thick.

"The Marster of 'Ounds, b' Gad!" Garden greeted him jovially. "Here's your Scotch-and-soda; and here also are Mr. Philo Vance and Mr. Van Dine."

"Delighted—delighted!" Hammle exclaimed heartily, coming forward. He extended his hand effusively to Vance. "Been a long time since I saw you, sir...Let me see...Ah, yes. Broadbank. You hunted with me that morning. Nasty spill you got. Warned you in advance that horse couldn't take the fences. But you were in at the kill—yes, by George! Recollect?"

"Oh, quite. Jolly affair. A good fox. Never fancied your bolting him from that drain into the jaws of the pack after the sport he showed."<sup>[9]</sup> Vance's manner was icy—obviously he did not like the man—and he turned immediately to Swift and began chatting amiably about the day's big race. Hammle busied himself with his Scotch-and-soda.

In a few minutes the butler announced lunch. The meal was heavy and tasteless, and the wine of dubious vintage,—Vance had been quite right in his prognostication.

The conversation was almost entirely devoted to horses, the history of racing, the Grand National, and the possibilities of the various entrants in the afternoon's Rivermont Handicap. Garden was dogmatic in stating his opinions but eminently pleasant and informative: he had made a careful study of modern racing and had an amazing memory.

Hammle was voluble and suave, and harked back to the former glories of racing and to famous dead heats—Attila and Acrobat in the Travers, Springbok and Preakness in the Saratoga Cup, St. Gaten and Harvester in the English Derby, Pardee and Joe Cotton at Sheepshead Bay, Kingston and YumYum at Gravesend, Los Angeles and White in the Latonia Derby,<sup>[10]</sup> Domino and Dobbins at Sheepshead Bay, Domino again and Henry of Navarre at Gravesend, Arbuckle and George Kessler in the Hudson Stakes, Sysonby and Race King in the Metropolitan Handicap, Macaw and Nedana at Aqueduct, and Morshion and Mate, also at Aqueduct. He spoke of the great upsets on the track, both here and abroad—of that early winning of the Epsom Derby by an unnamed outsider known as the "Fidget colt"; of the lone success of Amato over Grey Momus, forty-one years later; of the lucky win of Aboyeur in 1913, when Craganour was disqualified; and of the recent win of April the Fifth. He discussed the Kentucky Derby—the unlooked-for success of Day Star as a result of the poor ride given Himyar, and the tragic failure to win of Proctor Knott. And he talked of the great strategy of "Snapper" Garrison in bringing Boundless home in the World's Fair Derby of 1893; of the two lucky races of Plucky Play when he won over Equipoise in the Arlington Handicap and over Faireno in the Hawthorne Gold Cup. He mentioned the fateful ride that Coltilletti gave Sun Beau at Agua Caliente, losing the race to Mike Hall. He had a fund of historic information and, despite his prejudices, knew his subject well.

Swift, nervous and somewhat peevish, had little to say, and though he assumed an outward attitude of attention, I got the impression that other and more urgent matters were occupying his mind. He ate little and drank too much wine.

Vance contented himself mainly with listening and studying the others at the table. When he spoke at all, it was to mention with regret some of the great horses that had recently been destroyed because of accidents—Black Gold, Springsteel, Chase Me, Dark Secret and others. He spoke of the tragic and unexpected death of Victorian after his courageous recovery, and the accidental poisoning of the great Australian horse, Phar Lap.

We were nearing the end of the luncheon when a tall, well-built and apparently vigorous woman, who looked no more than forty (though I later learned that she was well past fifty), entered the room. She wore a tailored suit, a silver-fox scarf and a black felt toque.

"Why, mater!" exclaimed Garden. "I thought you were an invalid. Why this spurt of health and energy?"

He then presented me to his mother: both Vance and Hammle had met her on previous occasions.

"I'm tired of being kept in bed," she told her son querulously, after nodding graciously to the others. "Now you boys sit right down—I'm going shopping, and just dropped in to see if everything was going all right...I think I'll have a *crème de menthe frappée* while I'm here."

The butler drew up a chair for her beside Swift, and went to the pantry.

Mrs. Garden put her hand lightly on her nephew's arm.

"How goes it with you, Woody?" she asked in a spirit of *camaraderie*. Without waiting for his answer, she turned to Garden again. "Floyd, I want you to place a bet for me on the big race today, in case I'm not back in time."

"Name your poison," smiled Garden.

"I'm playing Grand Score to win and place—the usual hundred."

"Right-o, mater." Garden glanced sardonically at his cousin. "Less intelligent bets have been made in these diggin's full many a time and oft...Sure you don't want Equanimity, mater?"

"Odds are too unfavorable," returned Mrs. Garden, with a canny smile.

"He's quoted in the over-night line at five to two."

"He won't stay there." There was authority and assurance in the woman's tone and manner. "And I'll get eight or ten to one on Grand

Score. He was one of the greatest in his younger days, and the old spark may still be there—if he doesn't go lame, as he did last month."

"Right you are," grinned Garden. "You're on the dog for a century win and place."

The butler brought the *crème de menthe*, and Mrs. Garden sipped it and stood up.

"And now I'm going," she announced pleasantly. She patted her nephew on the shoulder. "Take care of yourself, Woody...Good afternoon, gentlemen." And she went from the room with a firm, masculine stride.

After a soggy *Baba au Rhum*, Garden led the way back to the drawing-room and the butler followed for further instructions.

"Sneed," Garden ordered, "fix the set-up as usual."

I glanced at the electric clock on the mantel: it was exactly ten minutes after one.



### 3. THE RIVERMONT RACES

(Saturday, April 14; 1:10 p.m.)

"Fixing the set-up" was a comparatively simple procedure, but a more or less mysterious operation for any one unfamiliar with the purpose it was to serve. From a small closet in the hall Sneed first wheeled out a sturdy wooden stand about two feet square. On this he placed a telephone connected to a loud speaker which resembled a midget radio set. As I learned later, it was a specially constructed amplifier to enable every one in the room to hear distinctly whatever came over the telephone.

On one side of the amplifier was attached a black metal switch box with a two-way key. In its upright position this key would cut off the voice at the other end of the line without interfering with the connection; and throwing the key forward would bring the voice on again.

"I used to have ear-phones for the gang," Garden told us, as Sneed rolled the stand back against the wall beside the archway and plugged the extension wires into jacks set in the baseboard.

The butler then brought in a well-built folding card-table and opened it beside the stand. On this table he placed another telephone of the conventional French, or hand, type. This telephone, which was gray, was plugged into an additional jack in the baseboard. The gray telephone was not connected with the one equipped with the amplifier, but was on an independent line.

When the two instruments and the amplifier had been stationed and tested, Sneed brought in four more card-tables and placed them about the drawing-room. At each table he opened up two folding chairs. Then, from a small drawer in the stand, he took out a long manila envelope which had evidently come through the mail, and, slitting the top, drew forth a number of large printed sheets approximately nine by sixteen inches. There were fifteen of these sheets—called "cards" in racing parlance—and after sorting them he spread out three on each of the card-tables. Two neatly sharpened pencils, a well-stocked cigarette box, matches and ash trays completed the equipment on each table. On the table holding the gray telephone was one additional item—a small, much-thumbed ledger.

The final, but by no means least important, duty of Sneed in "fixing the set-up" was to open the doors of a broad, low cabinet in one corner of the room, revealing a miniature bar inside.

A word about the "cards": These concentrated racing sheets were practically duplicates of the programs one gets at a race track, with the exception that, instead of having each race on a separate page, all the races at one track were printed, one after the other, across a single sheet. There were only three tracks open that month, and the cards on each table were the equivalent of the three corresponding programs. Each of the printed columns covered one race, giving the post position of the horses, the name of each entry and the weights carried.<sup>[11]</sup> At the top of each column were the number and distance of the race, and at the bottom were ruled spaces for the pari-mutuel prices. At the left of each column was a space for the odds; and between the names of the horses there was sufficient room to write in the jockeys' names when that information was received.

(In order to make more readily comprehensible the technique of this particular racing service, I am reproducing herewith an exact copy of the Rivermont Park card for that day. Race number Four was that memorable Rivermont Handicap which was to prove the vital primary factor in the terrible tragedy that took place in Professor Garden's home that afternoon.)

When Sneed had arranged everything he started from the room, but hesitated significantly in the archway. Garden grinned broadly and, sitting down at the table with the gray telephone, opened the small ledger before him and picked up a pencil.

"All right, Sneed," he said, "on what horse do you want to lose your easily earned money today?" Sneed coughed discreetly.

"If you don't mind, sir, I'd like to risk five dollars on Roving Flirt to show."

Garden made a notation in the ledger.

"All right, Sneed; you're on Roving Flirt for a V at third."

With an apologetic "Thank you, sir," the butler disappeared into the dining-room. When he had gone Garden glanced at the clock and reached for the black telephone connected with the amplifier.

"The first race today," he said, "is at two-thirty, and I'd better hop to it and get the line-up. Lex will be coming on in a few minutes; and the boys and girls will want to be knowing everything and a little bit more when they arrive with their usual high hopes and misgivings."<sup>[12]</sup>

He lifted the receiver from the hook of the telephone and dialed a number. After a pause he spoke into the transmitter:

"Hello, Lex. B-2-9-8. Waiting for the dope." And, laying the receiver down on the stand, he threw the switch key forward.

A clear-cut, staccato voice came through the amplifier: "O.K., B-2-9-8." Then there was a click, followed by several minutes of silence. Finally the same voice began speaking: *"Everybody get ready. The exact time now is one-thirty and a quarter.—Three tracks today. The order will be Rivermont, Texas, and Cold Springs. Just as you have them on the cards. Here we go. Rivermont: weather clear and track fast. Clear and fast. First post, 2:30. And now down the line. First race: 20, Barbour; 4, Gates; 5, Lyon; 3, Shea; scratch twice; 3, Denham; 20, Z. Smythe—that's S-m-y-t-h-e; 10, Gilly; 10, Deel; 15, Carr.—And the Second race: 4, Elkind; 20, Barbour; 4, Carr; 20, Hunter; 10, Shea; scratch number 6; 20, Gedney, and make the weight 116; scratch number 8; 3 to 5, Lyon; 4, Martinson.—And the Third race: The top one is 10, with Huron; scratch twice; 20, Denham; 20, J. Briggs—that's Johnny Briggs; 20, Hunter; 4, Gedney; even money, Deel; 20, Landseer. And now race number Four. The Rivermont Handicap. The top one is 8, with Shelton; 15, Denham; 10, Redman; 6, Baroco; 20, Gates; 20, Hunter; 6, Cressy; 5, Barbour; 12, J. Briggs—that's Johnny Briggs; 5, Elkind; 4, Martinson; scratch number 12; 20, Gilly; 21/2, Birken.—And the Fifth: 6, Littman; 12, Huron..."*

The incisive voice continued with the odds and jockeys and scratches on the two remaining races at Rivermont Park. As the announcements came over, Garden attentively and rapidly filled in the data on his card. When the last entrant of the closing race at Rivermont Park had been reached there was a slight pause. Then the announcements continued:

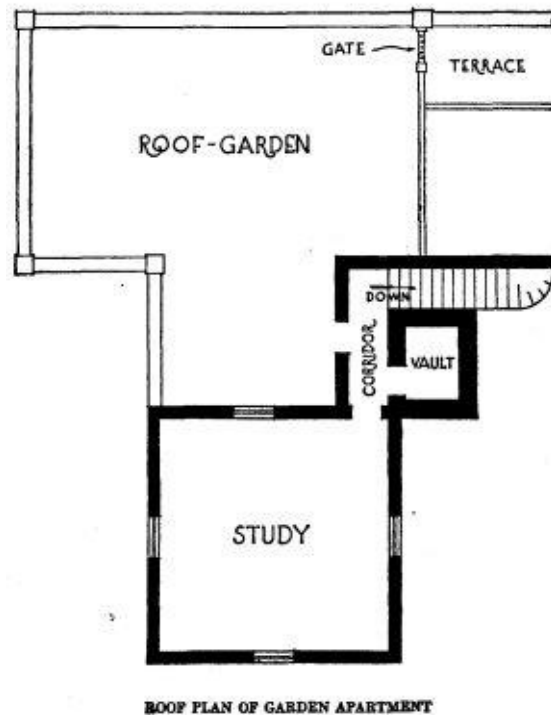
*"Now everybody go to Texas. At Texas, weather cloudy and track slow. Cloudy and slow. In the First: 4, Burden; 10, Lansing—"*

Garden leaned over and threw the amplifier switch up, and there was silence in the room.

"Who cares about Texas?" he remarked negligently, rising from his chair and stretching. "No one around here plays those goats anyway. I'll pick up the Cold Springs dope later. If I don't, some one's sure to ask for it, just to be contrary." He turned to his cousin. "Why don't you take Vance and Mr. Van Dine upstairs and show them around the garden?...They might," he added with good-natured sarcasm, "be interested in your lonely retreat on the roof, where you listen in to your fate. Sneed has probably got it arranged for you."

Swift rose with alacrity.

"Damned glad of the chance," he returned surlily. "Your manner today rather annoys me, Floyd." And he led the way down the hall and up the stairs to the roof-garden, Vance and I following. Hammle, who had settled himself in an easy chair with a Scotch-and-soda, remained below with our host.



The stairway was narrow and semicircular, and led upward from the hallway near the front entrance. In glancing back up the hall, toward the drawing-room, I noticed that no section of that room was visible from the stair end of the hall. I made this mental note idly at the time, but I mention it here because the fact played a very definite part in the tragic events which were to follow.

At the head of this narrow stairway we turned left into a corridor, barely four feet wide, at the end of which was a door leading into a large room—the only room on the roof. This spacious and beautifully appointed study, with high windows on all four sides, was used by Professor Garden, Swift informed us, as a library and private experimental laboratory. Near the door to this room, on the left wall of the corridor, was another door, of calamine, which, I learned later, led into a small storeroom built to hold the professor's valuable papers and data.

Half-way down the corridor, on the right, was another large calamine weather door which led out to the roof. This door had been propped open, for the sun was bright and the day mild. Swift preceded us into one of the loveliest skyscraper gardens I have ever seen. It covered a space about forty feet square and was directly over the drawing-room, the den and the reception hall. In the centre was a beautiful rock pool. Along the low brick balustrade were rows of thick privet and evergreens. In front of these were boxed flowerbeds, in which the crocuses, tulips and hyacinths were already blooming in a riot of color. That part of the garden nearest the study was overhung by a gay stationary awning, and various pieces of comfortable garden furniture were arranged in its shade.

We walked leisurely about the garden, smoking. Vance seemed deeply interested in two or three rare evergreens, and chatted casually about them. At length he turned, strolled back toward the awning, and sat down in a chair facing the river. Swift and I joined him. The conversation was desultory: Swift was a difficult man to talk to, and as the minutes went by he became more and more *distract*. After a while he got up nervously and walked to the other end of the garden. Resting his elbows on the balustrade, he looked for several minutes down into Riverside Park; then, with a sudden jerky movement, almost as if he had been struck, he straightened up and came back to us. He glanced apprehensively at his wristwatch.

"We'd better be going down," he said. "They'll be coming out for the first race before long."

Vance gave him an appraising look and rose. "What about that *sanctum sanctorum* of yours which your cousin mentioned?" he asked lightly.

"Oh, that..." Swift forced an embarrassed smile. "It's that red chair over there against the wall, next to the small table...But I don't see why Floyd should spoof about it. The crowd downstairs always rags me when I lose, and it irritates me. I'd much rather be alone when



I get the results."

"Quite understandable," nodded Vance with sympathy.

"You see," the man went on rather pathetically, "I frankly play the ponies for the money—the others downstairs can afford to take heavy losses, but I happen to need the cash just now. Of course, I know it's a hell of a way to try to make money. But you either make it in a hurry or lose it in a hurry. So what's the difference?"

Vance had stepped over to the little table on which stood a desk telephone which had, instead of the ordinary receiver, what is known as a head receiver—that is, a flat disk ear-phone attached to a curved metal band to go over the head.

"Your retreat is well equipped," commented Vance.

"Oh, yes. This is an extension of the news-service phone downstairs; and there's also a plug-in for a radio, and another for an electric plate. And floodlights." He pointed them out to us on the study wall. "All the comforts of a hotel," he added with a sneer.

He took the ear-phone from the hook and, adjusting the band over his head, listened for a moment.

"Nothing new yet at Rivermont," he mumbled.

He removed the earphone with nervous impatience and tossed it to the table. "Anyway we'd better get down." And he walked toward the door by which we had come out in the garden.

When we reached the drawing-room we found two newcomers—a man and a woman—seated at one of the tables, poring over the racing cards and making notations. Vance and I were casually introduced to them by Garden.

The man was Cecil Kroon, about thirty-five, immaculately attired and sleek, with smooth, regular features and a very narrow waxed mustache. He was quite blond, and his eyes were a cold steely blue. The woman, whose name was Madge Weatherby, was about the same age as Kroon, tall and slender, and with a marked tendency toward theatricalism in both her attire and her make-up. Her cheeks were heavily rouged and her lips crimson. Her eyelids were shaded with green, and her eyebrows had been plucked and replaced with fine penciled lines. In a spectacular way she was not unattractive.

Hammle had moved from his easy chair to one of the card-tables at the end of the room nearest the entrance, and was engaged in checking over the afternoon's entries.

Swift went to the same table and, nodding to Hammle, sat down opposite him. He removed his glasses, wiped them carefully, reached for one of the cards, and glanced over the races.

Garden looked up and motioned to us—he was holding the receiver of the black telephone to his ear.

"Choose a table, Vance, and see how accurate, or otherwise, your method of handicapping is. They'll be coming to the post for the first race in about ten minutes, and we'll be getting a new line shortly."

Vance strolled over to the table nearest Garden's, and seating himself, drew from his pocket a sheet of note-paper on which were written rows of names and figures and computations—the results of his labors, the night before, with the past-performance charts of the horses in that day's races. He adjusted his monocle, lighted a fresh cigarette, and appeared to busy himself with the Rivermont race card. But I could see that he was covertly studying the occupants of the room more intently than he was the racing data.

"It won't be long now," Garden announced, the receiver still at his ear. "Lex is repeating the Cold Springs and Texas lines for some subscribers who were late calling in."

Kroon went to the small bar and mixed two drinks which he took back to his table, setting one down before Miss Weatherby.

"I say, Floyd," he called out to Garden; "Zalia coming today?"

"Absolutely," Garden told him. "She was all stirred up when she phoned this morning. Full of sure things. Bulging with red-hot tips direct from trainers and jockeys and stable-boys and all the other phony sources of misinformation."

"Well, what about it?" came a vivacious feminine voice from down the hall; and the next moment a swaggering, pretty girl was standing in the archway, her hands on her muscular boyish hips. "I've concluded I can't pick any winners myself, so why not let the other guy pick 'em for me?...Hello, everybody," she threw in parenthetically..."But Floyd, old thing, I really have a humdinger in the First at Rivermont today. This tip didn't come from a stable-boy, either. It came from one of the stewards—a friend of dad's. And am I going to smear that hay-burner!"

"Right-o, Baby-face," grinned Garden. "Step into our parlor."

She started forward, and hesitated momentarily as she caught sight of Vance and me.

"Oh, by the way, Zalia,"—Garden put the receiver down and rose—"let me present Mr. Vance and Mr. Van Dine...Miss Graem."

The girl staggered back dramatically and lifted her hands to her head in mock panic.

"Oh, Heaven protect me!" she exclaimed. "Philo Vance, the detective! Is this a raid?"

Vance bowed gracefully.

"Have no fear, Miss Graem," he smiled. "I'm merely a fellow criminal. And, as you see, I'm dragging Mr. Van Dine along the downward path with me."

The girl flashed me a whimsical glance.

"But that isn't fair to Mr. Van Dine. Where would you be without him, Mr. Vance?"

"I admit I'd be unknown and unsung," returned Vance. "But I'd be a happier man—an obscure, but free, spirit. And I'd never have unconsciously provided the inspiration for Ogden Nash's poetic masterpiece."[\[13\]](#)

Zalia Graem smiled broadly, and then pouted.

"It was horrid of Nash to write that jingle," she said. "Personally, I think you're adorable." She went toward the unoccupied card-table. "But, after all, Mr. Vance," she threw back over her shoulder, "you *are* terribly stingy with your g's."

At this moment Garden, who was again listening through the receiver, announced:

"The new line's coming. Take it down if you want it."

He pressed forward the key on the switch box, and in a moment the voice we had heard earlier was again coming through the amplifier.

*"Coming out at Rivermont, and here's the new line: 20, 6, 4, 8 to 5, scratch twice, 3, 20, 15, 10, 15...Who was it wanted the run-down at Texas—?"*

Garden cut out the amplifier.

"All right, boys and girls," he sang out, drawing the ledger to him. "What's on your mind? Be speedy. Only two minutes to post time. Any customers?...How about your hot tip, Zalia?"

"Oh, I'm playing it, all right," Miss Graem answered seriously. "And he's ten to one. I want fifty on Topspede to win—and...seventy-five on him to show."

Garden wrote rapidly in the ledger.

"So you don't quite trust your hot tip?" he gloated. "Covering, as it were...Who else?"

"I'm playing Sara Bellum," Hammle spoke up. "Twenty-five across the board."

"And I want Moondash—twenty on Moondash to show." This bet came from Miss Weatherby.

"Any others?" asked Garden. "It's now or never."

"Give me Miss Construe—fifty to win," said Kroon.

"How about you, Vance?" asked Garden.

"I had Fisticuffs and Black Revel down as about equal choices, so I'll take the one with the better odds—but not to win. Make it a hundred on Black Revel a place."

Garden turned to his cousin. "And you, Woody?" Swift shook his head. "Not this race."

"Saving it all for Equanimity, eh? Right-o. I'm staying off this race myself." Garden reached for the gray telephone and dialed a number..."Hello, Hannix.[14] This is Garden...Feeling fine, thanks...Here's the book for the First at Rivermont: Topspede, half a hundred-0-seventy-five. Sara Bellum, twenty-five across the board. Moondash, twenty to show. Miss Construe, half a hundred to win. Black Revel a hundred a place...Right."

He hung up the receiver and cut in the amplifier. There was a momentary silence. Then:

*"I got 'em at the post at Rivermont. At the post, Rivermont. Topspede is making trouble...They've taken him to the outside...And there they go! Off at Rivermont at 2:32 and a half...At the quarter: it's Topspede, by a length; Sara Bellum, by a head; and Miss Construe...At the half: Sara Bellum, half a length; Black Revel, a length; and Topspede...In the stretch: Black Revel, a length; Fisticuffs, a head and gaining; and Sara Bellum...AND the Rivermont winner: Fisticuffs. The winner is Fisticuffs. Black Revel is second. Sara Bellum is third. The numbers are 4, 7, and 3. Winner closed at eight to five. Hold on for the official O.K. and the muts[15]..."*

"Well, well, well!" chortled Garden. "That was a grand race for Hannix, as far as this crowd was concerned. They came in like little trained pigs. Even our two winners here didn't nick the old fox for much. Pop Hammle chiseled out a bit of show money, but he has to deduct fifty dollars. And Vance probably picked about even money at place on Black Revel...What, about that humdinger of yours, Zalia? Oh, trusting child, will you never learn?..."

"Well, anyway," protested the girl good-naturedly, "wasn't Topspede a length ahead at the quarter? And he was still in the money at the half. I had the right idea."

"Sure," returned Garden. "Topspede made a noble effort, but I suspect he's a blood-brother of Morestone and a boy-friend of Nevada Queen—the world's most eminent folder-uppers. He'd probably go big at three furlongs on the Nursery Course." [16]

"Who cares?" retorted Zalia Graem. "I'm still young and healthy..."

The voice over the amplifier came back:

*"O.K. at Rivermont. Official. They got off at 2:32 and a half. Winner: number 4, Fisticuffs; second, number 7, Black Revel; third, number 3, Sara Bellum. The running time, 1:24...And here are the mots: Fisticuffs paid \$5.60—\$3.10—\$2.90. Black Revel paid \$3.90 and \$3.20. Sara Bellum paid \$5.80...Post time for the second race 3:05. The line: 3, 15, 5, 20, 12, scratch, 15, scratch, 4 to 5, 6...They're coming out at Cold Springs. And here's a new line—"*

Garden cut out the amplifier again.

"Well, Vance," he said, "you're the only winner on the first race. You made ninety-five dollars—all entered up in the ledger. And you, Pop, lose two dollars and a half." [17]

Since no one present was interested in the Texas or Cold Springs meets, there was approximately a half-hour between races. During these intervals the members of the party moved from table to table, chatting, discussing horses, and indulging in pleasant, intimate give-and-take; and there was considerable traffic to and from the bar. Occasionally Garden cut in the amplifier to pick up any late scratches, changes of odds, and other flashes from the tracks.

Vance, while apparently mingling casually with the alternately gay and serious groups, was closely watching everything that went on. I could plainly see that he was far less interested in the races than in the human and psychological relationships of those present.

Despite the superficial buoyancy of the gathering, I could detect an undercurrent of extreme tension and expectancy; and I made mental note of various little occurrences during the first hour or so. I noticed, for instance, that from time to time Zalia Graem joined Cecil Kroon and Madge Weatherby and engaged them in serious low-toned conversation. Once the three strolled out on the narrow balcony which ran along the north side of the drawing-room.

Swift was by turns hysterically gay and dejected, and he made frequent trips to the bar. His inconsistent moods impressed me unpleasantly; and several times I noticed Garden watching him with shrewd concern.

One incident connected with Swift puzzled me greatly. I had noticed that he and Zalia Graem had not spoken to each other during the entire time they had been in the drawing-room. Once they had brushed against each other near Garden's table, and each, as if instinctively, had drawn resentfully to one side. Garden had cocked his head at them irritably and said:

"Aren't you two on speaking terms yet—or is this feud to be permanent?...Why don't you kiss and make up and let the gaiety of the party be unanimous?"

Miss Graem had proceeded as if nothing had happened, and Swift had merely given his cousin a quick, indignant glance. Garden had then smiled sourly, shrugged his shoulders, and turned back to the ledger.

Hammle maintained his complacent, jovial manner throughout the afternoon; but even he seemed ill at ease at times, and his gaze drifted repeatedly to Kroon and Miss Weatherby. Once when Zalia Graem was at their table, he strolled over and boisterously slapped

Kroon on the back. Their conversation ceased abruptly, and Hammle filled in the sudden silence with a pointless anecdote about Salvator's race against time at Monmouth Park in 1890.

Garden did not leave his seat at the telephones, and, with the exception of an occasional furtive scrutiny of his cousin, he paid little attention to his guests....

The Second race at Rivermont Park, which went off at eight minutes after three, brought the group better results than the first. Only Kroon lost—he had played the odds-on favorite, Invulnerable, heavily to win; and Invulnerable, though in the lead coming into the stretch, quit badly. However, the next race—which took place a few minutes after half-past three—was a disappointment to every one. The even-money favorite was bumped at the stretch turn and barely managed to finish third, and an outsider, Ogowan, won the race and paid \$86.50. Luckily, no large amount had been placed on the race by any of those present. Swift, incidentally, made no wagers on any of the first three races.

The following race, the Fourth—the post time of which was announced as 4:10—was the Rivermont Handicap; and Garden had no more than cut out the amplifier after the third race, than I felt a curiously subdued and electrified atmosphere in the room.

#### 4. THE FIRST TRAGEDY

(Saturday, April 14; 8 p.m.)

"The great moment approaches!" Garden announced, and though he spoke with sententious gaiety, I could detect signs of strain in his manner. "Hannix's phone is going to be pretty busy during the last ten minutes of this momentous intermission, and I'd advise all of you to get your bets in before the post line comes across. There won't be any material changes, anyway; so speed the hopeful wagers."

There was silence for several moments, and then Swift, looking up from his card, said in a peculiarly flat voice:

"Get the latest run-down, Floyd. We haven't had one since the opening line, and there may be some shifts in the odds or a late scratch."

"Anything you say, dear cousin," Garden acceded in a cynical, yet troubled, tone, as he drew down the switch to cut in the amplifier and picked up the black receiver. He waited for a pause in the announcements from Texas and Cold Springs, and then spoke into the transmitter:

"Hello, Lex. Give me the run-down on the big one at Rivermont."

From the amplifier came the now familiar voice:

*"I just gave the latest line there. Where've YOU been?...All right, here it is, but listen this time—6, 12, 12, 5, 20, 20, 10, 6, 10, 6, 4, scratch, 20, 2. Post, 4:10..."*

Garden cut out the amplifier and looked down at the new row of figures he had hastily scribbled beside the earlier odds.

"Not very different from the morning line," he commented. "Heat Lightning, down two; Train Time, down three; Azure Star, up two; Roving Flirt, down one; Grand Score up from six to ten—what a picnic for the mater if he comes in! Risky Lad, up one—and that helps me. Head Start, down two; Sarah Dee, up one; and the rest as they were. Except Equanimity." He shot a quick look at his cousin. "Equanimity has gone from two-and-a-half to two, and I doubt if he'll pay even that much. Too many hopeful but misguided enthusiasts shoveling coarse money into the tote."[\[18\]](#)

Garden got up, mixed himself a highball, and carried it back to the table. Having disposed of it, he turned about in his chair.

"Well, aren't any of the master minds present made up?" He was a little impatient now.

Kroon rose, finished the drink which stood on the table before him, and dabbing his mouth with a neatly folded handkerchief which he took from his breast pocket, he moved toward the archway.

"My mind was made up yesterday." He spoke across the room, as if including every one. "Put me down in your fateful little book for one hundred on Hyjinx to win and two hundred on the same filly a place. And you can add two hundred on Head Start to show. Making it, all told, half a grand. That's my contribution to the afternoon's festivities."

"Head Start's a bad actor at the post," advised Garden, as he entered the bets in the ledger.

"Oh, well," sighed Kroon, "maybe he'll be a smart little boy and beat the barrier today." And he turned into the hall.

"Not deserting us, are you Cecil?" Garden called after him.

"Frightfully sorry," Kroon answered, looking back. "I'd love to stay for the race, but a legal conference at a maiden aunt's is scheduled for four-thirty, and I've got to be there. Papers to sign, and such rubbish. I'll try to get back though, if I don't have to read the bally documents." He waved his hand and, with a "Cheerio," continued down the hall.

Madge Weatherby immediately picked up her cards and moved to Zalia Graem's table, where the two women began a low, whispered conversation. Garden's inquiring glance moved from one to another of the party.

"Is that the only bet I'm to give Hannix?" he asked impatiently. "I'm warning you not to wait too long."

"Put me down for Train Time," Hammle rumbled ponderously. "I've always liked that bay colt. He's a grand stretch runner—but I don't think he'll win today. Therefore, I'm playing him place and show. Make it a hundred each."

"It's in the book," said Garden, nodding to him. "Who's next?"

At this moment a young woman of unusual attractiveness appeared in the archway—and stood there hesitantly, looking shyly at Garden. She wore a nurse's uniform of immaculate white, with white shoes and stockings, and a starched white cap set at a grotesque angle on the back of her head. She could not have been over thirty; yet there was a maturity in her calm, brown eyes, and evidence of great capability in the reserve of her expression and in the firm contour of her chin. She wore no make-up, and her chestnut hair was parted in the middle and brushed back simply over her ears. She presented a striking contrast to the two other women in the room.

"Hello, Miss Beeton," Garden greeted her pleasantly. "I thought you'd be having the afternoon off, since the mater's well enough to go shopping...What can I do for you? Care to join the madhouse and hear the races?"

"Oh, no. I've too many things to do." She moved her head slightly to indicate the rear of the house. "But if you don't mind, Mr. Garden," she added timidly, "I would like to bet two dollars on Azure Star to win, and to come in second, and to come in third."

Every one smiled covertly, and Garden chuckled. "For Heaven's sake, Miss Beeton," he chided her, "whatever put Azure Star in your mind?"

"Oh, nothing, really," she answered with a diffident smile. "But I was reading about the race in the paper this morning, and I thought that Azure Star was such a beautiful name. It—it appealed to me."

"Well, that's one way of picking 'em." Garden smiled indulgently. "Probably as good as any other. But I think you'd be better off if you forgot the beautiful name. The horse hasn't a chance. And besides, my book-maker doesn't take any bet less than five dollars."

Vance, who had been watching the girl with more interest than he usually showed in a woman, leaned forward.

"I say, Garden, just a moment." He spoke incisively. "I think Miss Beeton's choice is an excellent one—however she may have arrived at it." Then he nodded to the nurse. "Miss Beeton, I'll be very happy to see that your bet on Azure Star is placed." He turned again to Garden. "Will your book-maker take two hundred dollars across the board on Azure Star?"

"Will he? He'll grab it with both hands," Garden replied. "But why—?"

"Then it's settled," said Vance quickly. "That's my bet. And two dollars of it in each position belongs to Miss Beeton."

"That's perfect with me, Vance." And Garden jotted down the wager in his ledger.

I noticed that during the brief moments that Vance was speaking to the nurse and placing his wager on Azure Star, Swift was glowering at him through half-closed eyes. It was not until later that I understood the significance of that look.

The nurse cast a quick glance at Swift, and then spoke with simple directness.

"You are very kind, Mr. Vance." Then she added: "I will not pretend I don't know who you are, even if Mr. Garden had not called you by name." She stood looking straight at Vance with calm appraisal; then she turned and went back down the hall.

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Zalia Graem in exaggerated rapture. "The birth of Romance! Two hearts with but a single horse. How positively stunning!"

"Never mind the jealous persiflage," Garden rebuked the girl impatiently. "Choose your horse, and say how much."

"Oh, well, I can be practical, if subpoenaed," the girl returned. "I'm taking Roving Flirt to win...let's see—say, two hundred. And there goes my new spring suit!...And I might as well lose my sport coat too; so put another two hundred on him a place...And now I think I'll have a bit of liquid sustenance." And she went to the bar.

"How about you, Madge?" Garden asked, turning to Miss Weatherby. "Are you in on this classic?"

"Yes, I'm in on it," the woman answered with affected concern. "I want Sublimate, fifty across."

"Any more customers?" Garden asked, entering the bet. "I myself, if any one is interested, am pinning my youthful hopes on Risky Lad—one, two, and three hundred." He looked across the room apprehensively to his cousin. "What about you, Woody?"

Swift sat hunched in his chair, studying the card before him and smoking vigorously.

"Give Hannix the bets you've got," he said without raising his head. "Don't worry about me—I won't miss the race. It's only four o'clock."

Garden looked at him a moment and scowled.

"Why not get it off your chest now?" As there was no response, he drew the gray telephone toward him and dialed a number. A moment later he was relaying to the book-maker the various bets entered in his ledger.

Swift stood up and walked to the cabinet with its array of bottles. He filled a whiskey glass with Bourbon and drank it down. Then he walked slowly to the table where his cousin sat. Garden had just finished the call to Hannix.

"I'll give you my bet now, Floyd," Swift said hoarsely. He pressed one finger on the table, as if for emphasis. "*I want ten thousand dollars on Equanimity to win.*"

Garden's eyes moved anxiously to the other.

"I was afraid of that, Woody," he said in a troubled tone. "But if I were you—"

"I'm not asking you for advice," Swift interrupted in a cold steady voice; "I'm asking you to place a bet."

Garden did not take his eyes from the man's face. He said merely:

"I think you're a damned fool."

"Your opinion of me doesn't interest me either." Swift's eyelids drooped menacingly, and a hard look came into his set face. "All I'm interested in just now is whether you're going to place that bet. If not, say so; and I'll place it myself."

Garden capitulated.

"It's your funeral," he said, and turning his back on his cousin, he took up the gray hand set again and spun the dial with determination.

Swift walked back to the bar and poured himself another generous drink of Bourbon.

"Hello, Hannix," Garden said into the transmitter. "I'm back again, with an additional bet. Hold on to your chair or you'll lose your balance. I want ten grand on Equanimity to win...Yes, that's what I said: ten G-strings—ten thousand iron men. Can you handle it? Odds probably won't be over two to one...Right-o."

He replaced the receiver and tilted back in his chair just as Swift, headed for the hall, was passing him.

"And now, I suppose," Garden remarked, without any indication of raillery, "you're going upstairs so you can be alone when the tidings come through."

"If it won't break your heart—yes." There was a resentful note in Swift's words. "And I'd appreciate it if I was not disturbed." His eyes swept a little threateningly over the others in the room, all of whom were watching him with serious intentness. Slowly he turned and went toward the archway.

Garden, apparently deeply perturbed, kept his eyes on the retreating figure. Then, as if on sudden impulse, he stood up quickly and called out: "Just a minute, Woody. I want to say a word to you." And he stepped after him.

I saw Garden put his arm around Swift's shoulder as the two disappeared down the hall.

Garden was gone from the room for perhaps five minutes, and in his absence very little was said, aside from a few constrained conventional remarks. A tension seemed to have taken possession of every one present: there was a general feeling that some unexpected tragedy was impending—or, at least, that some momentous human factor was in the balance. We all knew that Swift could not afford his extravagant bet—that, in fact, it probably represented all he had. And we knew, too, or certainly suspected, that a serious issue depended upon the outcome of his wager. There was no gaiety now, none of the former light-hearted atmosphere. The mood of the gathering had suddenly changed to one of sombre misgiving.

When Garden returned to the room his face was a trifle pale, and his eyes were downcast. As he approached our table he shook his head dejectedly.

"I tried to argue with him," he remarked to Vance. "But it was no use; he wouldn't listen to reason. He turned nasty...Poor devil! If Equanimity doesn't come in he's done for." He looked directly at Vance. "I wonder if I did the right thing in placing that bet for him. But, after all, he's of age."

Vance nodded in agreement.

"Yes, quite," he murmured dryly, "—as you say. Really, y' know, you had no alternative."

Garden took a deep breath and, sitting down at his own table, picked up the black receiver and held it to his ear.

A bell rang somewhere in the apartment, and a few moments later Sneed appeared in the archway.

"Pardon me, sir," he said to Garden, "but Miss Graem is wanted on the other telephone."

Zalia Graem stood up quickly and raised one hand to her forehead in a gesture of dismay.

"Who on earth or in the waters under the earth can that be?" Her face cleared. "Oh, I know." Then she stepped up to Sneed. "I'll take the call in the den." And she hurried from the room.

Garden had paid little attention to this interruption: he was almost oblivious to everything but his telephone, waiting for the time to switch on the amplifier. A few moments later he turned in his chair and announced:

"They're coming out at Rivermont. Say your prayers, children...Oh, I say, Zalia," he called out in a loud voice, "tell the fascinating gentleman on the phone to call you back later. The big race is about to start."

There was no response, although the den was but a few steps down the hall.

Vance rose and, crossing the room, looked down the hallway, but returned immediately to his table.

"Thought I'd inform the lady," he murmured, "but the den door is closed."

"She'll probably be out—she knows what time it is," commented Garden casually, reaching forward to throw on the amplifier.

"Floyd darling," spoke up Miss Weatherby, "why not get this race on the radio? It's being broadcast by WXZ. Don't you think it'll be more exciting that way? Gil McElroy is announcing it."

"Bully suggestion," seconded Hammle. He turned to the radio, which was just behind him, and tuned in.

"Can Woody still get it upstairs?" Miss Weatherby asked Garden.

"Oh, sure," he answered. "This key on the amplifier doesn't interfere with any of the extension phones."

As the radio tubes warmed up, McElroy's well-known voice gained in volume over the loud speaker:

*"...and Equanimity is now making trouble at the post. Took the cue from Head Start...Now they're both back in their stalls—it looks as if we might get a—Yes! They're off! And to a good even start. Hyjinx has dashed into the lead; Azure Star comes next; and Heat Lightning is close behind. The others are bunched. I can't tell one from the other yet. Wait a second. Here they come past us—we're up on the roof of the grandstand here, looking right down on them—and it's Hyjinx on top now, by two lengths; and behind her is Train Time; and—yes, it's Sublimite, by a head, or a nose, or a neck—it doesn't matter—it's Sublimite anyway. And there's Risky Lad creeping up on Sublimite...And now they're going round the first turn, with Hyjinx still in the lead. The relative positions of the ones out front haven't changed yet...They're in the backstretch, and Hyjinx is still ahead by half a length; Train Time has moved up and holds his second position by a length and a half ahead of Roving Flirt, who's in third place. Azure Star is a length behind Roving Flirt. Equanimity is pocketed, but he's coming around on the outside now; he's far behind but gaining; and just behind him is Grand Score, making a desperate effort to get in the clear..."*

At this point in the broadcast Zalia Graem appeared suddenly in the archway and stood with her eyes fixed on the radio, her hands sunk in the pockets of her tailored jacket. She rocked a little back and forth, her head slightly to one side, wholly absorbed in the description of the race.

*"...They're rounding the far turn. Equanimity has improved his position and is getting into his famous stride. Hyjinx has dropped back and Roving Flirt has taken the lead by a head, with Train Time second, by a length, in front of Azure Star, who is running third and making a grand effort...And now they're in the stretch. Azure Star has come to the front and is a full length in the lead. Train Time is making a great bid for this classic and is still in second place, a length behind Azure Star. Roving Flirt is right behind him. Hyjinx has dropped back and it looks as if she was no longer a serious contender. Equanimity is pressing hard and is now in sixth place. He hasn't much time, but he's running a beautiful race and may come up front yet. Grand Score is falling by the wayside. Sublimite is far out in front of both of them but is not gaining. And I guess the rest are out of the running...And here they come to the finish. The leaders are straight out—there won't be much change. Just a second. Here they come...AND...the winner is AZURE STAR by two lengths. Next is Roving Flirt. And a length behind him is Train Time. Upper Shelf finished fourth...Wait a minute. Here come the numbers on the board—Yes, I was right. It's 3, 4, and 2. Azure Star wins the great Rivermont Handicap. Second is Roving Flirt. And third is Train Time..."*

Hammle swung round in his chair and shut off the radio.

"Well," he said, releasing a long-held breath, "I was partly right, at that."

"Not such a hot race," Miss Graem remarked with a toss of her head. "I'll just about break even. Anyway, I won't have to join a nudist colony this spring...Now I'll go and finish my phone call." And she turned back down the hall.

Garden seemed ill at ease and, for the second time that afternoon, mixed himself a highball.

"Equanimity wasn't even in the money," he commented, as if to himself..." But the results aren't official yet. Don't let your hopes rise too high—and don't despair. The winners won't be official for a couple of minutes—and there's no telling what may happen. Remember the final race on the get-away day of the Saratoga meet, when all three placed horses were disqualified?..."[\[19\]](#)

Just then Mrs. Garden bustled into the room, her hat, fox scarf, and gloves still on, and two small packages tucked under her arm.

"Don't tell me I'm too late!" she pleaded excitedly. "The traffic was abominable—three-quarters of an hour from 50th Street and Fifth Avenue...Is the big race over?"

"All over but the O.K., mater," Garden informed her.

"And what did I do?" The woman came forward and dropped wearily into an empty chair.

"The usual," grinned Garden. "A Grand Score? Your noble steed didn't score at all. Condolences. But it's not official yet. We'll be getting the O.K. in a minute now."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mrs. Garden despondently. "The only foul claimed in a race I bet on is against my horse when he wins—and it's always allowed. Nothing can save me now. And I've just spent an outrageous sum on a Brussels lace luncheon set."

Garden cut in the amplifier. There were several moments of silence, and then:

*"It's official at Rivermont. O.K. at Rivermont. Off at 4:16. The winner is number 3, Azure Star. Number 4, Roving Flirt, second; and number 2, Train Time, third. That's 3, 4, and 2—Azure Star, Roving Flirt, and Train Time. The running 2:02 and one-fifth—a new track record. And the mats: Azure Star paid \$26.80, \$9.00 and \$6.60. Roving Flirt, \$5.20 and \$4.60. Train Time, \$8.40...Next post at 4:40..."*

"Well, there it is," said Garden glumly, throwing back the switch and making rapid notations in his ledger. "Sneed, our admirable Crichton, makes six and a half dollars. The absent Mr. Kroon loses five hundred, and the present Miss Weatherby loses one hundred and fifty. Our old fox hunter is ahead just two hundred and twenty dollars, with part of which he can buy me a good dinner tomorrow. And you, mater, lose your two hundred dollars—very sad. I myself was robbed of six hundred berries. Zalia—who gets her sizzling tips from the friend of a friend of a distant relative of the morganatic wife of a double-bug rider—is one hundred and twenty dollars to the good—enough to get shoes and a hat and a handbag to match her new spring outfit. And Mr. Vance, the eminent dopest of crimes and ponies, can now take a luxurious vacation. He's the possessor of thirty-six hundred and forty dollars— of which thirty-six dollars and forty cents goes to our dear nurse. ...And Woode, of course..." His voice trailed off.

"What *did* Woody do?" demanded Mrs. Garden, sitting up stiffly in her chair.

"I'm frightfully sorry, mater,"—her son groped for words—"but Woody didn't use his head. I tried to dissuade him, but it was no go..."

"Well, what did Woody do?" persisted Mrs. Garden. "Did he lose much?"

Garden hesitated, and before he could formulate an answer, a paralyzing sound, like a pistol shot, broke the tense silence.

Vance was the first on his feet. His face was grim as he moved rapidly toward the archway. I followed him, and just behind came Garden. As I turned into the hallway I saw the others in the drawing-room get up and move forward. Had the report not been preceded by so electric an atmosphere, I doubt if it would have caused any particular perturbation; but, in the circumstances, every one, I think, had the same thought in mind when the detonation of the shot was heard.

As we hurried down the hall Zalia Graem opened the den door.

"What was that?" she asked, her frightened eyes staring at us.

"We don't know yet," Vance told her.

In the bedroom door, at the lower end of the hall, stood the nurse, with a look of inquiring concern on her otherwise placid face.

"You'd better come along, Miss Beeton," Vance said, as he started up the stairs two at a time. "You may be needed."

Vance swung into the upper corridor and stopped momentarily at the door on the right, which led out upon the roof. This door was still propped open, and after a hasty preliminary survey through it, he stepped quickly out into the garden.

The sight that met our eyes was not wholly unexpected. There, in the low chair which he had pointed out to us earlier that afternoon, sat Woode Swift, slumped down, with his head thrown back at an unnatural angle against the rattan head-rest, and his legs straight out before him. He still wore the earphone. His eyes were open and staring; his lips were slightly parted; and his thick glasses were tilted forward on his nose.

In his right temple was a small ugly hole beneath which two or three drops of already coagulating blood had formed. His right arm hung limp over the side of the chair, and on the colored tiling just under his hand lay a small pearl-handled revolver.

Vance immediately approached the motionless figure, and the rest of us crowded about him. Zalia Graem, who had forced her way forward and was now standing beside Vance, swayed suddenly and caught at his arm. Her face had gone pale, and her eyes appeared glazed. Vance turned quickly and, putting his arm about her, half led and half carried her to a large wicker divan nearby. He made a beckoning motion of his head to Miss Beeton.

"Look after her for a moment," he requested. "And keep her head down." Then he returned to Swift. "Every one please keep back," he ordered. "No one is to touch him."

He took out his monocle and adjusted it carefully. Then he leaned over the crumpled figure in the chair. He cautiously scrutinized the wound, the top of the head, and the tilted glasses. When this examination was over he knelt down on the tiling and seemed to be searching for something. Apparently he did not find what he sought, for he stood up with a discouraged frown and faced the others.

"Dead," he announced, in an unwontedly sombre tone. "I'm taking charge of things temporarily."

Zalia Graem had risen from the divan, and the nurse was supporting her with a show of tenderness. The dazed girl was apparently oblivious to this attention and stood with her eyes fixed on the dead man. Vance stepped toward her so that he shut out the sight that seemed to hold her in fascinated horror.

"Please, Miss Beeton," he said, "take the young lady downstairs immediately." Then he added, "I'm sure she'll be all right in a few minutes."

The nurse nodded, put her arm firmly about Miss Graem, and led her into the passageway.

Vance waited until the two young women were gone: then he turned to the others.

"You will all be so good as to go downstairs and remain there until further orders."

"But what are you going to do, Mr. Vance?" asked Mrs. Garden in a frightened tone. She stood rigidly against the wall, with half-closed eyes fixed in morbid fascination on the still body of her nephew. "We must keep this thing as quiet as possible...My poor Woody!"

"I'm afraid, madam, we shall not be able to keep it quiet at all." Vance spoke with earnest significance. "My first duty will be to telephone the District Attorney and the Homicide Bureau."

Mrs. Garden gasped, and her eyes opened wide in apprehension.

"The District Attorney? The Homicide Bureau?" she repeated distractedly. "Oh, no!...Why must you do that? Surely, any one can see that the poor boy took his own life."

Vance shook his head slowly and looked squarely at the distressed woman.

"I regret, madam," he said, "that this is not a case of suicide. ...It's murder!"



## 5. A SEARCH IN THE VAULT

(Saturday, April 14; 4:30 p.m.)

Following Vance's unexpected announcement there was a sudden silence. Every one moved reluctantly toward the door to the passageway. Only Garden remained behind.

"I say, Vance,"—he spoke in a shocked, confidential tone—"this is really frightful. Are you sure you're not letting your imagination run away with you? Who could possibly have wanted to shoot poor Woody? He must have done it himself. He was always a weakling, and he's talked about suicide more than once."

Vance looked at the man coldly for a moment.

"Thanks awfully for the information, Garden." His voice was as cold as his glance. "But it won't get us anywhere now, don't y' know. Swift was murdered; and I want your help, not your skepticism."

"Anything I can do, of course," Garden mumbled hastily, apparently abashed by Vance's manner.

"Is there a telephone up here?" Vance asked.

"Yes, certainly. There's one in the study."

Garden brushed past us with nervous energy, as if glad of the opportunity for action. He threw open the door at the end of the passageway and stood aside for us to enter the study.

"Over there," he said, pointing to the desk at the far end of the room, on which stood a hand telephone. "That's an open line. No connection with the one we use for the ponies, though it's an extension of the phone in the den." He stepped swiftly behind the desk and threw a black key on the switch box that was attached to the side of the desk. "By leaving the key in this position, you are disconnected from the extension downstairs, so that you have complete privacy."

"Oh, quite," Vance nodded with a faint smile. "I use the same system in my own apartment. Thanks awfully for your thoughtfulness...And now please join the others downstairs and try to keep things balanced for a little while—there's a good fellow."

Garden took his dismissal with good grace and went toward the door.

"Oh, by the way, Garden," Vance called after him, "I'll want a little chat with you in private, before long."

Garden turned, a troubled look on his face.

"I suppose you'll be wanting me to rattle all the family skeletons for you? But that's all right. I want to be as useful as I possibly can—you believe that, I hope. I'll come back the minute you want me. I'll be down there pouring oil on the troubled waters, and when you're ready for me you've only to press that buzzer on the book-shelves there, just behind the desk." He indicated a white push-button set flush in the centre of a small square japanned box on the upright between two sections of the book-shelves. "That's part of the inter-communicating system between this room and the den. I'll see that the den door is left open, so that I can hear the buzz wherever I am."

Vance nodded curtly, and Garden, after a momentary hesitation, turned and went from the room.

As soon as Garden could be heard making his way down the stairs, Vance closed the door and went immediately to the telephone. A moment later he was speaking to Markham.

"The galloping horses, old dear," he said. "The Trojans are riding roughshod. Equanimity was needed, but came in too far behind. Result, a murder. Young Swift is dead. And it was as clever a performance as I've yet seen...No, Markham,"—his voice suddenly became grave—"I'm not spoofing. I think you'd better come immediately. And notify Heath,[\[20\]](#) if you can reach him, and the Medical Examiner. I'll carry on till you get here..."

He replaced the receiver slowly. Taking out his cigarette case, he lighted a *Régie* with that studied deliberation which, from long observation, I had come to recognize as the indication of a distressed and groping frame of mind.

"This is a subtle crime, Van," he meditated. "Too subtle for my peace of mind. I don't like it—I don't at all like it. And I don't like this intrusion of horse-racing. Sheer expediency..."

He looked about the study appraisingly. It was a room nearly twenty-five feet square, lined with books and pamphlets and filing cabinets. On some of the shelves and in cabinets and atop every available piece of furniture were specimens of a unique collection of ancient pharmacists' paraphernalia—mortars and pestles of rare earthenware, brass, and bronze, chiseled and ornamented with baluster motives, mascarons, lion herms, leafage, cherub heads, Renaissance scrollings, bird figures, and *fleurs de lis*—Gothic, Spanish, French, Flemish, many of them dating back to the sixteenth century; ancient apothecary's scales of brass and ivory, with round columns on plinths, with urn finials, supporting embossed scale pans on straight and bow-shaped steel arms—many of them of late eighteenth-century French design; numerous early pharmacy jars of various shapes, cylindrical, ovoglobular, ring-molded barrel, incurvate octagonal, ovoid, and one inverted pear, in faience, majolica, and priceless porcelains, exquisitely decorated and lettered; and various other rare and artistic pharmaceutical items—a collection bespeaking years of travel and laborious searching.[\[21\]](#)

Vance walked round the room, pausing here and there before some unique vase or jar.

"An amazin' collection," he murmured. "And not without significance, Van. It gives one an insight into the nature of the man who assembled it—an artist as well as a scientist—a lover of beauty and also a seeker for truth. Really, y' know, the two should be synonymous. However..."

He went thoughtfully to the north window and looked out on the garden. The rattan chair with its gruesome occupant could not be seen from the study, as it was far to the left of the window, near the west balustrade.

"The crocuses are dying," he murmured, "giving place to the hyacinths and daffodils; and the tulips are well on their way. Color succeeds color. A beautiful garden. But there's death every hour in a garden, Van—or else the garden itself would not live...I wonder..."

He turned from the window abruptly and came back to the desk.

"A few words with the colorless Garden are indicated, before the minions of the law arrive."

He placed his finger on the white button in the buzzer box and depressed it for a second. Then he went to the door and opened it.



Several moments went by, but Garden did not appear, and Vance again pressed the button. After a full minute or two had passed without any response to his summons, Vance started down the passageway to the stairs, beckoning me to follow.

As he came to the vault door on the right, he halted abruptly. He scrutinized the heavy calamine door for a moment or two. At first glance it seemed to be closed tightly, but as I looked at it more closely, I noticed that it was open a fraction of an inch, as if the spring catch, which locked it automatically, had failed to snap when the door had last been shut. Vance pushed on the door gently with the tips of his fingers, and it swung inward slowly and ponderously.

"Deuced queer," he commented. "A vault for preserving valuable documents—and the door unlocked. I wonder..."

The light from the hall shone into the dark recess of the vault, and as Vance pushed the door further inward a white cord hanging from a ceiling light became visible. To the end of this cord was attached a miniature brass pestle which acted as a weight. Vance stepped immediately inside and jerked the cord, and the vault was flooded with light.

"Vault" hardly describes this small storeroom, except that the walls were unusually thick, and it had obviously been constructed to serve as a burglar-proof repository. The room was about five by seven feet, and the ceiling was as high as that of the hallway. The walls were lined with deep shelves from floor to ceiling, and these were piled with all manner of papers, documents, pamphlets, filing cases, and racks of test-tubes and vials labeled with mysterious symbols. Three of the shelves were devoted to a series of sturdy steel cash and security boxes. The floor was overlaid with small squares of black and white ceramic tile.

Although there was ample room for us both inside the vault, I remained in the hallway, watching Vance as he looked about him.

"Egoism, Van," he remarked, without turning toward me. "There probably isn't a thing here that any thief would deign to steal. Formulae, I imagine—the results of experimental researches—and such abstruse items, of no value or interest to any one but the professor himself. Yet he builds a special storeroom to keep them locked away from the world..."

Vance leaned over and picked up a batch of scattered typewritten papers which had evidently been brushed down from one of the shelves directly opposite the door. He glanced at them for a moment and carefully replaced them in the empty space on the shelf.

"Rather interestin', this disarray," he observed. "The professor was obviously not the last person in here, or he would certainly not have left his papers on the floor..." He wheeled about. "My word!" he exclaimed in a low tone. "These fallen papers and that unlatched door...It could be, don't y' know." There was a suppressed excitement in his manner. "I say, Van, don't come in here; and, above all, don't touch this door-knob."

He took out his monocle and adjusted it carefully. Then he knelt down on the tiled floor and began a close inspection of the small squares, as if he were counting them. His action reminded me of the way he had inspected the tiling on the roof near the chair in which we had found young Swift. It occurred to me that he was seeking here what he had failed to find in the garden. His next words confirmed my surmise.

"It should be here," he murmured, as if to himself. "It would explain many things—it would form the first vague outline of a workable pattern..."

After searching about for a minute or two, he stopped abruptly and leaned forward eagerly. Then he took a small piece of paper from his pocket and adroitly flicked something onto it from the floor. Folding the paper carefully, he tucked it away in his waistcoat pocket. Although I was only a few feet from him and was looking directly at him, I could not see what it was that he had found.

"I think that will be all for the moment," he said, rising and pulling the cord to extinguish the light. Coming out into the hallway, he closed the vault door by carefully grasping the shank of the knob. Then he moved swiftly down the passageway, stepped through the door to the garden, and went directly to the dead man. Though his back was turned to me as he bent over the figure, I could see that he took the folded paper from his waistcoat pocket and opened it. He glanced repeatedly from the paper in his hand to the limp figure in the chair. At length he nodded his head emphatically, and rejoined me in the hallway. We descended the stairs to the apartment below.

Just as we reached the lower hall, the front door opened and Cecil Kroon entered. He seemed surprised to find us in the hall, and asked somewhat vaguely, as he threw his hat on a bench:

"Anything the matter?"

Vance studied him sharply and made no answer; and Kroon went on:

"I suppose the big race is over, damn it! Who won it—Equanimity?"

Vance shook his head slowly, his eyes fixed on the other.

"Azure Star won the race. I believe Equanimity came in fifth or sixth."

"And did Woody go in on him up to the hilt, as he threatened?"

Vance nodded. "I'm afraid he did."

"Good Gad!" Kroon caught his breath. "That's a blow for the chap. How's he taking it?" He looked away from Vance as if he would rather not hear the answer.

"He's not taking it," Vance returned quietly. "He's dead."

"No!" Kroon sucked in his breath with a whistling sound, and his eyes slowly contracted. When he had apparently recovered from the shock he spoke in a hushed voice: "So he shot himself, did he?"

Vance's eyebrows went up slightly.

"That's the general impression," he returned blandly. "You're not psychic—are you? I didn't mention how Swift died, but the fact is, he did die by a revolver shot. Superficially, I admit, it looks like suicide." Vance smiled coldly. "Your reaction is most interestin'. Why, for instance, did you assume that he shot himself, instead of—let us say—jumping off the roof?"

Kroon set his mouth in a straight line, and a look of anger came into his narrowed eyes. He fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette, and finally stammered:

"I don't know—exactly...except that—most people shoot themselves nowadays."

"Oh, quite." Vance's lips were still set in a stern smile. "Not an uncommon way of assisting oneself out of this troublous world. But, really y' know, I didn't mention suicide at all. Why do you take it for granted that his death was self-inflicted?"

Kroon became aggressive. "He was healthy enough when I left here. No one's going to blow a man's brains out in public like this."

"Blow his brains out?" Vance repeated. "How do you know he wasn't shot through the heart?" Kroon was now obviously flustered.

"I—I merely assumed—"

Vance interrupted the man's embarrassment.

"However," he said, without relaxing his calculating scrutiny, "your academic conclusions regarding a more or less public murder are not without some logic. But the fact remains, some one did actually shoot Swift through the head—and practically in public. Things like that do happen, don't y' know. Logic has very little bearing on life and death—and horse-racing. Logic is the most perfect artificial means of arriving at a false conclusion." He held a light to Kroon's cigarette. "However, I could bear to know just where you've been and just when you returned to the apartment house here."

Kroon's gaze wandered, and he took two deep puffs on his cigarette before he answered.

"I believe I remarked before I went out," he said, with an attempt at serenity, "that I was going to a relative's to sign some silly legal documents—"

"And may I have the name and address of your relative—an aunt, I believe you said?" Vance requested pleasantly. "I'm in charge of the situation here until the officials arrive."

Kroon took the cigarette from his mouth with a forced air of nonchalance and drew himself up haughtily.

"I cannot see," he replied stiffly, "that that information concerns any one but myself."

"Neither can I," admitted Vance cheerfully. "I was merely hopin' for frankness. But I can assure you, in view of what has happened here this afternoon, that the police will want to know exactly when you returned from your mysterious signing of documents."

Kroon smirked. "You surely don't think that I've been lingering outside in the hall, do you? I arrived a few minutes ago and came directly up here."

"Thanks awfully," Vance murmured. "And now I must ask you to join the others in the drawing-room, and to wait there until the police arrive. I trust you have no objections."

"None whatever, I assure you," Kroon returned with a display of cynical amusement. "The regular police will be a relief, after this amateur hocus-pocus." He swaggered up the hall toward the archway, with his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets.

When Kroon had disappeared into the drawing-room, Vance went immediately to the front door, opened it quietly and, walking down the narrow public corridor, pressed the elevator button. A few moments later the sliding door opened and a dark, thin, intelligent-looking boy of perhaps twenty-two, in a light-blue uniform, looked out enquiringly.

"Going down?" he said respectfully.

"I'm not going down," Vance replied. "I merely wanted to ask you a question or two. I'm more or less connected with the District Attorney's office."

"I know you, Mr. Vance." The boy nodded alertly.

"A little matter has come up this afternoon," Vance said, "and I think you may be able to help me..."

"I'll tell you anything I know," agreed the boy.

"Excellent! Do you know a Mr. Kroon who visits the Garden apartment?— The gentleman is blond and has a waxed mustache."

"Sure, I know him," the boy returned promptly. "He comes up here nearly every afternoon. I brought him up today."

"About what time was that?"

"Two or three o'clock, I guess." The boy frowned. "Isn't he in there?"

Vance answered the question by asking another. "Have you been on the car all afternoon?"

"Sure I have—since noon. I don't get relieved till seven o'clock."

"And you haven't seen Mr. Kroon since you brought him up here early this afternoon?"

The boy shook his head. "No, sir; I haven't."

"I was under the impression," said Vance, "that Mr. Kroon went out about an hour ago and just returned."

Again the boy shook his head, and gave Vance a puzzled look.

"No. I only brought him up once today; and that was at least two hours ago. I haven't seen him since, going up or down."

The annunciator buzzed, and Vance quickly handed the boy a folded bill.

"Many thanks," he said. "That's all I wanted to know."

The boy pocketed the money and released the door as we turned back to the apartment.

When we re-entered the front hall, the nurse was standing in the doorway of the bedroom at the right of the entrance. There was a worried, inquisitive look in her eyes.

Vance closed the door softly and was about to start up the hall, but he hesitated and turned toward the girl.

"You look troubled, Miss Beeton," he said kindly. "But, after all, you should be accustomed to death."

"I am accustomed to it," she answered in a low voice. "But this is so different. It came so suddenly—without any warning...Although," she added, "Mr. Swift always impressed me as more or less the suicidal type."

Vance looked at the nurse appraisingly. "Your impression may have been correct," he said. "But it happens that Swift did not commit suicide."

The girl's eyes opened wide: she caught her breath and leaned against the casing of the door. Her face paled perceptibly.

"You mean someone shot him?" Her words were barely audible. "But who— who—?"

"We don't know." Vance's voice was matter-of-fact. "But we must find that out...Would you like to help me, Miss Beeton?"

She drew herself up; her features relaxed; and she was once more the unperturbed and efficient nurse.

"I'd be very glad to." There was more than a suggestion of eagerness in her words.

"Then I would like you to stand guard, as it were," he said, with a faint friendly smile. "I want to talk to Mr. Garden, and I don't want any one to go upstairs. Would you mind taking your post in this chair and notifying me immediately if any one should attempt to go up?"

"That's so little to ask," the girl replied, as she seated herself in a chair at the foot of the stairs.

Vance thanked her and proceeded to the den. Inside Garden and Zalia Graem were sitting close together on a tapestry davenport and talking in low, confidential tones. An indistinct murmur of voices from beyond the archway indicated that the other members of the

group were in the drawing-room.

Garden and Miss Graem drew apart quickly as we stepped into the den. Vance ignored their apparent embarrassment and addressed Garden as if he were unaware that he had interrupted a *tête-à-tête*.

"I've called the District Attorney, and he has notified the police. They should be here any minute now. In the meantime, I'd like to see you alone." He turned his head to Miss Graem and added: "I hope you won't mind."

The girl stood up and arched her eyebrows. "Pray, don't consider me," she replied. "You may be as mysterious as you wish."

Garden rebuked her peevishly.

"Never mind the *hauteur*, Zalia." Then he turned to Vance. "Why didn't you ring the buzzer for me? I would have come up. I purposely stayed here in the den because I thought you might be wanting me."

"I did ring, don't y' know," Vance told him. "Twice, in fact. But as you didn't come up, I came down."

"There was no signal here," Garden assured him. "And I've been right here ever since I came downstairs."

"I can vouch for that," put in Miss Graem.

Vance's eyes rested on her for a moment, and there was the trace of a sardonic smile at the corners of his mouth.

"I'm dashed grateful for the corroboration," he murmured.

"Are you sure you pressed the button?" Garden asked Vance. "It's damned funny. That system hasn't failed in six years. Wait a minute..."

Going to the door he called loudly for Sneed, and the butler came into the room almost immediately.

"Go upstairs to the study, Sneed," Garden ordered, "and push the buzzer button."

"The buzzer is out of order, sir," the butler told him imperturbably. "I've already notified the telephone company and asked them to send a man to fix it."

"When did you know about it?" Garden demanded angrily.

The nurse, who had heard the conversation, left her chair and came to the doorway.

"I discovered this afternoon that the buzzer wasn't working," she explained; "so I told Sneed about it and suggested that he notify the telephone company."

"Oh, I see. Thank you, Miss Beeton." Garden turned back to Vance. "Shall we go upstairs now?"

Miss Graem, who had been looking on with a cynical and somewhat amused expression, started from the room.

"Why go upstairs?" she asked. "I'll fade into the drawing-room, and you can talk to your heart's content right here."

Vance studied the girl for a few seconds, and then bowed slightly.

"Thank you," he said. "That will be much better." He stood aside as she strolled leisurely into the hall and closed the door after her.

Vance dropped his cigarette into a small ash tray on the tabouret before the davenport and, moving swiftly to the door, reopened it. From where I stood in the den, I could see that Miss Graem, instead of going toward the drawing-room, was walking rapidly in the opposite direction.

"Just a moment, Miss Graem!" Vance's voice was peremptory. "Please wait in the drawing-room. No one is to go upstairs just now."

She swung about. "And why not?" Her face was flushed with anger, and her jaw protruded with defiance. "I have a right to go up," she proclaimed spiritedly.

Vance said nothing but shook his head in negation, his eyes holding hers.

She returned his look, but could not resist the power of his scrutiny. Slowly she came back toward him. A sudden change seemed to have come over her. Her eyes dimmed, and tears sprang into them.

"But you don't understand," she protested, in a broken voice. "I'm to blame for this tragedy—it wasn't the race. If it hadn't been for me Woody would be alive now. I—I feel terrible about it. And I wanted to go upstairs—to see him."

Vance put his hand on the girl's shoulder. "Really," he said softly, "there's nothing to indicate that you're to blame."

Zalia Graem looked up at Vance searchingly. "Then what Floyd has been trying to tell me is true—that Woody didn't shoot himself?"

"Quite true," said Vance.

The girl drew a deep breath, and her lips trembled. She took a quick impulsive step toward Vance, and resting her head against his arm, burst into tears.

Vance placed his hands on her arms and held her away from him.

"I say, stop this nonsense," he admonished her sternly. "And don't try to be so deuced clever. Run along to the drawing-room and have a highball. It'll buck you up no end."

The girl's face, suddenly became cynical, and she drew up her shoulders in an exaggerated shrug.

"*Bien*, Monsieur Lecoq," she retorted with a toss of the head. And brushing past him, she swaggered up the hall toward the drawing-room.

## 6. AN INTERRUPTED INTERVIEW

(Saturday, April 14; 4:50 p.m.)

Vance watched her disappear. Then he turned and met the half wistful, half indignant gaze of Miss Beeton. He smiled at her a bit grimly and started back into the den. At this moment Mrs. Garden came through the archway with a look of resentful determination, and strode aggressively down the hall.

"Zalia has just told me," she said angrily, "that you forbade her to go upstairs. It's an outrage! But surely I may go up. This is my house, remember. You have no right whatever to prevent me from spending these last minutes with my nephew."

Vance turned to confront her. There was a pained look on his face, but his eyes were cold and stern.

"I have every right, madam," he said. "The situation is a most serious one, and if you will not accept that fact, it will be necessary for me to assume sufficient authority to compel you to do so."

"This is unbelievable!" the woman remonstrated indignantly.

Garden stepped to the den door.

"For Heaven's sake, mater," he pleaded, "be reasonable. Mr. Vance is quite right. And, anyway, what possible reason could you have for wanting to be with Woody now? We're in for enough scandal as it is. Why involve yourself further?"

The woman looked squarely at her son, and I had a feeling that some telepathic communication passed between them.

"It really doesn't make any particular difference," she conceded with calm resignation. But as she turned her eyes to Vance the look of cynical resentment returned. "Where, sir," she asked, "do you prefer that I remain until your policemen arrive?"

"I don't wish to seem too exacting, madam," Vance returned quietly; "but I would deeply appreciate it if you remained in the drawing-room."

The woman raised her eyebrows, shrugged her shoulders, and, turning indifferently, went back up the hall.

"Frightfully sorry, Vance," apologized Garden. "The mater is a dowager. Not accustomed to taking orders. And she resents it. I doubt if she really has the slightest desire to sit by Woody's stiffening body. But she hates to be told what to do and what not to do. She'd probably have spent the day in bed, if Doc Siefert hadn't firmly told her not to get up."

"That's quite all right." Vance spoke indifferently, gazing with perplexed meditation at the tip of his cigarette. Then he came quickly to the den door. "Let's have our little chat—eh, what?" He stood aside for Garden to enter the room; then he followed and closed the door.

Garden sat down wearily at one end of the davenport and took a pipe from a small drawer in the tabouret. He got out his tobacco and slowly packed the pipe, while Vance walked to the window and stood looking out over the city.

"Garden," he began, "there are a few things that I'd like to have cleared up before the District Attorney and the police arrive." He turned about leisurely and sat down at the desk, facing Garden. The latter was having some difficulty getting his pipe lighted. When he had finally succeeded he looked up dejectedly and met Vance's gaze.

"Anything I can do to help," he mumbled, sucking on his pipe.

"A few necessary questions, don't you know," Vance went on. "Hope they won't upset you, and all that. But the fact is, Mr. Markham will probably want me to take a hand in the investigation, since I was a witness to the preamble of this distressing tragedy."

"I hope he does," Garden returned. "It's a damnable affair, and I'd like to see the axe fall, no matter whom it might behead." His pipe was still giving him trouble. "By the way, Vance," he went on quietly, "how did you happen to come here today? I've asked you so often to join our racing séance—and you pick the one day when the roof blows off the place."

Vance kept his eyes on Garden for a moment.

"The fact is," he said at length, "I got an anonymous telephone message last night, vaguely outlining the situation here and mentioning Equanimity."

Garden jerked himself up to keener attention. His eyes opened wide, and he took the pipe from his mouth.

"The devil you say!" he exclaimed. "That's a queer one. Man or woman?"

"Oh, it was a man," Vance replied casually. Garden pursed his lips and, after a moment's meditation, said quietly:

"Well, anyway, I'm damned glad you did come...What can I tell you that might be of help? Anything you want, old man."

"First of all, then," asked Vance, "did you recognize the revolver? I saw you looking at it rather apprehensively when we came out on the roof."

Garden frowned, busied himself for a moment with his pipe, and finally answered, as if with sudden resolution:

"Yes! I did recognize it, Vance. It belongs to the old gentleman—"

"Your father?"

Garden nodded grimly. "He's had it for years. Why he ever got it in the first place, I don't know—he probably hasn't the slightest idea how to use it..."

"By the by," Vance put in, "what time does your father generally return home from the University?"

"Why—why—" Garden hesitated and then continued: "On Saturdays he's always here early in the afternoon—rarely after three. Gives himself and his staff a half-holiday...But," he added, "father's very erratic..." His voice trailed off nervously.

Vance took two deep inhalations on his cigarette: he was watching Garden attentively. Then he asked in a soft tone:

"What's on your mind?—Unless, of course, you have good reason for not wanting to tell me."

Garden took a long breath and stood up. He seemed to be deeply troubled as he walked across the room and back.

"The truth is, Vance," he said, as he resumed his place on the davenport, "I don't even know where the pater is this afternoon. As soon as I came downstairs after Woody's death, I called him to give him the news. I thought he'd want to get here as soon as possible, in the circumstances. But I was told that he'd locked up the laboratory and left the University about two o'clock." Garden looked up

quickly. "He's probably gone to the library for some research work. Or he may have swung round to Columbia. He spends a good bit of his time there."

I could not understand the man's perturbation; and I could see that it puzzled Vance as well. Vance endeavored to put him at his ease. "It really doesn't matter," he said, as if dismissing the subject. "It may be just as well that your father doesn't learn of the tragedy till later." He smoked for a moment. "But to get back to the revolver: where was it usually kept?"

"In the centre drawer of the desk upstairs," Garden told him promptly.

"And was the fact generally known to the other members of the household, or to Swift himself?"

Garden nodded. "Oh, yes. There was no secret about it. We often joked with the old gentleman about his 'arsenal.' Only last week, at dinner, he thought he heard some one in the garden and ran upstairs to see who it was. The mater called after him spoofingly: 'At last you may have a chance to use your precious revolver.' The old gentleman returned in a few minutes rather sheepishly. One of the flower-pots had been blown over and had rolled across the tiles. We all rode him good-naturedly for the rest of the meal."

"And the revolver was always loaded?"

"So far as I know, yes."

"And was there an extra supply of cartridges?"

"As to that, I cannot say," Garden answered; "but I don't think so."

"And here's a very important question, Garden," Vance went on. "How many of the people that are here today could possibly have known that your father kept this loaded revolver in his desk? Now, think carefully before answering."

Garden meditated for several moments. He looked off into space and puffed steadily on his pipe.

"I am trying to remember," he said reminiscently, "just who was here the day Zalia came upon the gun—"

"What day was that?" Vance cut in sharply.

"It was about three months ago," Garden explained. "You see, we used to have the telephone set-up connected upstairs in the study. But some of the western races came in so late that it began to interfere with the old gentleman's routine when he came home from the University. So we moved the paraphernalia down into the drawing-room. As a matter of fact, it was more convenient; and the mater didn't object—in fact, she rather enjoyed it—"

"But what happened on this particular day?" insisted Vance.

"Well, we were all upstairs in the study, going through the whole silly racing rigmarole that you witnessed this afternoon, when Zalia Graem, who always sat at the old gentleman's desk, began opening the drawers, looking for a piece of scratch paper on which to figure the mutuels. She finally opened the centre drawer and saw the revolver. She brought it out with a flourish and, laughing like a silly schoolgirl, pointed it around the room. Then she made some comments about the perfect gambling accommodations, drawing a parallel between the presence of the gun and the suicide room at Monte Carlo. 'All the conveniences of the Riviera,' she babbled. Or something to that effect. 'When you've lost your chemise, you can blow out your brains.' I reprimanded her—rather rudely, I'm afraid—and ordered her to put the revolver back in its place, as it was loaded—and just then a race came over the amplifier, and the episode was ended."

"Most interestin'," murmured Vance. "And can you recall how many of those present today were likewise present at Miss Graem's little *entr'acte*?"

"I rather think they were all there, if my memory is correct."

Vance sighed.

"A bit futile—eh, what? No possible elimination along that line."

Garden looked up, startled.

"Elimination? I don't understand. We were all downstairs here this afternoon except Kroon—and he was out—when the shot was fired."

"Quite—oh, quite," agreed Vance, leaning back in his chair. "That's the puzzlin' and distressin' part of this affair. No one could have done it, and yet someone did. But let's not tarry over the point. There are still one or two matters I want to ask you about."

"Go right ahead," Garden seemed completely perplexed...

At this moment there was a slight commotion in the hallway. It sounded as if a scuffle of some kind was in process, and a shrill, protesting voice mingled with the calm but determined tones of the nurse. Vance went immediately to the door and threw it open. There, just outside the den door, only a short distance from the stairway, were Miss Weatherby and Miss Beeton. The nurse had a firm hold on the other woman and was calmly arguing with her. As Vance stepped toward them, Miss Weatherby turned to face him and drew herself up arrogantly.

"What's the meaning of this?" she demanded. "Must I be mauled by a menial because I wish to go upstairs?"

"Miss Beeton has orders that no one is to go upstairs," Vance said sternly. "And I was unaware that she is a menial."

"But why can't I go upstairs?" the woman asked with dramatic emphasis. "I want to see poor Woody. Death is so beautiful; and I was very fond of Woody. By whose orders, pray, am I being denied this last communion with the departed?"

"By my orders," Vance told her coldly. "Furthermore, this particular death is far from beautiful, I assure you. Unfortunately, we are not living in a Maeterlinckian era. Swift's death is rather a sordid one, don't y' know. And the police will be here any minute. Until then no one will be permitted to disturb anything upstairs."

Miss Weatherby's eyes flashed.

"Then why," she demanded with histrionic indignation, "was this—this woman"—she glanced with exaggerated contempt at the nurse—"coming down the stairs herself when I came into the hall?"

Vance made no attempt to hide a smile of amusement.

"I'm sure I don't know. I may ask her later. But she happens to be under instructions from me to let no one go upstairs. Will you be so good, Miss Weatherby," he added, almost harshly, "as to return to the drawing-room and remain there until the officials arrive?"

The woman glared superciliously at the nurse, and then, with a toss of the head, strode toward the archway. There she turned and, with a cynical smirk, called back in an artificial tone:

"Blessings upon you, my children." Whereupon she disappeared into the drawing-room.

The nurse, obviously embarrassed, turned to resume her post, but Vance stopped her.

"Were you upstairs, Miss Beeton?" he asked in a kindly tone.

She was standing very erect, her face slightly flushed. But, for all her apparent mental disturbance, she was like a symbol of poise. She looked Vance frankly and firmly in the eye and slowly shook her head.

"I haven't left my post, Mr. Vance," she said quietly. "I understand my duty."

Vance returned her gaze for a moment, and then bowed his head slightly.

"Thank you, Miss Beeton," he said.

He came back into the den, and closing the door, addressed Garden again.

"Now that we have disposed temporarily of the theatrical queen,"—he smiled sombrely—"suppose we continue with our little chat."

Garden chuckled mildly and began repacking his pipe.

"Queer girl, Madge; always acting like a tragedienne—but I don't think she's ever really been on the stage. Suppressed theatrical ambition and that sort of thing. Dreams of herself as another Nazimova. And morbid as they come. Outside of that, she's a pretty regular sort. Takes her losses like an old general—and she's lost plenty the last few months..."

"You heard her tell me she was particularly fond of Swift," remarked Vance. "Just what did she mean by that?"

Garden shrugged. "Nothing at all, if you ask me. She didn't know that Woody was on earth, so to speak. But dead, Woody becomes a dramatic possibility."

"Yes, yes—quite," murmured Vance. "Which reminds me: what was the tiff between Swift and Miss Graem about? I noticed your little peace-maker advances this afternoon."

Garden became serious.

"I haven't been able to figure that situation out myself. I know they were pretty soft on each other some time ago—that is, Woody was pretty deep in the new-mown hay as far as Zalia went. Hovered round her all the time, and took all her good-natured bantering without a murmur. Then, suddenly, the embryonic love affair—or whatever it was—went sour. I'll-never-speak-to-you-again stuff. Like two kids. Both of them carrying around at least a cord of wood on each shoulder whenever the other was present. Obviously something had happened, but I never got the straight of it. It may have been a new flame on Woody's part—I rather imagine it was something of the kind. As for Zalia, she was never serious about it anyway. And I have an idea that Woody wanted that extra twenty thousand today for some reason connected with Zalia..." Garden stopped speaking abruptly and slapped his thigh. "By George! I wouldn't be surprised if that hard-bitten little gambler had turned Woody down because he was comparatively hard up. You can't tell about these girls today. They're as practical as the devil himself."

Vance nodded thoughtfully.

"Your observations rather fit with the remarks she made to me a little while ago. She, too, wanted to go upstairs to see Swift. Gave as her excuse the fact that she felt she was to blame for the whole sordid business."

Garden grinned.

"Well, there you are." Then he remarked judicially: "But you can never tell about women. One minute Zalia gives the impression of being superficial; and the next minute she'll make some comment that would almost lead you to believe she were an octogenarian philosopher. Unusual girl. Infinite possibilities there."

"I wonder." Vance smoked in silence for a moment. Then he went on: "There's another matter in connection with Swift which you might be able to clear up for me. Could you suggest any reason why, when I placed the bet on Azure Star for Miss Beeton this afternoon, Swift should have looked at me as if he would enjoy murdering me?"

"I saw that too," Garden nodded. "I can't say it meant anything much. Woody was always a weak sister where any woman was concerned. It took damned little to make him think he'd fallen in love. He may have become infatuated with the nurse—he'd been seeing her around here for the past few months. And now that you mention it, he's been somewhat poisonous toward me on several occasions because she was more or less friendly with me and ignored him entirely. But I'll say this for Woody: if he did have ideas about Miss Beeton, his taste is improving. She's an unusual girl—different..."

Vance nodded his head slowly and gazed with peculiar concentration out the window.

"Yes," he murmured. "Quite different." Then, as if bringing himself back from some alien train of thought, he crushed out his cigarette and leaned forward. "However, we'll drop speculation for the moment...Suppose you tell me something about the vault upstairs."

Garden glanced up in evident surprise.

"There's nothing to tell about that old catch-all. It's neither mysterious nor formidable. And it's really not a vault at all. Several years ago the pater found that he had accumulated a lot of private papers and experimental data that he didn't want casual callers messing in. So he had this fire-proof storeroom built to house these scientific treasures of his. The vault, as you call it, was built as much for mere privacy as for actual safe-keeping. It's just a very small room with shelves around the walls."

"Has everyone in the house access to it?" asked Vance.

"Anyone so inclined," replied Garden. "But who, in the name of Heaven, would want to go in there?"

"Really, y' know, I haven't the groggiest notion," Vance returned, "except that I found the door to it unlatched when I was coming downstairs a little while ago."

Garden shrugged carelessly, as if the matter was neither important nor unusual.

"Probably," he suggested, "the pater didn't shut the door tightly when he went out this morning. It has a spring lock."

"And the key?"

"The key is a mere matter of form. It hangs conveniently on a small nail at the side of the door."

"Accordingly," mused Vance, "the vault is readily accessible to any one in the household who cares to enter it."

"That's right," nodded the other. "But what are you trying to get at, Vance? What's the vault to do with poor Woody's death?"

"I'm not sure," returned Vance slowly, rising and going again to the window. "I wish I knew. I'm merely tryin' not to overlook any

possibility."

"Your line of inquiry sounds pretty far-fetched to me," Garden commented indifferently.

"One never knows, does one?" Vance murmured, going to the door. "Miss Beeton," he called, "will you be good enough to run upstairs and see if the key to the vault door is in its place?"

A few moments later the nurse returned and informed Vance that the key was where it was always kept.

Vance thanked her and, closing the den door, turned again to Garden.

"There's one more rather important matter that you can clear up for me— it may have a definite bearing on the situation." He sat down in a low green leather chair and took out his cigarette case. "Can the garden be entered from the fire exit opening on the roof?"

"Yes, by George!" The other sat up with alacrity. "There's a gate in the east fence of the garden, just beside the privet hedge, which leads upon the terrace on which the fire exit of the building opens. When we had the fence built we were required to put this gate in because of the fire laws. But it's rarely used, except on hot summer nights. Still, if any one came up the main stairs to the roof and went out the emergency fire door, he could easily enter our garden by coming through that gate in the fence."

"Don't you keep the gate locked?" Vance was studying the tip of his cigarette with close attention.

"The fire regulations don't permit that. We merely have an old-fashioned barn-door lift-latch on it."

"That's most interestin'," Vance commented in a low voice. "Then, as I understand it, any one coming up the main stairway could walk out through the fire exit to the terrace, and enter your garden. And, of course, return the same way."

"That's true." Garden narrowed his eyes questioningly. "Do you really think that some one may have entered the garden that way and popped poor Woody off while we were all down here?"

"I'm doing dashed little thinking at the present moment," Vance answered evasively. "I'm trying to gather some material to think about, don't y' know..."

We could hear the sharp ringing of the entrance bell, and a door opening somewhere. Vance stepped out into the hall. A moment later the butler admitted District Attorney Markham and Sergeant Heath, accompanied by Snitkin and Hennessey.[\[22\]](#)

## 7. EVIDENCE OF MURDER

(Saturday, April 14; 5:10 p.m.)

"Well, what's the trouble, Vance?" Markham demanded brusquely. "I phoned Heath, as you requested, and brought him up with me."

"It's a bad business," Vance returned. "Same like I told you. I'm afraid you're in for some difficulties. It's no ordin'ry crime. Everything I've been able to learn so far contradicts everything else." He looked past Markham and nodded pleasantly to Heath. "Sorry to make you all this trouble, Sergeant."

"That's all right, Mr. Vance." Heath held out his hand in solemn good-nature. "Glad I was in when the Chief called. What's it all about, and where do we go from here?..."

Mrs. Garden came bustling energetically down the hallway.

"Are you the District Attorney?" she asked, eyeing Markham ferociously. Without waiting for an answer, she went on: "This whole thing is an outrage. My poor nephew shot himself and this gentleman here"—she looked at Vance with supreme contempt—"is trying to make a scandal out of it." Her eyes swept over Heath and the two detectives. "And I suppose you're the police. There's no reason whatever for your being here."

Markham looked steadfastly at the woman and seemed to take in the situation immediately.

"Madam, if things are as you say," he promised in a pacifying, yet grave, tone, "you need have no fear of any scandal."

"I'll leave the matter entirely in your hands, sir," the woman returned with calm dignity. "I shall be in the drawing-room, and I trust you will notify me the moment you have done what is necessary." She turned and walked back up the hall.

"A most tryin' and complicated state of affairs, Markham," Vance took the matter up again. "I admit the chap upstairs appears to have killed himself. But that, I think, is what every one is *supposed to believe*. Tableau superficially correct. Stage direction and *décor* fairly good. But the whole far from perfect. I observed several discrepancies. As a matter of fact, the chap did not kill himself. And there are several people here who should be questioned later. They're all in the drawing-room now—except Floyd Garden."

Garden, who had been standing in the doorway to the den, came forward, and Vance introduced him to Markham and Heath. Then Vance turned to the Sergeant.

"I think you'd better have either Snitkin or Hennessey remain down here and see that no one leaves the apartment for a little while." He addressed Garden. "I hope you won't mind."

"Not at all," Garden replied complacently. "I'll join the others in the drawing-room. I feel the need of a highball, anyway." He included us all in a curt bow and moved up the hall.

"We'd better go up to the roof now, Markham," said Vance. "I'll run over the whole matter with you. There are some strange angles to the case. I don't at all like it. Rather sorry I came today. It might have passed for a nice refined suicide, with no bother or suspicion—every one smugly relieved. But here I am. However..."

He moved down the hall, and Markham and Heath and I followed him. But before he mounted the stairs he stopped and turned to the nurse.

"You needn't keep watch here any longer, Miss Beeton," he said. "And thanks for your help. But one more favor: when the Medical Examiner comes, please bring him directly upstairs."

The girl inclined her head in acquiescence and stepped into the bedroom.

We went immediately up to the garden. As we stepped out on the roof, Vance indicated the body of Swift slumped in the chair.

"There's the johnnie," he said. "Just as he was found."

Markham and Heath moved closer to the huddled figure and studied it for a few moments. At length Heath looked up with a perplexed frown.

"Well, Mr. Vance," he announced querulously, "it looks like suicide, all right." He shifted his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

Markham too turned to Vance. He nodded his agreement with the Sergeant's observation.

"It certainly has the appearance of suicide, Vance," he remarked.

"No—oh, no," Vance sighed. "Not suicide. A deuced brutal crime—and clever no end."

Markham smoked a while, still staring at the dead man skeptically; then he sat down facing Vance.

"Let's have the whole story before Doremus[23] gets here," he requested, with marked irritation.

Vance remained standing, his eyes moving aimlessly about the garden. After a moment he recounted succinctly, but carefully, the entire sequence of events of the afternoon, describing the group of people present, with their relationships and temperamental clashes; the various races and wagers; Swift's retirement to the garden for the results of the big Handicap; and, finally, the shot which had aroused us all and brought us upstairs. When he had finished, Markham worried his chin for a moment.

"I still can't see a single fact," he objected, "that does not point logically to suicide."

Vance leaned against the wall beside the study window and lighted a *Régie*.

"Of course," he said, "there's nothing in the outline I've given you to indicate murder. Nevertheless, it was murder; and that outline is exactly the concatenation of events which the murderer wants us to accept. We are supposed to arrive at the obvious conclusion of suicide. Suicide as the result of losing money on horses is by no means a rare occurrence, and only recently there has been an account of such a suicide in the papers.[24] It is not impossible that the murderer's scheme was influenced by this account. But there are other factors, psychological and actual, which belie this whole superficial and deceptive structure." He drew on his cigarette and watched the thin blue ribbon of smoke disperse in the light breeze from the river. "To begin with," he went on, "Swift was not the suicidal type. A trite observation—and one that is often untrue. But there can be little doubt of its truth in the present instance, despite the fact that young Garden has taken pains to convince me to the contr'ry. In the first place, Swift was a weakling and a highly imaginative one.



Moreover, he was too hopeful and ambitious—too sure of his own judgment and good luck—to put himself out of the world simply because he had lost all his money. The fact that Equanimity might not win the race was an eventuality which, as a confirmed gambler, he would have taken into consideration beforehand. In addition, his nature was such that, if he were greatly disappointed, the result would be self-pity and hatred of others. He might, in an emergency, have committed a crime—but it would not have been against himself. Like all gamblers, he was trusting and gullible; and I think it was these temperamental qualities which probably made him an easy victim for the murderer..."

"But see here, Vance." Markham leaned forward protestingly. "No amount of mere psychological analysis can make a crime out of a situation as seemingly obvious as this one. After all, this is a practical world; and I happen to be a member of a practical profession. I must have more definite reasons than you have given me before I would be justified in discarding the theory of suicide."

"Oh, I dare say," nodded Vance. "But I have more tangible evidence that the johnnie did not eliminate himself from this life. However, the psychological implications of the man's nature—the contradictions, so to speak, between his character and the present situation—were what led me in the first place to look for more specific and demonstrable evidence that he was not unassisted in his demise."

"Well, let's have it." Markham fidgeted impatiently in his chair.

"*Imprimis*, my dear Justinian, a bullet wound in the temple would undoubtedly cause more blood than you see on the brow of the deceased. There are, as you notice, only a few partly coagulated drops, whereas the vessels of the brain cannot be punctured without a considerable flow of blood. And there is no blood either on his clothes or on the tiles beneath his chair. Meanin' that the blood had been, perhaps, spilled elsewhere before I arrived on the scene—which was, let us say, within thirty seconds after we heard the shot—"

"But good Heavens, man!—"

"Yes, yes; I know what you're going to say. And my answer is that the gentleman did not receive the bullet in his temple as he sat in yonder chair with the head-phone on. He was shot elsewhere and brought here."

"A far-fetched theory," muttered Markham. "All wounds don't bleed the same."

Vance ignored the District Attorney's objection.

"And please take a good look at the poor fellow as he sits there, freed from all the horrors of the struggle for existence. His legs are stretched forward at an awkward angle. The trousers are twisted out of place and look most uncomfortable. His coat, though buttoned, is riding his shoulders, so that his collar is at least three inches above his exquisite mauve shirt. No man could endure to have his clothes so outrageously askew, even on the point of suicide—he would have straightened them out almost unconsciously. The *corpus delicti* shows every indication of having been dragged to the chair and placed in it."

Markham's eyes were surveying the limp figure of Swift as Vance talked.

"Even that argument is not entirely convincing," he said dogmatically, though his tone was a bit modified; "especially in view of the fact that he still wears the ear-phone..."

"Ah, exactly!" Vance took him up quickly. "That's another item to which I would call your attention. The murderer went a bit too far—there was a trifle too much thoroughness in the setting of the stage. Had Swift shot himself in that chair, I believe his first impulsive movement would have been to remove the head-phone, as it very easily could have interfered with his purpose. And it certainly would have been of no use to him after he had heard the report of the race. Furthermore, I seriously doubt if he would have come upstairs to listen to the race with his mind made up in advance that he was going to commit suicide in case his horse didn't come in. And, as I have explained to you, the revolver is one belonging to Professor Garden and was always kept in the desk in the study. Consequently, if Swift had decided, after the race had been run, to shoot himself, he would hardly have gone into the study, procured the gun, then come back to his chair on the roof and put the head-phone on again before ending his life. Undoubtedly he would have shot himself right there in the study—at the desk from which he had obtained the revolver."

Vance moved forward a little as if for emphasis.

"Another point about that head-phone—the point that gave me the first hint of murder—is the fact that the receiver at present is over Swift's right ear. Earlier today I saw Swift put the head-phone on for a minute, and he was careful to place the receiver over his left ear—the custom'ry way. The telephone receiver, d' ye see, Markham, has always been placed on the left side of the phone box, in order to leave the right hand free to make notations or for other emergencies. The result is, the left ear has adapted itself to hearing more distinctly over the wire than the right ear. And humanity, as a result, has accustomed itself to holding a telephone receiver to the left ear. Swift was merely conforming to custom and instinct when he placed the receiving end of the headphone on the left side of his head. But now the headphone is on in reversed position, and therefore unnatural. I'm certain, Markham, that head-phone was placed on Swift after he was dead."

Markham meditated on this for several moments.

"Still, Vance," he said at length, "reasonable objections could be raised to all the points you have brought up. They are based almost entirely on theory and not on demonstrable facts."

"From a legal point of view, you're right," Vance conceded. "And if these had been my only reasons for believing that a crime had been committed, I wouldn't have summoned you and the doughty Sergeant. But, even so, Markham, I can assure you the few drops of blood you see on the chappie's temple could not have thickened to the extent they had when I first saw the body—they must have been exposed to the air for several minutes. And, as I say, I was up here approximately thirty seconds after we heard the shot."

"But that being the case," returned Markham in astonishment, "how can you possibly explain the fact?"

Vance straightened a little and looked at the District Attorney with unwonted gravity.

"Swift," he said, "*was not killed by the shot we heard.*"

"That don't make sense to me, Mr. Vance," Heath interposed, scowling.

"Just a moment, Sergeant." Vance nodded to him in friendly fashion. "When I realized that the shot that wiped out this johnnie's existence was not the shot that we had heard, I tried to figure out where the fatal shot could have been fired without our hearing it below. And I've found the place. It was in a vault-like storeroom—practically sound-proof, I should say—on the other side of the passageway that leads to the study. I found the door unlocked and looked for evidence of some activity there..."

Markham had risen and taken a few nervous steps around the pool in the centre of the roof.

"Did you find any evidence," he asked, "to corroborate your theory?"

"Yes—unmistakable evidence." Vance walked over to the still figure in the chair and pointed to the thick-lensed glasses tipped forward on the nose. "To begin with, Markham, you will notice that Swift's glasses are in a position far from normal, indicatin' that they were put on hurriedly and inaccurately by some one else—just as was the head-phone."

Markham and Heath leaned over and peered at the glasses.

"Well, Mr. Vance," agreed the Sergeant, "they certainly don't look as if he had put 'em on himself."

Markham straightened up, compressed his lips, and nodded slowly.

"All right," he said; "what else?"

"Perpend, Markham." Vance pointed with his cigarette. "The left lens of the glasses—the one furthest from the punctured temple—is cracked at the corner, and there's a very small V-shaped piece missing where the crack begins—an indication that the glasses have been dropped and nicked. I can assure you that the lens was neither cracked nor nicked when I last saw Swift alive."

"Couldn't he have dropped his glasses on the roof here?" asked Heath.

"Possible, of course, Sergeant," Vance returned. "But he didn't. I carefully looked over the tiles round the chair, and the missin' bit of glass was not there."

Markham looked at Vance shrewdly.

"And perhaps you know where it is."

"Yes oh, yes." Vance nodded. "That's why I urged you to come here. That piece of glass is at present in my waistcoat pocket."

Markham showed a new interest.

"Where did you find it?" he demanded brusquely.

"I found it," Vance told him, "on the tiled floor in the vault across the hall. And it was near some scattered papers which could easily have been knocked to the floor by some one falling against them."

Markham's eyes opened incredulously, and he turned and studied the dead man again meditatively. At length he took a deep breath and pursed his lips.

"I'm beginning to see why you wanted me and the Sergeant here," he said slowly. "But what I don't understand, Vance, is that second shot that you heard. How do you account for it?"

Vance drew deeply on his cigarette.

"Markham," he answered, with quiet seriousness; "when we know how and by whom that second shot—which was obviously intended for us to hear—was fired, we will know who murdered Swift..."

At this moment the nurse appeared in the doorway leading to the roof. With her was Doctor Doremus, and behind the Medical Examiner were Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy, the finger-print men, and Peter Quackenbush, the official police photographer.

## 8. DISCONNECTED WIRES

(Saturday, April 14; 5:30 p.m.)

Miss Beeton indicated our presence on the roof with a professional nod as she stepped to one side, and the Medical Examiner strolled briskly toward us, with a "Thank you, my dear," thrown over his shoulder to the nurse.

"If I can be of any help—" the young woman offered.

"Not at the moment, thank you," replied Vance with a friendly smile; "though we may call on you later."

With an inclination of her head she indicated that she understood, and made her way back downstairs.

Doremus acknowledged our joint greetings with a breezy wave of the hand, and halted jauntily in front of Heath.

"Congratulations, Sergeant," he said in a bantering falsetto. "By Gad, congratulations!"

The Sergeant was immediately on his guard—he knew the peppery little Medical Examiner of old. "Well, what's it all about, doc?" Heath grinned.

"For once in your life," Doremus went on jocularly, "you picked the right time to summon me. Positively amazin', as Mr. Vance here would say. I wasn't eating or sleeping when your call came in. Nothing to do—bored with life, in fact. For the first time in history, you haven't dragged me away from my victuals or out from under my downy quilt. Why this sudden burst of charitable consideration?...Not a minim of vinegar in my system today. Bring on your corpses and I'll look 'em over without rancor."

Heath was amused in spite of his annoyance.

"I ain't arranging murders for your convenience. But if I caught you in an idle moment this time, it's fine with me...There's the fellow in the chair over there. It's Mr. Vance's find—and Mr. Vance has got ideas about it."

Doremus pushed his hat further back on his head, thrust his hands deep in his trousers pockets and stepped leisurely to the rattan chair with its lifeless occupant. He made a cursory examination of the limp figure, scrutinized the bullet hole, tested the arms and legs for *rigor mortis*, and then swung about to face the rest of us.

"Well, what about it?" he asked, in his easy cynical manner. "He's dead; shot in the head with a small-calibre bullet; and the lead's probably lodged in the brain. No exit hole. Looks as if he'd decided to shoot himself. There's nothing here to contradict the assumption. The bullet went into the temple, and is at the correct angle. Furthermore, there are powder marks, showing that the gun was held at very close range—almost a contact wound, I should say. There's an indication of singeing around the orifice."

He teetered on his toes and leered at the Sergeant.

"You needn't ask me how long he's been dead, for I can't tell you. The best I can do is to say that he's been dead somewhere between thirty minutes and a couple of hours. He isn't cold yet, and *rigor mortis* hasn't set in. The blood from the wound is only slightly coagulated, but the variations of this process—especially in the open air—do not permit an accurate estimate of the time involved:...What else do you want me to tell you?"

Vance took the cigarette from his mouth and addressed Doremus.

"I say, doctor; speakin' of the blood on the johnnie's temple, what would you say about the amount?"

"Too damned little, I'd say," Doremus returned promptly. "But bullet wounds have a queer way of acting sometimes. Anyway, there ought to be a lot more gore."

"Precisely," Vance nodded. "My theory is that he was shot elsewhere and brought to this chair."

Doremus made a wry face and cocked his head to one side.

"Was shot? Then you don't think it was suicide?" He pondered a moment. "It could be, of course," he decided finally. "There's no reason why a corpse can't be carried from one place to another. Find the rest of the blood and you'll probably know where his death occurred."

"Thanks awfully, doctor." Vance smiled faintly. "That did flash through my mind, don't y' know; but I believe the blood was wiped up. I was merely hopin' that your findings would substantiate my theory that he did not shoot himself while sitting in that chair, without any one else around."

Doremus shrugged indifferently.

"That's a reasonable enough assumption," he said. "There really ought to be more blood. And I can tell you that he didn't mop it up himself after the bullet was fired. He died instantly."

"Have you any other suggestions?" asked Vance.

"I may have when I've gone over the body more carefully after these babies"—he waved his hand toward the photographer and the finger-print men—"finish their hocus-pocus."

Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy had already begun their routine, with the telephone table as the starting-point; and Quackenbush was adjusting his small metal tripod.

Vance turned to Dubois. "I say, Captain, give your special attention to the head-plate, the revolver, and the glasses. Also the door-knob of the vault across the hall inside."

Dubois nodded with a grunt, and continued his delicate labors.

Quackenbush, his camera having been set up, took his pictures and then waited by the passageway door for further instructions from the finger-print officers.

When the three men had gone inside, Doremus drew in an exaggerated sigh and spoke to Heath impatiently.

"How about getting your *corpus delicti* over on the settee? Easier to examine him there."

"O.K., doc."

The Sergeant beckoned to Snitkin with his head, and the two detectives lifted Swift's limp body and placed it on the same wicker divan where Zalia Graem had lain when she collapsed at the sight of the dead man.

Doremus went to work in his usual swift and efficient fashion. When he had finished the task, he threw a steamer rug over the dead man, and made a brief report to Vance and Markham.

"There's nothing to indicate a violent struggle, if that's what you're hoping for. But there's a slight abrasion on the bridge of the nose, as if his glasses had been jerked off; and there's a slight bump on the left side of his head, over the ear, which may have been caused by a blow of some kind, though the skin hasn't been broken."

"How, doctor," asked Vance, "would the following theory square with your findings:—that the man had been shot elsewhere, had fallen to a tiled floor, striking his head against it sharply, that his glasses had been torn off when the left lens came in contact with the floor, and that he was carried out here to the chair, and the glasses replaced on his nose?"

Doremus pursed his lips and inclined his head thoughtfully.

"That would be a very reasonable explanation of the lump on his head and the abrasion on the bridge of his nose." He jerked his head up, raised his eyebrows, and smirked. "So this is another of your cock-eyed murders, is it? Well, it's all right with me. But I'll tell you right now, you won't get an autopsy report tonight. I'm bored and need excitement; and I'm going to Madison Square Garden to see Strangler Lewis and Londos have it out on the mat." He thrust his chin out in good-natured belligerence at Heath. "And I'm not going to leave my seat number at the box-office either. That's fair warning to you, Sergeant. You can either postpone your future casualties until tomorrow, or worry one of my assistants."

He made out an order for the removal of the body, readjusted his hat, waved a friendly good-bye which included all of us, and disappeared swiftly through the door into the passageway.

Vance led the way into the study, and the rest of us followed him. We were barely seated when Captain Dubois came in and reported that there were no finger-prints on any of the objects Vance had enumerated.

"Handled with gloves," he finished laconically, "or wiped clean."

Vance thanked him. "I'm not in the least surprised," he added.

Dubois rejoined Bellamy and Quackenbush in the hall, and the three made their way down the stairs.

"Well, Vance, are you satisfied?" Markham asked.

Vance nodded. "I hadn't expected any fingerprints. Cleverly thought-out crime. And what Doremus found fills some vacant spots in my own theory. Stout fella, Doremus. For all of his idiosyncrasies, he understands his business. He knows what is wanted and looks for it. There can be no question that Swift was in the vault when he was shot; that he fell to the floor, brushing down some of the papers; that he struck his head on the tiled floor, and broke the left lens of his glasses—you noted, of course, that the lump on his head is also on the left side—and that he was dragged into the garden and placed in the chair. Swift was a small, slender man; probably didn't weigh over a hundred and twenty pounds; and it would have been no great feat of strength for some one to have thus transported him after death..."

There were footsteps in the corridor and, as our eyes involuntarily turned toward the door, we saw the dignified elderly figure of Professor Ephraim Garden. I recognized him immediately from pictures I had seen.

He was a tall man, despite his stooped shoulders; and, though he was very thin, he possessed a firmness of bearing which made one feel that he had retained a great measure of the physical power that had obviously been his in youth. There was benevolence in the somewhat haggard face, but there was also shrewdness in his gaze; and the contour of his mouth indicated a latent hardness. His hair, brushed in a pompadour, was almost white and seemed to emphasize the sallowness of his complexion. His dark eyes and the expression of his face were like his son's; but he was a far more sensitive and studious type than young Garden.

He bowed to us with an old-fashioned graciousness and took a few steps into the study.

"My son has just informed me," he said in a slightly querulous voice, "of the tragedy that has occurred here this afternoon. I'm sorry that I did not return home earlier, as is my wont on Saturdays, for in that event the tragedy might have been averted. I myself would have been in the study here and would probably have kept an eye on my nephew. In any event, no one could then have got possession of my revolver."

"I am not at all sure, Doctor Garden," Vance returned grimly, "that your presence here this afternoon would have averted the tragedy. It is not nearly so simple a matter as it appears at first glance."

Professor Garden sat down in a chair of antique workmanship near the door and, clasping his hands tightly, leaned forward.

"Yes, yes. So I understand. And I want to hear more about this affair." The tension in his voice was patent. "Floyd told me that Woode's death had all the appearances of suicide, but that you do not accept that conclusion. Would it be asking too much if I requested further details with regard to your attitude in this respect?"

"There can be no doubt, sir," Vance returned quietly, "that your nephew was murdered. There are too many indications that contradict the theory of suicide. But it would be inadvisable, as well as unnecessary, to go into details at the moment. Our investigation has just begun."

"Must there be an investigation?" Professor Garden asked in tremulous protest.

"Do you not wish to see the murderer brought to justice?" Vance retorted coldly.

"Yes—yes; of course." The professor's answer was almost involuntary; but as he spoke his eyes drifted dreamily to the window overlooking the river, and he sank dejectedly a little lower into his chair. "It's most unfortunate, however," he murmured. Then he looked appealingly to Vance. "But are you sure you are right and that you are not creating unnecessary scandal?"

"Quite," Vance assured him. "Whoever committed the murder made several grave miscalculations. The subtlety of the crime was not extended through all phases of it. Indeed, I believe that some fortuitous incident or condition made certain revisions necessary at the last moment...By the by, doctor, may I ask what detained you this afternoon?—I gathered from your son that you usually return home long before this time on Saturdays."

"Of course, you may," the man replied with seeming frankness; but there was a startled look in his eyes as he gazed at Vance. "I had some obscure data to look up before I could continue with an experiment I'm making; and I thought today would be an excellent time to do it, since I close the laboratory and let my assistants go on Saturday afternoons."

"And where were you, doctor," Vance went on, "between the time you left the laboratory and the time of your arrival here?"

"To be quite specific," Professor Garden answered, "I left the University at about two and went to the public library where I remained until half an hour ago. Then I took a cab and came directly home."

"You went to the library alone?" asked Vance.

"Naturally I went alone," the professor answered tartly. "I don't take assistants with me when I have research work to do." He stood up suddenly. "But what is the meaning of all this questioning? Am I, by any chance, being called upon to furnish an alibi?"

"My dear doctor!" said Vance placatingly. "A serious crime has been committed in your home, and it is essential that we know—as a matter of routine—the whereabouts of the various persons in any way connected with the unfortunate situation."

"I see what you mean." Professor Garden inclined his head courteously and moved to the front window where he stood looking out to the low purple hills beyond the river, over which the first crepuscular shadows were creeping.

"I am glad you appreciate our difficulties," Vance said; "and I trust you will be equally considerate when I ask you just what was the relationship between you and your nephew?"

The man turned slowly and leaned against the broad sill.

"We were very close," he answered without hesitation or resentment. "Both my wife and I have regarded Woode almost as a son, since his parents died. He was not a strong person morally, and he needed both spiritual and material assistance. Perhaps because of this fundamental weakness in his nature, we have been more lenient with him than with our own son. In comparison with Woode, Floyd is a strong-minded and capable man, fully able to take care of himself."

Vance nodded with understanding.

"That being the case, I presume that you and Mrs. Garden have provided for young Swift in your wills."

"That is true," Professor Garden answered after a slight pause. "We have, as a matter of fact, made Woode and our son equal beneficiaries."

"Has your son," asked Vance, "any income of his own?"

"None whatever," the professor told him. "He has made a little money here and there, on various enterprises—largely connected with sports—but he is entirely dependent on the allowance my wife and I give him. It's a very liberal one—too liberal, perhaps, judged by conventional standards. But I see no reason not to indulge the boy. It isn't his fault that he hasn't the temperament for a professional career, and has no flair for business. And I see no point in his pursuing some uncongenial commercial routine, since there is no necessity for it. Both Mrs. Garden and I inherited our money; and while I have always regretted that Floyd had no interest in the more serious phases of life, I have never been inclined to deprive him of the things which apparently constitute his happiness."

"A very liberal attitude, doctor," Vance murmured; "especially for one who is himself so wholeheartedly devoted to the more serious things of life as you are...But what of Swift: did he have an independent income?"

"His father," the professor explained, "left him a very comfortable amount; but I imagine he squandered it or gambled most of it away."

"There's one more question," Vance continued, "that I'd like to ask you in connection with your will and Mrs. Garden's: were your son and nephew aware of the disposition of the estate?"

"I couldn't say. It's quite possible they were. Neither Mrs. Garden nor I have regarded the subject as a secret...But what, may I ask,"—Professor Garden gave Vance a puzzled look—"has this to do with the present terrible situation?"

"I'm sure I haven't the remotest idea," Vance admitted frankly. "I'm merely probin' round in the dark, in the hope of findin' some small ray of light."

Hennessey, the detective whom Heath had ordered to remain on guard below, came lumbering up the passageway to the study.

"There's a guy downstairs, Sergeant," he reported, "who says he's from the telephone company and has got to fix a bell or somethin'. He's fussed around downstairs and couldn't find anything wrong there, so the butler told him the trouble might be up here. But I thought I'd better ask you before I let him come up. How about it?"

Heath shrugged and looked inquiringly at Vance.

"It's quite all right, Hennessey," Vance told the detective. "Let him come up."

Hennessey saluted half-heartedly and went out.

"You know, Markham," Vance said, slowly and painstakingly lighting another cigarette, "I wish this infernal buzzer hadn't gone out of order at just this time. I abominate coincidences—"

"Do you mean," Professor Garden interrupted, "that inter-communicating buzzer between here and the den downstairs?...It was working all right this morning—Sneed summoned me to breakfast with it as usual."

"Yes, yes," nodded Vance. "That's just it. It evidently ceased functioning after you had gone out. The nurse discovered it and reported it to Sneed who called up the telephone company."

"It's not of any importance," the professor returned with a lackadaisical gesture of his hand. "It's a convenience, however, and saves many trips up and down the stairs."

"We may as well let the man attend to it, since he's here. It won't disturb us." Vance stood up. "And I say, doctor, would you mind joining the others downstairs? We'll be down presently, too."

The professor inclined his head in silent acquiescence and, without a word, went from the room.

Presently a tall, pale, youthful man appeared at the door to the study. He carried a small black tool-kit.

"I was sent here to look over a buzzer," he announced with surly indifference. "I didn't find the trouble downstairs."

"Maybe the difficulty is at this end," suggested Vance. "There's the buzzer behind the desk." And he pointed to the small black box with the push-button.

The man went over to it, opened his case of tools and, taking out a flashlight and a small screw-driver, removed the outer shell of the box. Fingering the connecting wires for a moment, he looked up at Vance with an expression of contempt.

"You can't expect the buzzer to work when the wires ain't connected," he commented.

Vance became suddenly interested. Adjusting his monocle, he knelt down and looked at the box.

"They're both disconnected—eh, what?" he remarked.

"Sure they are," the man grumbled. "And it don't look to me like they worked themselves loose, either."

"You think they were deliberately disconnected?" asked Vance.

"Well, it looks that way." The man was busy reconnecting the wires. "Both screws are loose, and the wires aren't bent—they look like they been pulled out."

"That's most interestin'." Vance stood up, and returned the monocle to his pocket meditatively. "It might be, of course. But I can't see why any one should have done it...Sorry for your trouble."

"Oh, that's all in the day's work," the man muttered, readjusting the cover of the box. "I wish all my jobs were as easy as this one." After a few moments he stood up. "Let's see if the buzzer will work now. Any one downstairs who'll answer if I press this?"

"I'll take care of that," Heath interposed, and turned to Snitkin. "Hop down to the den, and if you hear the buzzer down there, ring back."

Snitkin hurried out, and a few moments later, when the button was pressed, there came two short answering signals.

"It's all right now," the repair man said, packing up his tools and going toward the door. "So long." And he disappeared down the passageway.

Markham had been scrutinizing Vance closely for several minutes.

"There's something on your mind," he said seriously. "What's the point of this disconnected buzzer?"

Vance smoked for a moment in silence, looking down at the floor. Then he walked to the north window and looked out meditatively into the garden.

"I don't know, Markham. It's dashed mystifyin'. But I have a notion that the same person who fired the shot we heard disconnected those wires..."

Suddenly he stepped to one side behind the draperies and crouched down, his eyes still peering out cautiously into the garden. He raised a warning hand to us to keep back out of sight.

"Deuced queer," he said tensely. "That gate in the far end of the fence is slowly opening...Oh, my aunt!" And he swung swiftly into the passageway leading to the garden, beckoning to us to follow.

## 9. TWO CIGARETTE STUBS

(Saturday, April 14; 6 p.m.)

Vance ran past the covered body of Swift on the settee, and crossed to the garden gate. As he reached it he was confronted by the haughty and majestic figure of Madge Weatherby. Evidently her intention was to step into the garden, but she drew back abruptly when she saw us. Our presence, however, seemed neither to surprise nor to embarrass her.

"Charmin' of you to come up, Miss Weatherby," said Vance. "But I gave orders that every one was to remain downstairs."

"I had a right to come here!" she returned, drawing herself up with almost regal dignity.

"Ah!" murmured Vance. "Yes, of course. It might be, don't y' know. But would you mind explainin'?"

"Not at all." Her expression remained unchanged, and her voice was hollow and artificial. "I wished to ascertain if *he* could have done it."

"And who," asked Vance, "is this mysterious 'he'?"

"Who?" she repeated, throwing her head back sarcastically. "Why, Cecil Kroon!"

Vance's eyelids drooped, and he studied the woman narrowly for a brief moment. Then he said lightly:

"Most interestin'. But let that wait a moment. How did you get up here?"

"That was very simple." She tossed her head negligently. "I pretended to be faint and told your minion I was going into the butler's pantry to get a drink of water. I went out through the pantry door into the public hallway, came up the main stairs, and out on this terrace."

"But how did you know that you could reach the garden by this route?"

"I didn't know." She smiled enigmatically. "I was merely reconnoitring. I was anxious to prove to myself that Cecil Kroon could have shot poor Woody."

"And are you satisfied that he could have?" asked Vance quietly.

"Oh, yes," the woman replied with bitterness. "Beyond a doubt. I've known for a long time that Cecil would kill him sooner or later. And I was quite certain when you said that Woody had been murdered that Cecil had done it. But I did not understand how he could have gotten up here, after leaving us this afternoon. So I endeavored to find out."

"And why, may I ask," said Vance, "would Mr. Kroon desire to dispose of Swift?"

The woman clasped her hands theatrically against her breast. Taking a step forward, she said in a histrionically sepulchral voice:

"Cecil was jealous—frightfully jealous. He's madly in love with me. He has tortured me with his attentions..." One of her hands went to her forehead in a gesture of desperation. "There has been nothing I could do. And when he learned that I cared for Woody, he became desperate. He threatened me. I was horribly frightened. I didn't dare break everything off with him—I didn't know what he might do. So I humored him: I went about with him, hoping, hoping that this madness of his would subside. For a time I thought he was becoming more normal and rational. And then—today—this terrible crime!..." Her voice trailed off in an exaggerated sigh.

Vance's keen regard showed neither the sympathy her pompous recital called for, nor the cynicism which I knew he felt. There was only a studied interest in his gaze.

"Sad—very sad," he mumbled.

Miss Weatherby jerked her head up and her eyes flashed.

"I came up here to see if it were possible that Cecil could have done this thing. I came up in the cause of justice!"

"Very accommodatin'." Vance's manner had suddenly changed. "We're most appreciative, and all that sort of thing. But I must insist, don't y' know, that you return downstairs and wait there with the others. And you will be so good as to come through the garden and go down the apartment stairs."

He was brutally matter-of-fact as he drew the gate shut and directed the woman to the passageway door. She hesitated a moment and then followed his indicating finger. As she passed the wicker settee she stopped suddenly and sank to her knees.

"Oh, Woody, Woody!" she wailed dramatically. "It was all my fault!" She covered her face with her hands and bent her head far forward in an attitude of abject misery.

Vance heaved a deep sigh, threw away his cigarette and, taking her firmly by one arm, lifted her to her feet.

"Really, y' know, Miss Weatherby," he said brusquely, leading her toward the door, "this is not a melodrama."

She straightened up with a stifled sob and went down the passageway toward the stairs.

Vance turned to the detective and nodded toward the entrance.

"Snitkin," he said wearily, "go downstairs and tell Hennessey to keep an eye on Sarah Bernhardt till we need her."

Snitkin grinned and followed Miss Weatherby below.

When we were back in the study Vance sank into a chair and yawned.

"My word!" he complained. "The case is difficult enough without these amateur theatricals."

Markham, I could see, had been both impressed and puzzled by the incident.

"Maybe it's not all dramatics," he suggested. "The woman made some very definite statements."

"Oh, yes. She would. She's the type." Vance took out his cigarette case. "Definite statements, yes. And misleadin'. Really, y' know, I don't for a moment believe she regards Kroon as the culprit."

"Well, what then?" snapped Markham.

"Nothing—really nothing." Vance sighed. "Vanity and futility. The lady is vanity—we're futility. Neither leads anywhere."

"But she certainly has something on her mind," protested Markham.

"So have we all. I wonder...But if we could read one person's mind completely, we'd probably understand the universe. Akin to omniscience, and that sort of thing."

"God Almighty!" Markham stood up and planted himself belligerently in front of Vance. "Can't you be rational?"

"Oh, Markham—my dear Markham!" Vance shook his head sadly. "What is rationality? However...As you say. There is something back of the lady's histrionics. She has ideas. But she's circuitous. And she wants us to be like those Chinese gods who can't proceed except in a straight line. Sad. But let's try makin' a turn. The situation is something like this: An unhappy lady slips out through the butler's pantry and presents herself on the roof-garden, hopin' to attract our attention. Having succeeded, she informs us that she has proved conclusively that a certain Mr. Kroon has done away with Swift because of amorous jealousy. That's the straight line—the longest distance between two points.—Now for the curve. The lady herself, let us assume, is the spurned and not the spurner. She resents it. She has a temper and is vengeful—and she comes to the roof here for the sole purpose of convincing us that Kroon is guilty. She's not beyond that sort of thing. She'd be jolly well glad to see Kroon suffer, guilty or not."

"But her story is plausible enough," said Markham aggressively. "Why try to find hidden meanings in obvious facts? Kroon could have done it. And your psychological theory regarding the woman's motives eliminates him entirely."

"My dear Markham—oh, my dear Markham! It doesn't eliminate him at all. It merely tends to involve the lady in a rather unpleasant bit of chicanery. The fact is, her little drama here on the roof may prove most illuminatin'."

Vance stretched his legs out before him and sank deeper into his chair.

"Curious situation. Y' know, Markham, Kroon deserted the party about fifteen or twenty minutes before the big race—legal matters to attend to for a maiden aunt, he explained—and he didn't appear again until after I had phoned you. Assumed immediately that Swift had shot himself. Also mentioned a couple of accurate details. All of which could have been either the result of actual knowledge or mere guesswork. Doubt inspired me to converse with the elevator boy. I learned that Kroon had not gone down or up in the elevator since his arrival here early in the afternoon..."

"What's that!" Markham exclaimed. "That's more than suspicious—taken with what we have just heard from this Miss Weatherby."

"I dare say," Vance was unimpressed. "The legal mind at work. But from my gropin' amateur point of view, I'd want more—oh, much more. However,"—Vance rose and meditated a moment—"I'll admit that a bit of lovin' communion with Mr. Kroon is definitely indicated." He turned to Heath. "Send the chappie up, will you, Sergeant? And be sweet to him. Don't annoy him. *La politesse*. No need to put him on his guard."

Heath nodded and started toward the door. "I get you, Mr. Vance."

"And Sergeant," Vance halted him; "you might question the elevator boy and find out if there is any one else in the building whom Kroon is in the habit of calling on. If so, follow it up with a few discreet inquiries."

Heath vanished down the stairs, and a minute or so later Kroon sauntered into the study with the air of a man who is bored and not a little annoyed.

"I suppose I'm in for some more tricky questions," he commented, giving Markham and Snitkin a fleeting contemptuous glance and letting his eyes come to rest on Vance with a look of resentment. "Do I take the third-degree standing or sitting?"

"Just as you wish," Vance returned mildly; and Kroon, after glancing about him, sat down leisurely at one end of the davenport. The man's manner, I could see, infuriated Markham, who leaned forward and asked in cold anger:

"Have you any urgent reasons for objecting to give us what assistance you can in our investigation of this murder?"

Kroon raised his eyebrows and smoothed the waxed ends of his mustache:

"None whatever," he said with calm superiority. "I might even be able to tell you who shot Woody."

"That's most interestin'," murmured Vance, studying the man indifferently. "But we'd much rather find out for ourselves, don't y' know. Much more sportin', what? And there's always the possibility that our own findin's might prove more accurate than the guesses of others."

Kroon shrugged maliciously and said nothing.

"When you deserted the party this afternoon, Mr. Kroon," Vance went on in an almost lackadaisical manner, "you gratuitously informed us that you were headed for a legal conference of some kind with a maiden aunt. I know we've been over this before, but I ask again: would you object to giving us, merely as a matter of record, the name and address of your aunt, and the nature of the legal documents which lured you so abruptly away from the Rivermont Handicap, after you had wagered five hundred dollars on the outcome?"

"I most certainly would object," returned Kroon coolly. "I thought you were investigating a murder; and I assure you my aunt had nothing to do with it. I fail to see why you should be interested in my family affairs."

"Life is full of surprises, don't y' know," murmured Vance. "One never knows where family affairs and murder overlap."

Kroon chuckled mirthlessly, but checked himself with a cough.

"In the present instance, I am happy to inform you that, so far as I am concerned, they do not overlap at all."

Markham swung round toward the man.

"That's for us to decide," he snapped. "Do you intend to answer Mr. Vance's question?"

Kroon shook his head.

"I do not! I regard that question as incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial. Also frivolous."

"Yes, yes," Vance smiled at Markham. "It could be, don't y' know. However, let it pass, Markham. Present status: Name and address of maiden aunt, unknown; nature of legal documents, unknown; reason for the gentleman's reticence, also unknown."

Markham resentfully mumbled a few unintelligible words and resumed smoking his cigar while Vance continued the interrogation.

"I say, Mr. Kroon, would you also consider it irrelevant—and the rest of the legal verbiage—if I asked you by what means you departed and returned to the Garden apartment?"

Kroon appeared highly amused.

"I'd consider it irrelevant, yes; but since there is only one sane way I could have gone and come back, I'm perfectly willing to confess to you that I took a taxicab to and from my aunt's."

Vance gazed up at the ceiling as he smoked. "Suppose," he said, "that the elevator boy should deny that he took you either down or up in the car since your first arrival here this afternoon. What would you say?"



Kroon jerked himself up to attention.

"I'd say that he had lost his memory—or was lying."

"Yes, of course. The obvious retort. Quite." Vance's eyes moved slowly to the man on the davenport. "You will probably have the opportunity of saying just that on the witness stand."

Kroon's eyes narrowed and his face reddened. Before he could speak, Vance went on.

"And you may also have the opportunity of officially giving or withholding your aunt's name and address. The fact is, you may find yourself in the most distressin' need of an alibi."

Kroon sank back on the davenport with a supercilious smile.

"You're very amusing," he commented lightly. "What next? If you'll ask me a reasonable question, I'll be only too happy to answer. I'm a highly esteemed citizen of these States—always willing, not to say anxious, to assist the authorities—to aid in the cause of justice, and all that sort of rot." There was an undercurrent of venom in his contumelious tone.

"Well, let's see where we stand." Vance suppressed an amused smile. "You left the apartment at approximately a quarter to four, took the elevator downstairs and then a taxi, went to your aunt's to fuss a bit with legal documents, drove back in a taxi, and took the elevator upstairs. Bein' gone a little over half an hour. During your absence Swift was shot. Is that correct?"

"Yes." Kroon was curt.

"But how do you account for the fact that when I met you in the hall on your return, you seemed miraculously cognizant of the details of Swift's passing?"

"We've been over that, too. I knew nothing about it. You told me Swift was dead, and I merely surmised the rest."

"Yes—quite. No crime in accurate surmisals. Deuced queer coincidence, however. Taken with other facts. As likely as a five-horse win parlay. Extr'ordin'ry."

"I'm listening with great interest." Kroon had again assumed his air of superiority. "Why don't you stop beating about the bush?"

"Worth-while suggestion." Vance crushed out his cigarette and, drawing himself up in his chair, leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees. "What I was leadin' up to was the fact that some one has definitely accused you of murdering Swift."

Kroon started, and his face went pale. After a few moments he forced a harsh guttural noise intended for a laugh. "And who, may I ask, has accused me?"

"Miss Madge Weatherby."

One corner of Kroon's mouth went up in a sneer of hatred.

"She would! And she probably told you that it was a crime of passion— caused by an uncontrollable jealousy."

"Just that," nodded Vance. "It seems you have been forcing your unwelcome attentions upon her, with dire threats; whereas, all the time, she was madly enamored of Mr. Swift. And so, when the strain became too great, you eliminated your rival. Incidentally, she has a very pretty theory which fits the known facts, and which your own refusal to answer my questions bolsters up considerably."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Kroon got to his feet slowly and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. "I see what you're driving at. Why didn't you tell me this in the first place?"

"Waitin' for the final odds," Vance returned. "You hadn't laid your bet. But now that I've told you, do you care to give us the name and address of your maiden aunt and the nature of the legal documents you had to sign?"

"That's all damned nonsense," Kroon spluttered. "I don't need an alibi. When the time comes—" At this moment Heath appeared at the door, and walking directly to Vance, handed him a page torn from his note-book, on which were several lines of handwriting.

Vance read the note rapidly as Kroon looked on with malignant resentment. Then he folded the paper and slipped it into his pocket.

"When the time comes....," he murmured. "Yes—quite." He raised his eyes lazily to Kroon. "As you say. When the time comes. The time has now come, Mr. Kroon."

The man stiffened, but did not speak. I could see that he was aggressively on his guard.

"Do you, by any chance," Vance continued, "know a lady named Stella Fruemon? Has a snug little apartment on the seventeenth floor of this building—only two floors below. Says you were visitin' her around four o'clock today. Left her at exactly four-fifteen. Which might account for your not using the elevator. Also for your reluctance to give us your aunt's name and address. Might account for other things as well...Do you care to revise your story?"

Kroon appeared to be thinking fast. He walked nervously up and down the study floor.

"Puzzlin' and interestin' situation," Vance went on. "Gentleman leaves this apartment at—let's say—ten minutes to four. Family documents to sign. Doesn't enter the elevator. Appears in apartment two floors below within a few minutes—been a regular visitor there. Remains till four-fifteen. Then departs. Shows up again in this apartment at half-past four. In the meantime, Swift is shot through the head—exact time unknown. Gentleman is apparently familiar with various details of the shooting. Refuses to give information regarding his whereabouts during his absence. A lady accuses him of the murder, and demonstrates how he could have accomplished it. Also kindly supplies the motive. Fifteen minutes of gentleman's absence—namely, from four-fifteen to four-thirty—unaccounted for."

Vance drew on his cigarette.

"Fascinatin' assortment of facts. Add them up. Mathematically speakin', they make a total...I say, Mr. Kroon, any suggestions?"

Kroon came to a sudden halt and swung about.

"No!" he blurted. "Damn your mathematics! And you people hang men on such evidence!" He sucked in a deep noisy breath and made a despairing gesture. "All right, here's the story. Take it or leave it. I've been mixed up with Stella Fruemon for the past year. She's nothing but a gold-digger and blackmailer. Madge Weatherby got on to it. She's the jealous member of this combination—not me. And she cared about as much for Woode Swift as I did. Anyway, I got involved with Stella Fruemon. It came to a show-down, and I had to pay through the nose. To avoid scandal for my family, of course. Otherwise, I'd have thrown her through the window and called it my boy scout's good deed for the day. At any rate, we each got our lawyers, and a settlement was reached. She finally named a stiff figure and agreed to sign a general release from all claims. In the circumstances, I had no alternative. Four o'clock today was the time set for the completion of the transaction. My lawyer and hers were to be at her apartment. The certified check and the papers were ready. So I went down there a little before four to clean up the whole dirty business. And I cleaned it up and got out. I had walked

down the two flights of stairs to her apartment, and at four-fifteen, when the hold-up was over, I told the lady she could go to hell, and I walked back up the stairs."

Kroon took a deep breath and frowned.

"I was so furious—and relieved—that I kept on walking without realizing where I was going. When I opened the door which I thought led into the public hallway outside the Garden apartment, I found I was out on the terrace of the roof." He cocked an angry eye at Vance. "I suppose that fact is suspicious too—walking up three flights of stairs instead of two—after what I'd been through?"

"No. Oh, no." Vance shook his head. "Quite natural. Exuberant spirits. Weight off the shoulders, and all that. Three flights of stairs seemin' like two. Light impost, so to speak. Horses run better that way. Don't feel the extra furlong, as it were. Quite comprehensible...But please proceed."

"Maybe you mean that—and maybe you don't." Kroon spoke truculently. "Anyway; it's the truth...When I saw where I was I thought I'd come through the garden and go down the stairway there. It was really the natural thing to do..."

"You knew about the gate leading into the garden, then?"

"I've known about it for years. Everybody who's been up here knows about it. On summer nights Floyd used to leave the gate open and we'd walk up and down the terrace. Anything wrong with my knowing about the gate?"

"No. Quite natural. And so, you opened the gate and entered the garden?"

"Yes."

"And that would be between a quarter after four and twenty minutes after four?"

"I wasn't holding a stop-watch on myself, but I guess that's close enough...When I entered the garden I saw Swift slumped down in his chair. His position struck me as funny, but I paid no attention to it until I spoke to him and got no answer. Then I approached and saw the revolver lying on the tiles, and the hole in his head. It gave me a hell of a shock, I can tell you, and I started to run downstairs to give the alarm. But I realized it would look bad for me. There I was, alone on the roof with a dead man..."

"Ah, yes. Discretion. So you played safe. Can't say that I blame you entirely—if your chronology is accurate. So, I take it, you re-entered the public stairway and came down to the front door of the Garden apartment."

"That's just what I did." Kroon's tone was as vigorous as it was resentful.

"By the by, during the brief time you were on the roof, or even after you returned to the stairway, did you hear a shot?"

Kroon looked at Vance in obvious surprise.

"A shot? I've told you the fellow was already dead when I first saw him."

"Nevertheless," said Vance, "there was a shot. Not the one that killed him, but the one that summoned us to the roof. There were two shots, don't y' know—although no one seems to have heard the first."

Kroon thought a moment.

"By George! I did hear something, now that you put it that way. I thought nothing of it at the time, since Woody was already dead. But just as I re-entered the stairway there was an explosion of some kind outside. I thought it was a car back-firing down in the street, and paid no attention to it."

Vance nodded with a puzzled frown.

"That's very interestin'..." His eyes drifted off into space. "I wonder..." After a moment he returned his gaze to Kroon. "But to continue your tale. You say you left the roof immediately and came downstairs. But there were at least ten minutes from the time you left the garden to the time I encountered you entering the apartment at the front door. How and where did you spend these ten intervening minutes?"

"I stayed on the landing of the stairs and smoked a couple of cigarettes. I was trying to pull myself together. After what I had been through, and then finding Woody shot, I was in a hell of a mental state."

Heath stood up quickly, one hand in his outside coat pocket, and thrust out his jaw belligerently toward the agitated Kroon.

"What kind of cigarettes do you smoke?" he barked.

The man looked at the Sergeant in bewilderment, and then said: "I smoke gold-tipped Turkish cigarettes. What about it?"

Heath drew his hand from his pocket and looked at something which he held on his palm.

"All right," he muttered. Then he addressed Vance. "I got the stubs here. Picked 'em up on the landing when I came up from the dame's apartment. Thought maybe they might have some connection."

"Well, well," sneered Kroon. "So the police actually found something!...What more do you want?" he demanded of Vance.

"Nothing for the moment, thank you," Vance, returned with exaggerated courtesy. "You have done very well by yourself this afternoon, Mr. Kroon. We won't need you any more...Sergeant, give instructions to Hennessey that Mr. Kroon may leave the apartment."

Kroon went to the door without a word.

"Oh, I say." Vance delayed him at the threshold. "Do you, by any chance, possess a maiden aunt?"

Kroon looked back over his shoulder with a vicious grin.

"No, thank God!" And he slammed the door noisily behind him.

## 10. THE \$10,000 BET

(Saturday, April 14; 6:15 p.m.)

"A good story," Markham commented dryly when Kroon had gone.

"Yes, yes. Good. But reluctant." Vance appeared disturbed.

"Do you believe it?"

"My dear Markham, I keep an open mind, neither believin' nor disbelievin'. Prayin' for facts. But no facts yet. Drama everywhere, but no substance. Kroon's story is at least consistent. One of the reasons why I'm skeptical. Always distrust consistency. Too easy to manufacture. And Kroon's shrewd no end."

"Still," put in Markham, "those cigarette butts which Heath found check with his story."

"Yes. Oh, yes." Vance nodded and sighed. "I don't doubt he smoked two cigarettes on the stair landing. But he could have smoked them just as well if he'd done the johnnie in. At the moment I'm suspectin' every one here. Lot of angles protrudin' from this case."

"On the other hand," objected Markham, "with that entrance from the main stairway to the door open to anybody, why couldn't an outsider have killed Swift?"

Vance looked up at him with a melancholy air.

"Oh, Markham—my dear Markham! The legalistic intelligence at work. Ever lookin' for loopholes. The prosecutin' attorney hopin' for the best. No. Oh, no. No outsider. Too many sound objections. The murder was too perfectly timed. Only some one present could have executed it so fittingly. Moreover, it was committed in yon vault. Only some one thoroughly familiar with the Garden household and the exact situation here this afternoon could have done it..."

There was a rustle in the passageway, and Madge Weatherby came rushing into the study, with Heath following and protesting vigorously. It was obvious that Miss Weatherby had dashed up the stairs before any one could interfere with her.

"What's the meaning of this?" she demanded imperiously. "You're letting Cecil Kroon go, after what I've told you? And I"—she indicated herself with a dramatic gesture—"I am being held here, a prisoner."

Vance rose wearily and offered her a cigarette. She brushed the proffered case aside and sat down rigidly.

"The fact is, Miss Weatherby," said Vance, returning to his chair, "Mr. Kroon explained his brief absence this afternoon lucidly and with impellin' logic. It seems that he was doing nothing more reprehensible than conferring with Miss Stella Fruemon and a brace of attorneys."

"Ah!" The woman's eyes glared with venom.

"Quite so. He was breaking off with the lady for ever and ever. Also getting a release from her and from her heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, from the beginning of the world to the day of the date of these presents—I believe that is the correct legal phraseology. Really, y' know, he never cared for her. He assured us she was quite a nuisance. Was rather vehement about it. No woman would ever dominate and blackmail him—or brave words to that effect. The Cezanne slogan modified:

*Pas une gonzesse ne me mettra le grappin dessus.*"

"Is that the truth?" Miss Weatherby straightened in her chair.

"Yes, yes. No subterfuge. Kroon said you were jealous of Stella. Thought I'd relieve your mind."

"Why didn't he tell me, then?"

"There's always the possibility you didn't give him a chance."

The woman nodded vigorously.

"Yes, that's right. I wouldn't speak to him when he returned here this afternoon."

"Care to revamp your original theory?" asked Vance. "Or do you still think that Kroon is the culprit?"

"I—I really don't know now," the woman answered hesitantly. "When I last spoke to you I was terribly upset...Maybe it was all my imagination."

"Imagination—yes. Terrible and dangerous thing. Causes more misery than actuality. Especially imagination stimulated by jealousy. 'Not poppy, nor mandragora, nor all the drowsy syrups of the world'..." He looked at the woman quizzically. "Since you're not so sure that Kroon did the deed, have you any other suggestions?"

There was a tense silence. Miss Weatherby's face seemed to contract: she drew in her lips. Her eyes almost closed.

"Yes!" she exploded, leaning toward Vance with a new enthusiasm. "It was Zalia Graem who killed Woody! She had the motive, as you call it. She's capable of such things, too. She's breezy and casual enough on the outside. But inside she's a demon. She'd stop at nothing. There was something between her and Woody. Then she chucked him over. But he wouldn't let her alone. He kept on annoying her, and she ignored him. He didn't have enough money to suit her. You saw the way they acted toward each other today."

"Have you any idea as to how she managed the crime?" Vance asked quietly.

"She was out of the drawing-room long enough, wasn't she? Supposed to be telephoning. But does any one really know where she was, or what she was doing?"

"Poignant question. Situation very mysterious." Vance rose slowly and bowed to the woman. "Thanks awfully—we're most grateful. And we shall not hold you prisoner any longer. If we should need you later, we'll communicate with you."

When she had gone Markham grinned sourly. "The lady is well equipped with suspects. What do you make of this new accusation?" Vance was frowning.

"Animosity shunted from Monsieur Kroon to La Graem. Yes. Queer situation. Logically speakin', this new accusation is more reasonable than her first. It has its points...If only I could get that disconnected buzzer out of my mind. It must fit somewhere...And that second shot—the one we all heard."

"Couldn't it have been a mechanism of some kind?" suggested Markham. "It's not difficult to effect a detonation by electric wires."

Vance nodded apathetically.

"I'd thought of that. But there's nothing about the buzzer to indicate that a gadget might have been attached to it. I looked carefully while the telephone man was working on it."

Vance again moved to the buzzer and inspected it with care. Then he gave his attention to the bookshelves surrounding it. He took down a dozen or so volumes and scrutinized the empty shelves and the uprights. Finally he shook his head and returned to his chair.

"No. Nothing there. The dust behind the books is thick and shows no signs of recent disturbance. No powder marks anywhere. And no indications of a mechanism."

"It could have been removed before the repair man arrived," theorized Markham without enthusiasm.

"Yes, another possibility. I had thought of that too. But the opportunity was lacking. I came in here immediately after I had found the johnnie shot..." He took the cigarette from his lips and straightened up. "By Jove! Some one might have slipped in here when we all dashed upstairs after the shot. Remote chance, though. And yet...Another curious thing, Markham: three or four different people tried to storm this aerie while I was in the den with Garden. All of them wished to be with the corpse for *post-mortem* communion—that sort of morbid rigmarole. I wonder...However, it's too late to work from that point now. Nothing to do but to jot down those facts for future reference."

"Does the buzzer connect with any other room besides the den?"

Vance shook his head.

"No. That's the only connection."

"Didn't you say there was some one in the den at the time you heard this shot?"

Vance's gaze swept past Markham, and it was several moments before he answered.

"Yes. Zalia Graem was there. Ostensibly telephoning." His voice, I thought, was a little bitter; and I could see that his mind had gone off on a new line of thought.

Heath squinted and moved his head up and down. "Well, Mr. Vance, that gets us places."

Vance stared at him.

"Does it really, Sergeant? Where? It merely fuddles up the case—until we get some more information along the same line."

"We might get more information from the young woman herself," Markham put in sarcastically.

"Oh, yes. Quite. Obvious procedure. But I have a few queries to put to Garden first. Pavin' the way, as it were. I say, Sergeant, collect Floyd Garden and bring him here."

Garden came into the room uneasily and looking slightly haggard.

"What a mess!" he sighed, sinking dismally into a chair. He packed his pipe shakily. "Any light on the case?"

"A few fitful illuminations," Vance told him. "By the by, it seems that your guests walk in and out the front door without the formality of ringing or being announced. Is this practice customary?"

"Oh, yes. But only when we're playing the races. Much more convenient. Saves annoyance and interruptions."

"And another thing: when Miss Graem was phoning in the den and you suggested that she tell the gentleman to call back later, did you actually know that it was a man she was talking to?"

Garden opened his eyes in mild surprise.

"Why, no. I was merely ragging her. Hadn't the faintest idea. But, if it makes any difference, I'm sure Sneed could give you the information, if Miss Graem won't. Sneed answered the phone, you know."

"It's of no importance." Vance brushed the matter aside. "It might interest you to know, however, that the buzzer in this room failed to function because someone had carefully disconnected the wires."

"The devil you say!"

"Oh, yes. Quite." Vance fixed Garden with a significant look. "This buzzer, if I understand it correctly, is operated only from the den, and when we heard the shot, Miss Graem was in the den. Incidentally, the shot we all heard was not the shot that killed Swift. The fatal shot had been fired at least five minutes before that. Swift never even knew whether he had won or lost his bet."

Garden's gaze was focused on Vance with wide-eyed awe. A smothered exclamation escaped his half-parted lips. Quickly he drew himself together and, standing up, let his eyes roam vaguely about the room.

"Good God, man!" He shook his head despondently. "This thing is getting hellish. I see your implication about the buzzer and the shot we heard. But I can't see just how the trick was done." He turned to Vance with an appealing look. "Are you sure about those disconnected wires and what you say was a second shot?"

"Quite sure." Vance's tone was casual. "Sad, what? By the by, Miss Weatherby tried to convince us that Miss Graem shot Swift."

"Has she any grounds for such an accusation?"

"Only that Miss Graem had a grudge of some kind against Swift and detested him thoroughly, and that, at the supposed time of his demise, Miss Graem was absent from the drawing-room. Doubts that she was in the den phoning all the time. Thinks she was up here, busily engaged in murder."

Garden drew rapidly on his pipe and seemed to be thinking.

"Of course, Madge knows Zalia pretty well," he admitted with reluctance. "They go about a great deal together. Madge may know the inside story of the clash between Zalia and Woody. I don't. Zalia might have thought she had sufficient cause to end Woody's career. She's an amazing girl. One never quite knows what she will do next."

"Do you yourself regard Miss Graem as capable of a cold-blooded, skilfully planned murder?"

Garden pursed his lips and frowned. He coughed once or twice, as if to gain time; then he spoke.

"Damn it, Vance! I can't answer that question. Frankly, I don't know who is and who isn't capable of murder. The younger set today are all bored to death, intolerant of every restraint, living beyond their means, digging up scandal, seeking sensations of every type. Zalia is little different from the rest, as far as I can see. She always seems to be stepping on the gas and exceeding the speed limits. How far she would actually go, I'm not prepared to say. Who is, for that matter? It may be merely a big circus parade with her, or it may be fundamental—a violent reaction from respectability. Her people are eminently respectable. She was brought up strictly—even

forced into a convent for a couple of years, I believe. Then broke loose and is now having her fling..."

"A vivid, though not a sweet, character sketch," murmured Vance. "One might say offhand that you are rather fond of her but don't approve."

Garden laughed awkwardly.

"I can't say that I dislike Zalia. Most men do like her—though I don't think any of them understand her. I know I don't. There's some impenetrable wall around her. And the curious thing is, men like her although she doesn't make the slightest effort to gain their esteem or affection. She treats them shabbily—actually seems to be annoyed by their attentions."

"A poisonous, passive Dolores, so to speak."

"Yes, something like that, I should say. She's either damned superficial or deep as hell—I can't make up my mind which. As to her status in this present situation...well, I don't know. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if Madge was right about her. Zalia has staggered me a couple of times—can't exactly explain it. You remember, when you asked me about father's revolver, I told you Zalia had discovered it in that desk and staged a scene with it in this very room. Well, Vance, my blood went cold at the time. There was something in the way she did it, and in the tone of her voice, that made me actually fear that she was fully capable of shooting up the party and then walking about the room to chuckle at the corpses. No reason for my feelings, perhaps; but, believe me, I was damned relieved when she put the gun back and shut the drawer...All I can say," he added, "is that I don't wholly understand her."

"No. Of course not. No one can wholly understand another person. If any one could he'd understand everything. Not a comfortin' thought...Thanks awfully for the recital of your fears and impressions. You'll look after matters downstairs for a while, won't you?"

Garden seemed to breathe more freely on being dismissed, and, with a mumbled acquiescence, moved toward the door.

"Oh, by the by," Vance called after him. "One other little point I wish to ask you about."

Garden waited politely.

"Why," asked Vance, blowing a ribbon of smoke toward the ceiling, "didn't you place Swift's bet on Equanimity?"

The man gave a start, and his jaw dropped. He barely rescued his pipe from falling to the floor.

"You didn't place it, don't y' know," Vance went on dulcetly, gazing at Garden with dreamy, half-closed eyes. "Rather interestin' point, in view of the fact that your cousin was not destined to live long enough to collect the wager, even if Equanimity had won. And, in the circumstances, had you placed it, you would now be saddled with a ten-thousand-dollar debt—since Swift is no longer able to settle."

"God Almighty, stop it, Vance!" Garden exploded. He sank limply into a chair. "How the hell do you know I didn't place Woode's bet?"

Vance regarded the man with searching eyes.

"No bookie would take a bet of that size five minutes before post time. He couldn't absorb it. He would have to lay a lot of it off—he might even have to place some of it out of town—Chicago or Detroit. He'd need time, don't y' know. A ten-thousand-dollar bet would usually have to be placed at least an hour before the race was run. I've done a bit of hobnobbin' with bookies and race-track men."

"But Hannix—"

"Don't make a Wall-Street financier of Hannix for my benefit," Vance admonished quietly. "I know these gentlemen of the chalk and eraser as well as you do. And another thing: I happened to be sitting in a strategic position near your table when you pretended to place Swift's bet. You very deftly pulled the cord taut over the plunger of the telephone when you picked up the receiver. You were talking into a dead phone."

Garden drew himself together and capitulated with a weary shrug.

"All right, Vance," he said. "I didn't place the bet. But if you think, for one moment, that I had any suspicion that Woody was going to be shot this afternoon, you're wrong."

"My dear fellow!" Vance sighed with annoyance. "I'm not thinkin'. Higher intelligence not at work at the moment. Mind a blank. Only tryin' to add up a few figures. Ten thousand dollars is a big item. It changes our total—eh, what?...But you haven't told me why you didn't place the bet. You could have placed it. You had sufficient indication that Swift was going to wager a large sum on Equanimity, and it would only have been necess'ry to inform him that the bet had to be placed early."

Garden rose angrily, but beneath his anger was a great perturbation.

"I didn't want him to lose the money," he asserted aggressively. "I knew what it would mean to him."

"Yes, yes. The Good Samaritan. Very touchin'. But suppose Equanimity had won, and your cousin had survived—what about the pay-off?"

"I was fully prepared to run that risk. It wasn't a hell of a lot. What did the old oat-muncher pay, anyway?—less than two to one. A dollar and eighty cents to the dollar, to be exact. I would have been out eighteen thousand dollars. But there wasn't a chance of Equanimity's coming in—I was quite certain of that. I took the chance for Woody's sake. I was being decent—or weak—I don't know which. If the horse had won, I'd have paid Woody myself—and he would never have known that it wasn't Hannix's money."

Vance looked at the man thoughtfully.

"Thanks for the affectin' confession," he murmured at length. "I think that will be all for the moment."

As he spoke, two men with a long coffin-like wicker basket bustled into the passageway. Heath was at the door in two strides.

"The Public Welfare boys after the body," he announced over his shoulder.

Vance stood up.

"I say, Sergeant, have them go down the outside stairway. No use returning through the apartment." He addressed Garden again. "Would you mind showing them the way?"

Garden nodded morosely and went out on the roof. A few moments later the two carriers, with Garden leading the way, disappeared through the garden gate with their grim burden.

## 11. THE SECOND REVOLVER

(Saturday, April 14; 6:25 p.m.)

Markham regarded Vance with dismal concern. "What's the meaning of Garden's not placing that bet?"

Vance sighed.

"What's the meaning of anything? Yet, it's from just such curious facts as this that some provisional hypothesis may evolve."

"I certainly can't figure out what bearing Garden's conduct has on the case, unless—"

Vance interrupted him quickly.

"No. Puzzlin' situation. But everything we have learned so far might mean something. Provided, of course, we could read the meanin'. Emotion may be the key."

"Don't be so damned occult," snapped Markham. "What's on your mind?"

"My dear Markham! You're too flatterin'. Nothing whatever. I'm seekin' for something tangible. The other gun, for instance. The one that went off somewhere when the chappie was already dead. It should be here or hereabouts..." He turned to Heath. "I say, Sergeant, could you and Snitkin take a look for it? Suggested itiner'ry: the roof-garden and the flowerbeds, the terrace, the public stairs, the lower hallway. Then the apartment proper. Assumption: any one present may have had it. Follow up all the known local migrations of every one downstairs. If it's here it'll probably be in some tempor'ry hidin'-place, awaitin' further disposal. Don't ransack the place. And don't be too dashed official. Sweetness and light does it."

Heath grinned. "I know what you mean, Mr. Vance."

"And, Sergeant, before you start reconnoitrin', will you fetch Hammle. You'll probably find him at the bar downstairs, ingesting a Scotch-and-soda."

When Heath had gone, Vance turned to Markham.

"Hammle may have some good counsel to offer, and he may not. I don't like the man—sticky sort. We might as well get rid of him—at least tempor'rily. The place is frightfully cluttered..."

Hammle strutted pompously into the study and was cursorily presented to Markham. Through the window, in the gathering dusk, I could catch glimpses of Heath and Snitkin moving along the flower boxes.

Vance waved Hammle to a chair and studied him a moment with a melancholy air, as if endeavoring to find an excuse for the man's existence.

The interview was brief and, as it turned out, of peculiar significance. The significance lay, not so much in what Hammle said, as in the result of the curiosity which Vance's questions aroused in the man. It was this curiosity which enabled him later to supply Vance with important information.

"It is not our desire to keep you here any longer than necess'ry, Mr. Hammle,"—Vance began the interview with marked distaste—"but it occurred to me to ask you if you have any ideas that might be helpful to us in solving Swift's murder."

Hammle coughed impressively and appeared to give the matter considerable thought.

"No, I have none," he at length admitted. "None whatever. But of course one can never tell about these things. The most insignificant facts can really be interpreted seriously, provided one has given them sufficient thought. As for myself, now, I haven't duly considered the various approaches to the subject."

"Of course," Vance agreed, "there hasn't been a great deal of time for serious thought concerning the situation. But I thought there might be something in the relationships of the various people here this afternoon—and I am assuming that you are fairly familiar with them all—that might inspire you to make a suggestion."

"All I can say," returned Hammle, carefully weighing his words, "is that there were many warring elements in the gathering—that is to say, many peculiar combinations. Oh, nothing criminal." He waved his hand quickly in deprecation. "I would have you understand that absolutely. But there was a combination of this and that, which might lead to— well, to anything."

"To murder, for instance?"

Hammle frowned. "Now, murder is a very, very serious business." His tone bordered on the sententious. "But, Mr. Vance, you can take it from me, in all solemnity, I wouldn't put even murder past any of those present today. No, by Gad!"

"That's an amazin' indictment," muttered Vance; "but I'm glad to have your opinion and we'll consider it...By the by, didn't you notice anything irregular in Garden's placing Swift's large bet on Equanimity at the last minute?"

Hammle's countenance went quickly blank. He presented Vance momentarily with a perfect "poker face." Then, unable to withstand the direct scrutiny of Vance's cold gaze, he puckered up his mouth into a shrewd smile.

"Why deny it?" he chuckled. "The laying of that bet was not only irregular—it was damned near impossible. I don't know a book-maker in New York who would take such an amount when there was not even enough time to throw some 'come-back money' into the totalizator. A swell time this Hannix would have had trying to balance his book with a cloudburst like that at the last minute! The whole transaction struck me as damned peculiar. Couldn't imagine what Garden was up to."

Vance leaned forward, and his eyelids drooped as he focused his gaze on Hammle.

"That might easily have had some bearing on the situation here this afternoon, and I'd like very much to know why you didn't mention it."

For a brief moment the man seemed flustered; but almost immediately he settled back in his chair with a complacent look, and extended his hands, palms up.

"Why should I become involved?" he asked with cynical suavity. "I have never believed in bothering too much with other people's concerns. I've too many problems of my own to worry about."

"That's one way of looking at life," Vance drawled. "And it has its points. However..." He contemplated the tip of his cigarette, then

asked: "Would your discretion permit you to comment on Zalia Graem?"

Hammle sat up with alacrity.

"Ah!" He nodded his head significantly. "That's something to think about. There are varied possibilities in that girl. You may be on the right track. A most likely suspect for the murder. You never can tell about women, anyway. And, come to think of it, the shooting must have taken place during the time she was out of the room. She's a good pistol shot, too. I recall once when she came out to my estate on Long Island—she did a bit of target practice that afternoon. Oh, she knows weapons as most women know bonnets, and she's as wild as a two-year-old filly at her first barrier."

Vance nodded and waited.

"But don't think, for a minute," Hammle hurried on, "that I am intimating that she had anything to do with Swift's death. Absolutely not! But the mention of her name gave me pause." As he finished speaking he nodded his head sagely.

Vance stood up with a stifled yawn.

"It's quite evident," he said, "you're not in the mood to be specific. I wasn't looking for generalities, don't y' know. Consequently I may want to have another chat with you. Where can you be reached later, should we need you?"

"If I am permitted to go now, I shall return to Long Island immediately," Hammle answered readily, glancing speculatively at his watch. "Is that all you wish at the moment?"

"That is all, thank you."

Hammle again referred to his watch, hesitated a moment, and then left us.

"Not a nice person, Markham," Vance commented dolefully when Hammle had gone. "Not at all a nice person. As you noticed, every one, according to him, is fitted for the role of killer—every one except himself, of course. A smug creature. And that unspeakable waistcoat! And the thick soles of his shoes! And the unpresed clothes! Oh, very careless and sportin'—and very British. The uniform of the horse-and-dog gentry. Animals really deserve better associates."

He shrugged sadly and, going to the buzzer, pressed the button.

"Queer reports on that Graem girl." He walked back to his chair musingly. "The time has come to commune with the lady herself..."

Garden appeared at the door.

"Did you ring for me, Vance?"

"Yes." Vance nodded. "The buzzer is working now. Sorry to trouble you, but we would like to see Miss Graem. Would you do the honors?"

Garden hesitated, his eyes fixed sharply on Vance. He started to say something, changed his mind and, with a muttered "Right-o," swung about and returned downstairs.

Zalia Graem swaggered into the room, her hands in her jacket pockets, and surveyed us with breezy cynicism.

"My nose is all powdered for the inquisition," she announced with a twisted smile. "Is it going to take long?"

"You might better sit down." Vance spoke with stern politeness.

"Is it compulsory?" she asked.

Vance ignored the question, and she leaned back against the door.

"We're investigating a murder, Miss Graem,"—Vance's voice was courteous but firm—"and it will be necessary to ask you questions that you may deem objectionable. But please believe that it will be for your own good to answer them frankly."

"Am I a suspect? How thrilling!"

"Every one I've talked to thus far thinks so." He looked at the girl significantly.

"Oh, so that's how the going is! I'm in for a sloppy track, and I can't mud. How perfectly beastly!" She frowned. "I thought I detected a vague look of fear in people's eyes. I think I will sit down, after all." She threw herself into a chair and gazed up with simulated dejection. "Am I to be arrested?"

"Not just at the minute. But certain matters must be straightened out. It may be worth your while to help us."

"It sounds ghastly. But go ahead."

"First," said Vance, "we'd like to know about the feud between you and Swift."

"Oh, the devil!" the girl exclaimed disgustedly. "Must that be raked up? There was really nothing to it. Woody bothered the life out of me. I felt sorry for him and went around with him a bit when he implored me to and threatened to resort to all the known forms of suicide if I didn't. Then it became too much for me, and I decided to draw a line across the page. But I'm afraid I didn't go about it in a nice way. I told him I was extravagant and cared only for luxuries, and that I could never marry a poor man. I had a silly notion it might snap him out of his wistful adoration. It worked, after a fashion. He got furious and said nasty things—which, frankly, I couldn't forgive. So he took the high road, and I took the low—or the other way round."

"And so, the conclusion we may draw is that he played the horses heavily in the forlorn hope of amassing a sufficient fortune to overcome your aversion to his poverty—and that his bet on Equanimity today was a last fling—"

"Don't say that!" the girl cried, her hands tightening over the arms of the chair. "It's a horrible idea, but—it might be true. And I don't want to hear it."

Vance continued to study her critically.

"Yes, as you say. It might be true. On the other hand...however, we'll let it pass." Then he asked quickly: "Who telephoned you today, just before the Rivermont Handicap?"

"Tartarin de Tarascon," the girl replied sarcastically.

"And had you instructed this eminent adventurer to call you at just that time?"

"What has that to do with anything?"

"And why were you so eager to take the call on the den phone and shut the door?"

The girl leaned forward and looked at Vance defiantly.

"What are you trying to get at?" she demanded furiously.

"Are you aware," Vance went on, "that the den downstairs is the only room directly connected by wires with this room up here?"

The girl seemed unable to speak. She sat pale and rigid, her eyes fixed steadily on Vance.

"And do you know," he continued, without change of intonation, "that the wires at this end of the line had been disconnected? And are you aware that the shot which we heard downstairs was not the one that ended Swift's life—that he was shot in the vault off the hall, several minutes before we heard the shot?"

"You're being ghastly," the girl cried. "You're making up nightmares—nightmares to frighten me. You're implying terrible things. You're trying to torture me into admitting things that aren't true, just because I was out of the room when Woody was shot..."

Vance held up his hand to stop her reproaches. "You misinterpret my attitude, Miss Graem," he said softly. "I asked you, a moment ago, for your own sake, to answer my questions frankly. You refuse. In those circumstances, you should know the facts as they appear to others." He paused. "You and Swift were not on good terms. You knew, as did the others, that he usually went up to the roof before races. You knew where Professor Garden kept his revolver. You're familiar with guns and a good pistol shot. A telephone call for you is perfectly timed. You disappear. Within the next five minutes Swift is shot behind that steel door. Another five minutes pass; the race is over; and a shot is heard. That shot could conceivably have been fired by a mechanism. The buzzer wires up here had been disconnected, obviously for some specific purpose. At the time of the second shot you were at the other end of those wires. You almost fainted at the sight of Swift. Later you tried to go upstairs...Adding all this up: you had a motive, a sufficient knowledge of the situation, access to the criminal agent, the ability to act, and the opportunity." Vance paused again. "Now are you ready to be frank, or have you really something to hide?"

A change came over the girl. She relaxed, as if from a sudden attack of weakness. She did not take her eyes from Vance, and appeared to be appraising him and deciding what course to follow.

Before she managed to speak Heath stamped up the passageway and opened the study door. He carried a woman's black-and-white tweed top-coat over his arm. He cocked an eyebrow at Vance and nodded triumphantly.

"I take it, Sergeant," Vance drawled, "your quest has been successful. You may speak out." He turned to Zalia Graem and explained: "Sergeant Heath has been searching for the gun that fired the second shot."

The girl became suddenly animated and leaned forward attentively.

"I followed the route you suggested, Mr. Vance," Heath reported. "After going over the roof and the stairs and the hall of the apartment, I thought I'd look through the wraps hanging in the hall closet. The gun was in the pocket of this." He threw the coat on the davenport and took a .38 gun-metal revolver from his pocket. He broke it and showed it to Vance and Markham. "Full of blanks and one of 'em has been discharged."

"Very good, Sergeant," Vance complimented him. "Whose coat is this, by the by?"

"I don't know yet, Mr. Vance; but I'm going to find out *pronto*."

Zalia Graem had risen and come forward.

"I can tell you whose coat that is," she said. "It belongs to Miss Beeton, the nurse. I saw her wearing it yesterday."

"Thanks awfully for the identification," returned Vance, his eyes resting dreamily on her.

She gave him a wry smile and returned to her chair.

"But there's a question still pending," Vance said;—"to wit: are you ready to be frank now?"

"All right." She focused her gaze on Vance again. "Lemmy Merrit, one of the various scions of the horsey aristocracy that infests our eastern seaboard, asked me to drive out to Sands Point with him for the polo game tomorrow. I thought I might dig up some more exciting engagement and told him to call me here this afternoon at half-past three for a final yes or no. I purposely stipulated that time, so I wouldn't miss the running of the Handicap. As you know, he didn't call till after four, with excuses about not having been able to get to a telephone. I tried to get rid of him in a hurry, but he was persistent—the only virtue he possesses, so far as I know. I left him dangling on the wire when I came out to listen to the race, and then went back for a farewell and have-a-nice-time-without-me. Just as I hung up I heard what sounded like a shot and came to the door, to find every one hurrying along the hall. An idea went through my head that maybe Woody had shot himself—that's why I went mid-Victorian and almost passed out when I saw him. That's everything. I know nothing about wires, buzzers, or mechanical devices; and I haven't been in this room for a week. However, I'll incriminate myself to the extent of admitting that I didn't like Woody, and that on many occasions I had the desire to blow his brains out. And, as you say, I am a pretty good shot."

Vance rose and bowed.

"Thanks for your ultimate candor, Miss Graem. I'm deuced sorry I had to torture you to obtain it. And please ignore the nightmares you accused me of manufacturing. I'm really grateful to you for helping me fill in the pattern."

The girl frowned as her intense gaze rested on Vance.

"I wonder if you don't really know more about this affair than you pretend."

"My dear Miss Graem! I do not pretend to know anything about it." Vance went to the door and held it open for her. "You may go now, but we shall probably want to see you again tomorrow, and I must ask for your promise that you will stay at home where you will be available."

"Don't worry, I'll be at home." She shrugged and then added: "I'm beginning to think that maybe Ogden Nash had the right idea."

As she went out, Miss Beeton was coming up the passageway toward the study. The two women passed each other without speaking.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr. Vance," the nurse apologized, "but Doctor Siefert has just arrived and asked me to inform you that he wished very much to see you as soon as possible. Mr. Garden," she added, "has told him about Mr. Swift's death."

At that moment her gaze fell on the tweed coat, and a slight puzzled frown lined her forehead. Before she could speak Vance said:

"The Sergeant brought your coat up here. He didn't know whose it was. We were looking for something." Then he added quickly: "Please tell Doctor Siefert that I will be very glad to see him at once. And ask him if he will be good enough to come here to the study."

Miss Beeton nodded and went out, closing the door softly behind her.



## 12. POISON GAS

(Saturday, April 14; 6:40 p.m.)

Vance went to the window and looked out for some time in silence. It was obvious he was deeply troubled. Markham respected his perturbation and did not speak.

It was Vance himself who at length broke the silence.

"Markham," he said, his eyes scanning the brilliant sunset colors across the river, "the more I see of this case the less I like it. Every one seems to be trying to pin the posy of guilt on the other chap. And there's fear wherever I turn. Guilty consciences at work."

"But every one," returned Markham, "seems pretty well agreed that this Zalia Graem had a hand in it."

Vance inclined his head.

"Oh, yes," he murmured. "I had observed that fact. I wonder..."

Markham studied Vance's back for several moments.

"Do you think Doctor Siefert will be of any help?" he asked.

"He might be, of course," Vance replied. "Evidently he wants to see me. But I imagine it's curiosity as much as anything else. However, there's little that anyone who was not actually here can tell us. The difficulty in this case, Markham, lies in trying to weed out a multiplicity of misleading items..."

There was a soft knock, and Vance turned from the window. He was confronted by Garden, who had opened the study door without waiting for a summons.

"Sorry, Vance," Garden apologized, "but Doc Siefert is downstairs and says he'd like to see you, if convenient, before he goes."

Vance looked at the man a moment and frowned.

"Miss Beeton informed me of the fact a few minutes ago. I asked her to tell the doctor I would be glad to see him at once. I can't understand his sending you also. Didn't the nurse give him the message?"

"I'm afraid not. I know Siefert sent Miss Beeton up here, and I assumed, as I imagine Siefert did, that you had detained her." He looked round the room with a puzzled expression. "The fact is, I thought she was still up here."

"You mean she hasn't returned downstairs?" Vance asked.

"No, she hasn't come down yet."

Vance took a step forward.

"Are you sure of that, Garden?"

"Yes, very sure." Garden nodded vigorously. "I've been in the front hall, near the foot of the stairs, ever since Doc Siefert arrived."

Vance walked thoughtfully to a small table and broke the ashes from his cigarette.

"Did you see any of the others come down?" he asked Garden.

"Why, yes," Garden told him. "Kroon came down and went out. And then Madge Weatherby also came down and went out. And shortly after the nurse had gone up with Siefert's message to you, Zalia came down and hurried away. But that's all. And, as I say, I've been down there in the front hall all the time."

"What about Hammle?"

"Hammle? No, I haven't seen anything of him. I thought he was still here with you."

"That's deuced queer." Vance moved slowly to a chair and sat down with a perplexed frown. "It's possible you missed him. However, it doesn't matter." He had lifted his head a little and was watching Garden speculatively. "Ask the doctor to come up, will you?"

When Garden had left us Vance sat smoking and staring at the ceiling. I knew from the droop of his eyelids that he was disturbed. He moved restlessly in his chair and finally leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees.

"Deuced queer," he muttered again.

"For Heaven's sake, Vance," Markham commented irritably. "It's entirely possible Garden wasn't watching the stairs as closely as he imagines."

"Yes. Oh, yes." Vance nodded vaguely. "Everyone worried. No one on the alert. Normal mechanisms not functioning. Still, the stairs are visible half way up the hall, and the hall itself isn't very spacious..."

"It's quite possible Hammle went down the main stairs from the terrace, wishing, perhaps, to avoid the others."

"He hadn't his hat up here with him," Vance returned without looking up. "He would have had to enter the front hall and pass Garden to get it. No point in such silly manoeuvres...But it isn't Hammle I'm thinking of. It's Miss Beeton. I don't like it..." He got up slowly and took out another cigarette. "She's not the kind of girl that would neglect taking my message to Siefert immediately, unless for a very good reason."

"A number of things might have happened—" Markham began, but Vance cut in.

"Yes, of course. That's just it. Too many things have happened here today already." He went to the north window and looked out into the garden. Then he returned to the centre of the room and stood for a moment in tense meditation. "As you say, Markham." His voice was barely audible. "Something may have happened..." Suddenly he threw his cigarette into an ash tray and turned on his heel. "Oh, my word! I wonder...Come, Sergeant. We'll have to make a search—immediately."

He opened the door quickly and started down the hall. We followed him with vague apprehension, not knowing what was in his mind and with no anticipation of what was to follow. Vance peered out through the garden door. Then he turned back, shaking his head.

"No, it couldn't have been there. We would have been able to see." His eyes moved inquiringly up and down the hall, and after a moment a strange, startled look came into them. "It could be!" he exclaimed. "Oh, my aunt! Damnable things are happening here. Wait a second."

He rapidly retraced his steps to the vault door. Grasping the knob, he rattled it violently; but the door was now locked. Taking the key from its nail, he inserted it hurriedly into the lock. As he opened the heavy door a crack, a pungent, penetrating odor assailed my nostrils. Vance quickly drew back.

"Out into the air!" he called over his shoulder, in our direction. "All of you!"

Instinctively we made for the door to the garden.

Vance held one hand over his nose and mouth and pushed the vault door further inward. Heavy amber-colored fumes drifted out into the hall, and I felt a stifling, choking sensation. Vance staggered back a short step, but kept his hand on the door-knob.

"Miss Beeton! Miss Beeton!" he called. There was no response; and I saw Vance put his head down and move forward into the dense fumes that were emanating from the open door. He sank to his knees on the threshold and leaned forward into the vault. The next moment he had straightened up and was dragging the limp body of the nurse out into the passageway.

The whole episode took much less time than is required to relate it. Actually no more than ten seconds had elapsed from the time he had inserted the key into the lock. I knew what an effort he was making, for even as I stood outside the garden door, where the fumes were comparatively thin, I felt half suffocated, and Markham and Heath were choking and coughing.

As soon as the girl was out of the vault, Vance took her up in his arms and carried her unsteadily out into the garden, where he placed her gently on the wicker settee. His face was deathly pale; his eyes were watering; and he had difficulty with his breathing. When he had released the girl, he leaned heavily against one of the iron posts which supported the awning. He opened his mouth wide and sucked the fresh air into his lungs.

The nurse was gasping stertorously and clutching her throat. Although her breast was rising and falling convulsively, her whole body was limp and lifeless.

At that moment Doctor Siefert stepped through the garden door, a look of amazement on his face. He had all the outward appearance of the type of medical man Vance had described to us the night before. He was about sixty, conservatively but modishly attired, and with a bearing studiously dignified and self-sufficient.

With a great effort Vance drew himself erect.

"Hurry, doctor," he called. "It's bromin gas." He made a shaky gesture with one hand toward the prostrate figure of the nurse.

Siefert came rapidly forward, moved the girl's body into a more comfortable position and opened the collar of her uniform.

"Nothing but the air can help her," he said, as he moved one end of the settee around so that it faced the cool breeze from the river.

"How are you feeling, Vance?"

Vance was dabbing his eyes with a handkerchief. He blinked once or twice and smiled faintly.

"I'm quite all right." He went to the settee and looked down at the girl for a moment. "A close call," he murmured.

Siefert inclined his head gravely.

At this moment Hammle came strutting up briskly from a remote corner of the garden.

"Good Gad!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

Vance turned to the man in angry surprise.

"Well, well," he greeted him. "The roll call is complete. I'll tell you later what's the matter. Or perhaps you will be able to tell me. Wait over there." And he jerked his head in the direction of a chair nearby.

Hammle glared in resentment and began spluttering; but Heath, who had come quickly to his side, took him firmly by the arm and led him diplomatically to the chair Vance had indicated. Hammle sat down meekly and took out a cigarette.

"I wish I'd taken the earlier train to Long Island," he muttered.

"It might have been better, don't y' know," murmured Vance, turning away from him.

The nurse's strangled coughing had abated somewhat. Her breathing was deeper and more regular, and the gasping had partly subsided. Before long she struggled to sit up.

Siefert helped her.

"Breathe as deeply and rapidly as you can," he said. "It's air you need."

The girl made an effort to follow instructions, one hand braced against the back of the settee, and the other resting on Vance's arm.

A few minutes later she was able to speak, but with considerable difficulty.

"I feel—better now. Except for the burning—in my nose and throat."

Siefert sent Heath for some water and when the Sergeant had fetched it Miss Beeton drank a glassful in choking gulps. In another two or three minutes she seemed to have recovered to a great extent. She looked up at Vance with frightened eyes.

"What happened?" she asked.

"We don't know yet." Vance returned her gaze with obvious distress. "We only know that you were poisoned with bromin gas in the vault where Swift was shot. We were hoping that you could tell us about it yourself."

She shook her head vaguely, and there was a dazed look in her eyes.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you very much. It all happened so unexpectedly—so suddenly. All I know is that when I went to tell Doctor Siefert he might come upstairs, I was struck on the head from behind, just as I passed the garden door. The blow didn't render me entirely unconscious, but it stunned me so that I was unaware of anything or anybody around me. Then I felt myself being caught from behind, turned about, and forced back up the passageway and into the vault. I have a faint recollection of the door being shut upon me, although I wasn't sufficiently rational to protest or even to realize what had happened. But I was conscious of the fact that inside the vault there was a frightful suffocating smell. I was leaning up against the wall and it was very painful to breathe...I felt myself sinking—and that's the last I remember..." She shuddered. "That's all I knew—until just now."

"Yes. Not a pleasant experience. But it could have been much worse." Vance spoke in a low voice and smiled gravely down at the girl. "There's a bad bruise on the back of your head. That too might have been worse, but the starched band of your cap probably saved you from more serious injury."

The girl had got to her feet and stood swaying a little as she steadied herself against Vance.

"I really feel all right now." She looked at Vance wistfully. "And I have you to thank—haven't I?"

Siefert spoke gruffly. "A few more minutes of that bromin gas would have proved fatal. Whoever found you and got you out here did so just in time."

The girl had not taken her eyes from Vance.

"How did you happen to find me so soon?" she asked him.

"Belated reasoning," he answered. "I should have found you several minutes before—the moment I learned that you had not returned downstairs. But at first it was difficult to realize that anything serious could have happened to you."

"I can't understand it even now," the girl said with a bewildered air.

"Neither can I—entirely," returned Vance. "But perhaps I can learn something more."

Going quickly to the pitcher of water Heath had brought, he dipped his handkerchief into it. Pressing the handkerchief against his face, he disappeared into the passageway. A minute or so later he returned. In his hand he held a jagged piece of thin curved glass, about three inches long.

It was part of a broken vial, and still clinging to it was a small paper label on which was printed the symbol "Br."

"I found this on the tiled floor, in the far corner of the vault. It was just beneath one of the racks which holds Professor Garden's assortment of chemicals. There's an empty space in the rack, but this vial of bromin couldn't have fallen to the floor accidentally. It could only have been taken out deliberately and broken at the right moment." He handed the fragment of glass to Heath. "Take this, Sergeant, and have it gone over carefully for fingerprints. But if, as I suspect, the same person that killed Swift handled it, I doubt if there will be any telltale marks on it. However..."

Heath accepted the bit of glass gingerly, rolled it in his handkerchief and thrust it into his pocket.

"If it does show any finger-prints," he grumbled, "it'll be the first we found around here."

Vance turned to Markham, who had been standing near the rock pool during the entire scene, looking on with aggressive bewilderment.

"Bromin," he explained, "is a common reagent. It's to be found in almost every chemist's laboratory. It's one of the halogens, and, though it's never found free in nature, it occurs in various compounds. Incidentally, it got its name from the Greek bromos, which means stench. It hasn't figured very often as a criminal agent, although accidental cases of bromin poisoning are numerous. But it was used extensively during the war in the manufacture of gas bombs, for it volatilizes on coming in contact with the air. And bromin gas is suffocating and deadly. Whoever planned this lethal chamber for Miss Beeton wasn't without cruelty."

"It was a dastardly thing, Vance," Siefert burst out, his eyes flashing.

Vance nodded and his eyes moved to the nurse. "Yes. All of that, doctor. So was Swift's murder...How are you feeling now, Miss Beeton?"

"A little shaky," she answered with a weak smile. "But nothing more." She was leaning against one end of the settee.

"Then we'll carry on, what?"

"Of course," she returned in a low voice.

Floyd Garden stepped out from the hallway at this moment. He coughed and looked at us with blinking, inquisitive eyes.

"What's this beastly odor in the hall?" he asked. "It's gotten downstairs, and Sneed is already crying like a lost baby. Is anything wrong?"

"Not now. No," Vance returned. "A little bromin gas a few minutes ago; but the air will be clear in a little while. No casualties. Every one doing well...Did you want to see me?"

Garden looked round at the group on the roof with a puzzled air.

"Awfully sorry to interrupt you, Vance; but the fact is, I came for the doctor." His eyes rested on Siefert, and he smiled dryly. "It's the usual thing, doc," he said. "The mater seems almost in a state of collapse—she assured me vigorously that she hadn't an ounce of strength left. I got her to go to bed—which she seemed perfectly willing to do. But she insists on seeing you immediately. I never know when she means it and when she doesn't. But that's the message."

A worried look came into Siefert's eyes, and he took a slow deep breath before answering.

"I'll come at once, of course," he said. He looked at the nurse and then lifted his gaze to Vance. "Will you excuse me?"

Vance bowed. "Certainly, doctor. But I think Miss Beeton had better remain here in the air for a while longer."

"Oh, by all means. By all means. If I need her I'll send word. But I trust that won't be necessary." And Siefert left the roof reluctantly, with Garden following him.

Vance watched them until they turned through the door of the passageway; then he spoke to the nurse.

"Please sit here a few minutes, Miss Beeton. I want to have a talk with you. But first I'd like a minute or two with Mr. Hammle."

The nurse nodded her assent and sat down a little wearily on the settee.

Vance beckoned curtly to Hammle. "Suppose we go inside for a moment."

Hammle rose with alacrity. "I was wondering how much longer you gentlemen were going to keep me here."

Vance led the way into the study, and Markham and I followed behind Hammle.

"What were you doing on the roof, Mr. Hammle?" asked Vance. "I told you some time ago, after our brief interview, that you might go."

Hammle fidgeted. He was patently apprehensive and wary.

"There's no crime in going out into the garden for a while—is there?" he asked with unimpressive truculence.

"None whatever," Vance returned casually. "I was wonderin' why you preferred the garden to going home. Devilish things have been happening in the garden this afternoon."

"As I told you, I wish I had gone. How did I know—?"

"That's hardly the point, Mr. Hammle." Vance cut him short. "It doesn't answer my question."

"Well now, look here," Hammle explained fulsomely; "I had just missed a train to Long Island, and it was more than an hour until the next one. When I went out of here and started to go downstairs, I suddenly said to myself, 'It'll be pleasanter waiting in the garden than in the Pennsylvania Station.' So I went out on the roof and hung around. And here I am."

Vance regarded the man shrewdly and nodded his head. "Yes, as you say. Here you are. More or less in evidence. By the by, Mr. Hammle, what did you see while you were waiting in the garden for the next train?"

"Not a thing—absolutely!" Hammle's tone was aggressive. "I walked along the boxwood hedges, smoking, and was leaning over the parapet by the gate, looking out at the city, when I heard you come out carrying the nurse."

Vance narrowed his eyes: it was obvious he was not satisfied with Hammle's explanation.

"And you saw no one else either in the garden or on the terrace?"

"Not a soul," the man assured him.

"And you heard nothing?"

"Not until you gentlemen came out."

Vance stood regarding Hammle for several moments. Then he turned and walked toward the garden window.

"That will be all for the moment," he said brusquely. "But we shall probably want to see you tomorrow."

"I'll be at home all day. Glad to be of any service." Hammle shot a covert look at Vance, made his adieux quickly, and went out down the passageway.

### 13. THE AZURE STAR

(Saturday, April 14; 7 p.m.)

Vance returned at once to the garden. Miss Beeton drew herself up a little as he approached her.

"Do you feel equal to a few questions?" he asked her.

"Oh, yes." She smiled with more assurance now, and rose.

Dusk was settling rapidly over the city. A dull slate color was replacing the blue mist over the river. The skies beyond the Jersey hills were luminous with the vivid colors of the sunset, and in the distance tiny specks of yellow light were beginning to appear in the windows of the serried buildings. A light breeze was blowing from the north, and the air was cool.

As we crossed the garden to the balustrade, Miss Beeton took a deep breath and shuddered slightly.

"You'd better have your coat," Vance suggested. He returned to the study and brought it out to her. When he had helped her into it she turned suddenly and looked at him inquiringly.

"Why was my coat brought to the study?" she asked. "It's been worrying me frightfully...with all the terrible things that have been going on today."

"Why should it worry you?" Vance smiled at the girl. "A misplaced coat is surely not a serious matter." His tone was reassuring.

"But we really owe you an explanation. You see, two revolvers figured in Swift's death. One of them we all saw on the roof here—that was the one with which the chap was killed. But no one downstairs heard the shot because the poor fellow met his end in Professor Garden's storeroom vault—"

"Ah! That was why you wanted to know if the key was in its place." The girl nodded.

"The shot we all heard," Vance went on, "was fired from another revolver after Swift's body had been carried from the vault and placed in the chair out here. We were naturally anxious to find that other weapon, and Sergeant Heath made a search for it..."

"But—but—my coat?" Her hand went out and she clutched at Vance's sleeve as a look of understanding came into her frightened eyes.

"Yes," Vance said, "the Sergeant found the revolver in the pocket of your top-coat. Some one had put it there as a temporary hiding-place."

She recoiled with a sudden intake of breath. "How dreadful!" Her words were barely audible.

Vance put his hand on her shoulder.

"If you had not come to the study when you did and seen the coat, we would have returned it to the closet downstairs and saved you all this worry."

"But it's too terrible!...And then this—this attempt on my life. I can't understand. I'm frightened."

"Come, come," Vance exhorted the girl. "It's over now, and we need your help."

She gazed directly into his eyes for several minutes. Then she gave him a faint smile of confidence.

"I'm very sorry," she said simply. "But this house—this family—they've been doing queer things to my nerves for the past month. I can't explain it, but there's something frightfully wrong here...I was in charge of an operating room in a Montreal hospital for six months, attending as many as six and eight operations a day; but that never affected me the way this household does. There, at least, I could see what was going on—I could help and know that I was helping. But here everything goes on in dark corners, and nothing I do seems to be of any use. Can you imagine a surgeon suddenly going blind in the middle of a laparotomy and trying to continue without his sight? That's how I feel in this strange place...But please don't think I am not ready to help—to do anything I can for you. You, too, always have to work in the dark, don't you?"

"Don't we all have to work in the dark?" Vance murmured, without taking his eyes from her. "Tell me who you think could have been guilty of the terrible things that have happened here."

All fear and doubt seemed to have left the girl. She moved toward the balustrade and stood looking over the river with an impressive calm and self-control.

"Really, I don't know," she answered with quiet restraint. "There are several possibilities, humanly speaking. But I haven't had time to think about it clearly. It all happened so suddenly..."

"Yes, quite," put in Vance. "Things like that usually do come suddenly and without previous warning."

"Woode Swift's death wasn't at all the sort of thing I would expect to happen here," the girl went on. "I wouldn't have been surprised at some act of impulsive violence, but this premeditated murder, so subtle and so carefully planned, seems alien to the atmosphere here. Besides, it isn't a loving family, except on the surface. Psychologically, every one seems at cross purposes—full of hidden hatreds. No contacts anywhere—I mean, no understanding contacts. Floyd Garden is saner than the others. His interests are narrow, to be sure, but, on his own mental level, he has always impressed me as being straightforward and eminently human. He's dependable, too, I think. He's intolerant of subtleties and profundities, and has always taken the course of ignoring the existence of those qualities which have caused friction between the other members of the household. Maybe I'm wrong about it, but that has been my impression."

She paused and frowned.

"As for Mrs. Garden, I feel that by nature she is shallow and is deliberately creating for herself a deeper and more complex mode of life, which she doesn't in the least understand. That, of course, makes her unreasonable and dangerous. I have never had a more unreasonable patient. She has no consideration whatever for others. Her affection for her nephew has never seemed genuine to me. He was like a little clay model that she had made and prized highly. If she had an idea for another figurine, I feel that she would have wet the clay and remodeled it into a new object of adoration."

"And Professor Garden?"

"He's a researcher and scientist, of course, and, therefore, not altogether human, in the conventional sense. I have thought sometimes

that he isn't wholly rational. To him people and things are merely elements to be converted into some new chemical combination. Do you understand what I am trying to say?"

"Yes, quite well," Vance assured her. "Every scientist imagines himself an *Übermensch*. Power is his god. Many of the world's greatest scientists have been regarded as madmen. Perhaps they were. Yes. A queer problem. The possession of power induces weakness. Silly notion, what? The most dangerous agency in the world is science. Especially dangerous to the scientist himself. Every great scientific discoverer is a Frankenstein. However...What is your impression of the guests who were present today?"

"I don't feel competent to pass judgment on them," the girl replied seriously. "I can't entirely understand them. But each one strikes me as dangerous in his own way. They are all playing a game—and it seems to be a game without rules. To them the outcome justifies the methods they use. They seem to be mere seekers after sensation, trying to draw the veil of illusion over life's realities because they are not strong enough to face the facts."

"Yes, quite. You have clear vision." Vance scrutinized the girl beside him. "And you took up nursing because you are able to face the realities. You are not afraid of life—or of death."

The girl looked embarrassed.

"You're making too much of my profession. After all, I had to earn my living, and nursing appealed to me."

"Yes, of course. It would." Vance nodded. "But tell me, wouldn't you rather not have to work for your living?"

She looked up.

"Perhaps. But isn't it natural for every woman to prefer luxury and security to drudgery and uncertainty?"

"No doubt," said Vance. "And speakin' of nursing, just what do you think of Mrs. Garden's condition?"

Miss Beeton hesitated before she answered:

"Really, I don't know what to say. I can't understand it. And I rather suspect that Doctor Siefert himself is puzzled by it. Mrs. Garden is obviously a sick woman. She shows many of the symptoms of that nervous, erratic temperament exhibited by people suffering from cancer. Though she's much better some days than others, I know that she suffers a great deal. Doctor Siefert tells me she is really a neurological case; but I get the feeling, at times, that it goes much deeper—that an obscure physiological condition is producing the neurological symptoms she shows."

"That's most interestin'. Doctor Siefert mentioned something of the kind to me only a few days ago." Vance moved nearer to the girl. "Would you mind telling me something of your contacts with the members of the household?"

"There's very little to tell. Professor Garden practically ignores me—half the time I doubt if he even knows I am here. Mrs. Garden alternates between periods of irritable admonition and intimate confidence. Floyd Garden has always been pleasant and considerate. He has wanted me to be happy here, and has often apologized for his mother's abominable treatment of me at times. I've rather liked him for his attitude."

"And what of Swift—did you see much of him?" The girl seemed reluctant to answer and looked away; but she finally turned back to Vance.

"The truth is, Mr. Swift asked me several times to go to dinner and the theatre with him. He was never objectionable in his advances; but he did rather annoy me occasionally. I got the impression, though, that he was one of those unhappy men who feel their inferiority and seek to bolster themselves up with the affections of women. I think that he was really concerned with Miss Graem, and merely turned to me through pique."

Vance smoked for a few moments in silence. Then he said:

"What of the big race today? Had there been much discussion about it?"

"Oh, yes. For over a week I've heard little else here. A curious tension has been growing in the house. I heard Mr. Swift remark to Floyd Garden one evening that the Rivermont Handicap was his one remaining hope, and that he thought Equanimity would win. They immediately went into a furious argument regarding Equanimity's chances."

"Was it generally known to the other members of the afternoon gatherings how Swift felt about this race and Equanimity?"

"Yes, the matter was freely discussed for days.—You see," the girl added in explanation, "it's impossible for me not to overhear some of these afternoon discussions; and Mrs. Garden herself often takes part in them and then discusses them with me later."

"By the by," asked Vance, "how did you come to bet on Azure Star?"

"Frankly," the girl confessed shyly, "I've been mildly interested in the horse-betting parties here, though I've never had any desire to make a wager myself. But I overheard you tell Mr. Garden that you had picked Azure Star, and the name was so appealing that I asked Mr. Garden to place that bet for me. It was the first time I ever bet on a horse."

"And Azure Star came in." Vance sighed. "Too bad. Actually you bet against Equanimity, you know—he was the favorite. A big gamble. Most unfortunate that you won. Beginner's luck, d'ye see, is always fatal."

The girl's face became suddenly sombre, and she looked steadily at Vance for several moments before she spoke again.

"Do you really think it will prove fatal?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. Inevitable. You won't be able to resist making other wagers. One doesn't stop with the first bet if one wins. And, invariably, one loses in the end."

Again the girl gave Vance a long and troubled look; then her gaze drifted to the darkening sky overhead.

"But Azure Star is a beautiful name, isn't it?" She pointed upward. "There's one now."

We all looked up. High above we saw a single bright star shining with blue luminosity in the cloudless sky. After a moment Vance moved toward the parapet and looked out over the waters of the river to the purpling hills and the still glowing sunset colors in the west. The sharp forms of the great gaunt buildings of the city to the south cut the empyrean like the unreal silhouettes on a theatrical drop.

"No city in the world," Vance said, "is as beautiful as New York seen from a vantage point like this in the early twilight." (I wondered at his sudden change of mood.)

He stepped up on the parapet and looked down into the great abyss of deep shadows and flickering lights far below. A curious chill of fear ran over me—the sort of fear I have always felt when I have seen acrobatic performers perilously balanced high above a circus

arena. I knew Vance had no fear of heights and that he possessed an abnormal sense of equilibrium. But I nevertheless drew in an involuntary breath; my feet and lower limbs began to tingle; and for a moment I actually felt faint.

Miss Beeton was standing close to Markham, and she, too, must have experienced something of the sensation I felt, for I saw her face go suddenly pale. Her eyes were fixed on Vance with a look of apprehensive horror, and she caught at Markham's arm as if for support.

"Vance!" It was Markham's stern voice that broke the silence. "Come down from there!"

Vance jumped down and turned to us.

"Frightfully sorry," he said. "Height does affect most people. I didn't realize." He looked at the girl. "Will you forgive me?..."

As he spoke Floyd Garden stepped out on the roof through the passageway door.

"Sorry, Vance," he apologized, "but Doc Siefert wants. Miss Beeton downstairs—if she feels equal to it. The mater is putting on one of her acts."

The nurse hurried away immediately, and Garden strolled up to Vance. He was again fussing with his pipe.

"A beastly mess," he mumbled. "And you've certainly put the fear of God and destruction into the hearts of the pious boys and girls here this afternoon. They all got the jitters after you talked with them." He looked up. "The fact is, Vance, if you should want to see Kroon or Zalia Graem or Madge Weatherby for any reason this evening, they'll be here. They've all asked to come. Must return to the scene of the crime, or something of that kind. Need mutual support. And, to tell you the truth, I'm damned glad they're coming. At least we can talk the thing over and drink highballs; and that's better than fussing and worrying about it all alone."

"Perfectly natural. Quite." Vance nodded. "I understand their feelings— and yours—perfectly...Beastly mess, as you say...And now suppose we go down."

Doctor Siefert met us at the foot of the stairs.

"I was just coming up for you, Mr. Vance. Mrs. Garden insists on seeing you gentlemen." Then he added in a low tone: "She's in a tantrum. A bit hysterical. Don't take anything she may say too seriously."

We entered the bedroom. Mrs. Garden, in a salmon-pink silk dressing-gown, was in bed, bolstered up by a collection of pillows. Her face was drawn and, in the slanting rays of the night-light, seemed flabby and unhealthy. Her eyes glared demoniacally as she looked at us, and her fingers clutched nervously at the quilt. Miss Beeton stood at the far side of the bed, looking down at her patient with calm concern; and Professor Garden leaned heavily against the window-sill opposite, his face a mask of troubled solicitude.

"I have something to say, and I want you all to hear it." Mrs. Garden's voice was shrill and strident. "My nephew has been killed today—and I know who did it!" She glared venomously at Floyd Garden who stood near the foot of the bed, his pipe hanging limply from the corner of his mouth. "*You* did it!" She pointed an accusing finger at her son. "You've always hated Woody. You've been jealous of him. No one else had any reason to do this despicable thing. I suppose I should lie for you and shield you. But to what end? So you could kill somebody else? Perhaps—perhaps even me, or your father. No! The time has come for the truth. You killed Woody, and I know you killed him. And I know why you did it..."

Floyd Garden stood through this tirade without moving and without perceptible emotion. He kept his eyes on his mother with cynical indifference. When she paused he took the pipe from his mouth and with a sad smile said:

"And why did I do it, mater?"

"Because you were jealous of him. Because you knew that I had divided my estate equally between you two—and you want it all for yourself. You always resented the fact that I loved Woody as well as you. And now you think that by having got Woody out of the way, you'll get everything when I die. But you're mistaken. You'll get nothing! Do you hear me? Nothing! Tomorrow I'm going to change my will." Her eyes were full of frantic gloating: she was like a woman who has suddenly gone out of her mind. "I'm going to change my will, do you understand? Woody's share will go to your father, with the stipulation that you will never get or inherit a dollar of it. And your share will go to charity." She laughed hysterically and beat the bed with her clenched fists.

Doctor Siefert had been watching the woman closely. He now moved a little nearer the bed.

"An ice-pack, immediately," he said to the nurse; and she went quickly from the room. Then he busied himself with his medicine case and deftly prepared a hypodermic injection.

"I won't let you give me that," the woman on the bed screamed. "There's nothing the matter with me. I'm tired of taking your drugs."

"Yes, I know. But you'll take this, Mrs. Garden." Doctor Siefert spoke with calm assurance.

The woman relaxed under his patient dictatorial scrutiny and permitted him to give her the injection. She lay back on the pillows, staring blankly at her son. The nurse returned to the room and arranged the ice-bag for her patient.

Doctor Siefert then quickly made out a prescription and turned to Miss Beeton.

"Have this filled at once. A teaspoonful every two hours until Mrs. Garden falls asleep."

Floyd Garden stepped forward and took the prescription.

"I'll phone the pharmacy," he said. "It'll take them only a few minutes to send it over." And he went out of the room.

After a few final instructions to Miss Beeton, the doctor led the way to the drawing-room, and the rest of us followed, leaving the nurse rearranging Mrs. Garden's pillows. Professor Garden, who during the painful scene had stood with his back to us, gazing out of the window into the night, still remained there, looking like a hunched gargoye framed by the open casement.

As we passed the den door, we could hear Floyd Garden telephoning.

"I think Mrs. Garden will quiet down now," Doctor Siefert remarked to Vance when we reached the drawing-room. "As I told you, you mustn't take her remarks seriously when she's in this condition. She will probably have forgotten about it by tomorrow."

"Her bitterness, however, did not seem entirely devoid of rationality," Vance returned.

Siefert frowned but made no comment on Vance's statement. Instead he said in his quiet, well-modulated voice, as he sat down leisurely in the nearest chair: "This whole affair is very shocking. Floyd Garden gave me but few details when I arrived. Would you care to enlighten me further?"

Vance readily complied. He briefly went over the entire case, beginning with the anonymous telephone message he had received the night before. (Not by the slightest sign did the doctor indicate any previous knowledge of that telephone call. He sat looking at Vance

with serene attentiveness, like a specialist listening to the case history of a patient.) Vance withheld no important detail from him. He explained about the races and the wagers, Swift's withdrawal to the roof, the actions of the other members of the party, the shot, the finding of Swift's body, the discoveries in the vault, the matter of the disconnected buzzer wires, the substance of his various interviews with the members of the Garden family and their guests, and, finally, the finding of the second revolver in the nurse's coat.

"And the rest," Vance concluded, "you yourself have witnessed."

Siefert nodded very slowly two or three times, as if to infer that he had received a clear and satisfactory picture of the events of the afternoon.

"A very serious situation," he commented gravely, as if making a diagnosis. "Some of the things you have told me seem highly significant. A shrewdly conceived murder—and a vicious one. Especially the hiding of the revolver in Miss Beeton's coat and the attempt on her life with the bromin gas in the vault. I don't understand that phase of the situation."

Vance looked up quickly.

"Do you understand any other phase of the situation?"

"No, no. I did not mean to imply that," Siefert hastened to answer. "I was merely thinking that while Swift's death could conceivably be explained on rational grounds, I fail to see any possible reason for this dastardly attempt to involve Miss Beeton and then to end her life."

"But I seriously doubt," said Vance, "that the revolver was put in Miss Beeton's coat pocket with any intention of incriminating her. I imagine it was to have been taken out of the house at the first opportunity. But I agree with you that the bromin episode is highly mystifyin'." Vance, without appearing to do so, was watching the doctor closely. "When you asked to see me on your arrival here this afternoon," he went on, "I was hoping that you might have some suggestion which, coming from one who is familiar with the domestic situation here, might put us on the track to a solution."

Siefert solemnly shook his head several times. "No, no. I am sorry, but I am completely at a loss myself. When I asked to speak to you and Mr. Markham it was because I was naturally deeply interested in the situation here and anxious to hear what you might have to say about it." He paused, shifted slightly in his chair, and then asked: "Have you formed any opinion from what you have been able to learn?"

"Yes. Oh, yes." Vance's gaze drifted from the doctor to the beautiful T'ang horse which stood on a nearby cabinet. "Frankly, however, I detest my opinion. I'd hate to be right about it. A sinister, unnatural conclusion is forcing itself upon me. It's sheer horror." He spoke with unwonted intensity.

Siefert was silent, and Vance turned to him again.

"I say, doctor, are you particularly worried about Mrs. Garden's condition?"

A cloud overspread Siefert's countenance, and he did not answer at once.

"It's a queer case," he said at length, with an obvious attempt at evasion. "As I recently told you, it has me deeply puzzled. I'm bringing Kattelbaum up tomorrow."<sup>[25]</sup>

"Yes. As you say. Kattelbaum." Vance looked at the doctor dreamily. "My anonymous telephone message last night mentioned radioactive sodium. But equanimity is essential. Yes. By all means. Not a nice case, doctor—not at all a nice case...And now I think we'll be toddlin'." Vance rose and bowed with formal brusqueness. Siefert also got up.

"If there is anything whatever that I can do for you...," he began.

"We may call on you later," Vance returned, and walked toward the archway.

Siefert did not follow us, but turned and moved slowly toward one of the front windows, where he stood looking out, with his hands clasped behind him. We re-entered the hallway and found Sneed waiting to help us with our coats.

We had just reached the door leading out of the apartment when the strident tones of Mrs. Garden's voice assailed us again. Floyd Garden was standing just inside the bedroom door, looking over at his mother.

"Your solicitude won't do you any good, Floyd," Mrs. Garden cried. "Being kind to me now, are you? Telephoning for the prescription—all attention and loving kindness. But don't think you're pulling the wool over my eyes. It won't make any difference. Tomorrow I change my will! Tomorrow..."

We continued on our way out, and heard no more.

But Mrs. Garden did not change her will. The following morning she was found dead in bed.



## 14. RADIOACTIVE SODIUM

(Sunday, April 15; 9 a.m.)

Shortly after nine o'clock the next morning there was a telephone call from Doctor Siefert. Vance was still abed when the telephone rang, and I answered it. (I had been up for several hours: the events of the preceding day had stirred me deeply, and I had been unable to sleep.) The doctor's voice was urgent and troubled when he asked that I summon Vance immediately. I had a premonition of further disaster as I roused Vance. He seemed loath to get up and complained cynically about people who rise early in the morning. But he finally slipped into his Chinese robe and sandals and, lighting a *Régie*, went protestingly into the anteroom.

It was nearly ten minutes before he came out again. His resentment had given way, and as he stepped across to the table and rang for Currie, there was a look of keen interest in his eyes.

"Breakfast at once," he ordered when his old butler appeared. "And put out a sombre suit and my black Homburg. And, by the by, Currie, a little extra coffee. Mr. Markham will be here soon and may want a cup."

Currie went out, and Vance turned back to his bedroom. At the door he stopped and turned to me with a curious look.

"Mrs. Garden was found dead in her bed this morning," he drawled. "Poison of some kind. I've phoned Markham, and we'll be going to the Garden apartment as soon as he comes. A bad business, Van,—very bad. There's too much betting going on in that house." And he went on into the bedroom.

Markham arrived within half an hour. In the meantime Vance had dressed and was finishing his second cup of coffee.

"What's the trouble now?" Markham demanded irritably, as he came into the library. "Perhaps now that I'm here, you'll be good enough to forgo your cryptic air."

"My dear Markham—oh, my dear Markham!" Vance looked up and sighed. "Do sit down and have a cup of coffee while I enjoy this cigarette. Really, y' know, it's deuced hard to be lucid on the telephone." He poured a cup of coffee, and Markham reluctantly sat down. "And please don't sweeten the coffee," Vance went on. "It has a delightfully subtle bouquet, and it would be a pity to spoil it with saccharine."

Markham, frowning defiantly, put three lumps of sugar in the cup.

"Why am I here?" he growled.

"A profoundly philosophical question," smiled Vance. "Unanswerable, however. Why are any of us here? Why anything? But, since we are all here without knowing the reason therefor, I'll pander to your pragmatism." He drew deeply on his cigarette and settled back lazily in his chair. "Siefert phoned me this morning, just before I called you. Explained he didn't know your private number at home and asked me to apologize to you for not notifying you direct."

"Notifying me?" Markham set down his cup.

"About Mrs. Garden. She's dead. Found so this morning in bed. Probably murdered."

"Good God!"

"Yes, quite. Not a nice situation. No. The lady died some time during the night—exact hour unknown as yet. Siefert says it might have been caused by an overdose of the sleeping medicine he prescribed for her. It's all gone. And he says there was enough of it to do the trick. On the other hand, he admits it might have been something else. He's very noncommittal. No external signs he can diagnose. Craves our advice and succor. Hence his summons."

Markham pushed his cup aside with a clatter and lighted a cigar.

"Where's Siefert now?" he asked.

"At the Gardens'. Very correct. Standing by, and all that. The nurse phoned him shortly after eight this morning—it was she who made the discovery when she took Mrs. Garden's breakfast in. Siefert hastened over and after viewing the remains and probing round a bit called me. Said that, in view of yesterday's events, he didn't wish to go ahead until we got there."

"Well, why don't we get along?" snapped Markham, standing up.

Vance sighed and rose slowly from his chair.

"There's really no rush. The lady can't elude us. And Siefert won't desert the ship. Moreover, it's a beastly hour to drag one out of bed. Y' know, Markham, an entertainin' monograph could be written about the total lack of consideration on the part of murderers. They think only of themselves. No fellow feelin'. Always upsettin' the normal routine. And they never declare a holiday—not even on a Sunday morning...However, as you say. Let's toddle."

"Hadn't we better notify Heath?" suggested Markham.

"Yes—quite," returned Vance, as we went out. "I called the Sergeant just after I phoned you. He's been up half the night working on the usual police routine. Stout fella, Heath. Amazin' industry. But quite futile. If only such energy led anywhere beyond steel filing cabinets. I always think tenderly of Heath as a perpetuator of archives..."

Miss Beeton admitted us to the Garden apartment. She looked drawn and worried, but she gave Vance a faint smile of greeting which he returned.

"I'm beginning to think this nightmare will never end, Mr. Vance," she said.

Vance nodded sombrely, and we went on into the drawing-room where Doctor Siefert, Professor Garden, and his son were awaiting us.

"I'm glad you've come, gentlemen," Siefert greeted us, coming forward.

Professor Garden sat at one end of the long davenport, his elbows resting on his knees, his face in his hands. He barely acknowledged our presence. Floyd Garden got to his feet and nodded abstractedly in our direction. A terrible change seemed to have come over him. He looked years older than when we had left him the night before, and his face, despite its tan, showed a greenish pallor. His eyes moved vaguely about the room; he was visibly shaken.

"What a hell of a situation!" he mumbled, focusing watery eyes on Vance. "The mater accuses me last night of putting Woody out of the way, and then threatens to cut me off in her will. And now she's dead! And it was I who took charge of the prescription. The doc says it could have been the medicine that killed her."

Vance looked at the man sharply.

"Yes, yes," he said in a low, sympathetic tone. "I thought of all that, too, don't y' know. But it certainly won't help you to be morbid about it. How about a Tom Collins?"

"I've had four already," Garden returned dispiritedly, sinking back into his chair. But almost immediately he sprang to his feet again. He pointed a finger at Vance, and his eyes filled with apprehension and entreaty.

"For God's sake," he burst out, "it's up to you to find out the truth. I'm on the spot—what with my going out of the room with Woody yesterday, my failure to place his bet, then the mater's accusation, and that damned will of hers, and the medicine. You've got to find out who's guilty..."

As he was talking the door bell had rung, and Heath came up the hallway.

"Sure, we're gonna find out," came the pugnacious voice of the Sergeant from the archway. "And it ain't gonna be so well with you when we do."

Vance turned quickly round. "Oh, I say, Sergeant. Less animation, please. This is hardly the time. Too early in the morning." He went to Garden and, putting a hand on the man's shoulder, urged him back into his chair. "Come, buck up," he said; "we'll need your help, and if you work up a case of jitters you'll be useless."

"But don't you see how deeply involved I am?" Garden protested weakly.

"You're not the only one involved," Vance returned calmly. He turned to Siefert. "I think, doctor, we should have a little chat. Possibly we can get the matter of your patient's death straightened out a bit. Suppose we go upstairs to the study, what?"

As we stepped through the archway into the hall, I glanced back. Young Garden was staring after us with a hard, determined look. The professor had not moved, and took no more notice of our going than he had of our coming.

In the study Vance went directly to the point.

"Doctor, the time has come when we must be perfectly frank with each other. The usual conventional considerations of your profession must be temporarily put aside. A matter far more urgent is involved now, and it requires more serious consideration than the accepted relationship between doctor and patient. Therefore, I shall be altogether candid with you and trust that you can see your way to being equally candid with me."

Siefert, who had taken a chair near the door, looked at Vance a trifle uneasily.

"I regret that I do not understand what you mean," he said in his suavest manner.

"I merely mean," replied Vance coolly, "that I am fully aware that it was you who sent me the anonymous telephone message Friday night."

Siefert raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Indeed! That's very interesting."

"Not only interestin'," drawled Vance, "but true. How I know it was you need not concern us at the moment. I only beg of you to admit that it is so, and to act accordingly. The fact has a direct bearing on this tragic case, and unless you will assist us with a frank statement, a grave injustice may be done—an injustice that could not be squared with any existing code of medical ethics."

Siefert hesitated for several moments. He withdrew his eyes hastily from Vance and looked thoughtfully out of the window toward the west.

"Assuming, for the sake of argument," he said with deliberation, like a man carefully choosing his words, "that it was I who phoned you Friday night, what then?"

Vance watched the man with a faint smile.

"It might be, don't y' know," he said, "that you were cognizant of the situation here, and that you had a suspicion—or let us say, a fear—that something tragic was impending." Vance took out his cigarette case and lighted a cigarette. "I fully understood the import of that message, doctor—as you intended. That is why I happened to be here yesterday afternoon. The significance of your reference to the *Aeneid* and the inclusion of the word 'equanimity' did not escape me. I must say, however, that your advice to investigate radioactive sodium was not entirely clear—although I think I now have a fairly lucid idea as to the implication. However, there were some deeper implications in your message, and this is the time, d' ye see, when we should face this thing together with complete honesty."

Siefert brought his eyes back to Vance in a long appraising glance, and then shifted them to the window again. After a minute or two he stood up, clasped his hands behind him, and strode across the room. He looked out over the Hudson with troubled concern. Then he turned and, nodding as if in answer to some question he had put to himself, said:

"Yes, I did send you that message. Perhaps I was not entirely loyal to my principles when I did so, for I had little doubt that you would guess who sent it and would understand what I was trying to convey to you. But I realize that nothing can be gained now by not being frank with you...The situation in this household has bothered me for a long time, and lately I've had a sense of imminent disaster. All of the factors of late have been ripening for this final outburst. And I felt so strongly about them that I could not resist sending an anonymous message to you, in the hope that the vague eventualities I anticipated might be averted."

"How long have you felt this vague premonition?" asked Vance.

"For the past three months, I should say. Although I have acted as the Gardens' physician for many years, it was not until last fall that Mrs. Garden's changing condition came to my notice. I thought little of it at first, but, as it grew worse and I found myself unable to diagnose it satisfactorily, a curious suspicion forced itself on me that the change was not entirely natural. I began coming here much more frequently than had been my custom, and during the last couple of months I had felt many subtle undercurrents in the various relationships of the household, which I had never sensed before. Of course, I knew that Floyd and Swift never got along particularly well—that there was some deep animosity and jealousy between them. I also knew the conditions of Mrs. Garden's will. Furthermore, I knew of the gambling on the horses that had become part of the daily routine here. Neither Floyd nor Woode kept anything from me

—you see, I have always been their confidant as well as their physician—and their reactions toward their personal affairs—which, unfortunately, included horse-racing—were well known to me."

Siefert paused with a frown.

"As I say, it has been only recently that I have felt something deeper and more significant in all this interplay of temperaments; and this feeling grew to such proportions that I actually feared a violent climax of some kind—especially as Floyd told me only a few days ago that his cousin intended to stake his entire remaining funds on Equanimity in the big race yesterday. So overpowering was my feeling in regard to the whole situation here that I decided to do something about it, if I could manage it without divulging any professional confidences. But you saw through my subterfuge, and, to be wholly candid with you, I'm rather glad you did."

Vance nodded. "I appreciate your scruples in the matter, doctor. I only regret that I was unable to forestall these tragedies. That, as it happened, was beyond human power." Vance looked up quickly. "By the by, doctor, did you have any definite suspicions when you phoned me Friday night?"

Siefert shook his head with emphasis. "No. Frankly, I was baffled. I merely felt that some sort of explosion was imminent. But I hadn't the slightest idea in what quarter that explosion would occur."

"Can you say from what quarter the causes for your apprehension arose?"

"No. Nor can I say whether my feeling had to do with Mrs. Garden's state of health alone, or whether I was influenced also by the subtle antagonism between Floyd and Woode Swift. I asked myself the question many times, without finding a satisfactory answer. At times, however, I could not resist the impression that the two factors were in some way closely related. Hence my phone message, in which, by inference, I called your attention to both Mrs. Garden's peculiar illness and the tense atmosphere that had developed round the daily betting on the races."

Vance smoked a while in silence. "And now, doctor, will you be so good as to give us the full details about this morning?"

Siefert drew himself up in his chair.

"There's practically nothing to add to the information I gave you over the phone. Miss Beeton called me a little after eight o'clock and informed me that Mrs. Garden had died some time during the night. She asked for instructions, and I told her that I would come at once. I was here half an hour or so later. I could find no determinable cause for Mrs. Garden's death, and assumed it might have been her heart until Miss Beeton called my attention to the fact that the bottle of medicine sent by the druggist was empty..."

"By the by, doctor, what was the prescription you made out for your patient last night?"

"A simple barbitol solution."

"Why did you not prescribe one of the ordin'ry barbiturate compounds?"

"Why should I?" Siefert asked with obvious annoyance. "I always prefer to know exactly what my patient is getting. I'm old-fashioned enough to take little stock in proprietary mixtures."

"And I believe you told me on the telephone that there was sufficient barbitol in the prescription to have caused death."

"Yes." The doctor nodded. "If taken at one time."

"And Mrs. Garden's death was consistent with barbitol poisoning?"

"There was nothing to contradict such a conclusion," Siefert answered. "And there was nothing to indicate any other cause."

"When did the nurse discover the empty bottle?"

"Not until after she had phoned me, I believe."

"Could the taste of the solution be detected if it were given to a person without his knowledge?"

"Yes—and no," the doctor replied judiciously. "The taste is a bit acrid; but it is a colorless solution, like water, and if it were drunk fast the taste might go unnoticed."

Vance nodded. "Therefore, if the solution had been poured into a glass and water had been added, Mrs. Garden might conceivably have drunk it all without complaining about the bitter taste?"

"That's wholly possible," the doctor told him. "And I cannot help feeling that something of that kind took place last night. It was because of this conclusion that I called you immediately."

Vance, smoking lazily, was watching Siefert from under speculative eyelids. Moving slightly in his chair and crushing out his cigarette in a small jade ash tray at his side, he said:

"Tell me something of Mrs. Garden's illness, doctor, and why radioactive sodium should have suggested itself to you."

Siefert brought his eyes sharply back to Vance.

"I was afraid you would ask me that. But this is no time for squeamishness. I must trust wholly to your discretion." He paused, as if determining how he might best approach a matter which was obviously distasteful to him. "As I've already said, I don't know the exact nature of Mrs. Garden's ailment. The symptoms have been very much like those accompanying radium poisoning. But I have never prescribed any of the radium preparations for her—I am, in fact, profoundly skeptical of their efficacy. As you may know, we have had many untoward results from the haphazard, unscientific administration of these radium preparations."[\[26\]](#)

He cleared his throat before continuing.

"One evening while reading the reports of the researches made in California on radioactive sodium, or what might be called artificial radium, which has been heralded as a possible medium of cure for cancer, I suddenly realized that Professor Garden himself was actively interested in this particular line of research and had done some very creditable work in the field. The realization was purely a matter of association, and I gave it little thought at first. But the idea persisted, and before long some very unpleasant possibilities began to force themselves upon me."

Again the doctor paused, a troubled look on his face.

"About two months ago I suggested to Doctor Garden that, if it were at all feasible, he put Miss Beeton on his wife's case. I had already come to the conclusion that Mrs. Garden required more constant attention and supervision than I could afford her, and Miss Beeton, who is a registered nurse, had, for the past year or so, been working with Doctor Garden in his laboratory—in fact, it was I who had sent her to him when he mentioned his need of a laboratory assistant. I was particularly anxious to have her take Mrs. Garden's case, rather than some other nurse, for I felt that from her observations some helpful suggestions might result. The girl had

been on several difficult cases of mine, and I was wholly familiar with her competency and discretion."

"And have Miss Beeton's subsequent observations been helpful to you, doctor?" asked Vance.

"No, I can't say that they have," Siefert admitted, "despite the fact that Doctor Garden still availed himself of her services occasionally in the laboratory, thereby giving her an added opportunity of keeping an eye on the entire situation. But, on the other hand, neither have they tended to dissipate my suspicions."

"I say, doctor," Vance asked after a moment, "could this new radioactive sodium be administered to a person without his knowing it?"

"Oh, quite easily," Siefert assured him. "It could, for instance, be substituted in a shaker for ordinary salt and there would be nothing to arouse the slightest suspicion."

"And in quantities sufficient to produce the effects of radium poisoning?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And how long would it be before the effects of such administrations proved fatal?"

"That's impossible to say."

Vance was studying the tip of his cigarette. Presently he asked: "Has the nurse's presence in the house resulted in any information regarding the general situation here?"

"Nothing that I had not already known. In fact, her observations have merely substantiated my own conclusions. It's quite possible, too, that she herself may unwittingly have augmented the animosity between young Garden and Swift, for she has intimated to me once or twice that Swift had annoyed her occasionally with his attentions; and I have a very strong suspicion that she is personally interested in Floyd Garden."

Vance looked up with augmented interest.

"What, specifically, has given you that impression, doctor?"

"Nothing specific," Siefert told him. "I have, however, observed them together on several occasions, and my impression was that some sentiment existed there. Nothing that I can put my finger on, though. But one night when I was walking up Riverside Drive I happened to see them together in the park—undoubtedly a stroll together."

"By the by, doctor, have young Garden and the nurse been acquainted only since she came here to take care of his mother?"

"Oh, no," said Siefert. "But their previous acquaintance was, I imagine, more or less casual. You see, during the time Miss Beeton was Doctor Garden's laboratory assistant she had frequent occasion to come to the apartment here, to work with the professor in his study—stenographic notes and transcription, records, and the like. And she naturally became acquainted with Floyd and Woode Swift and Mrs. Garden herself..."

The nurse appeared at the door at that moment to announce the arrival of the Medical Examiner, and Vance asked her to bring Doctor Doremus up to the study.

"I might suggest," said Siefert quickly, "that, with your consent, it would be possible to have the Medical Examiner accept my verdict of death due to an accidental overdose of barbitol and avoid the additional unpleasantness of an autopsy."

"Oh, quite," Vance nodded. "That was my intention." He turned to the District Attorney. "All things considered, Markham," he said, "I think that might be best. There's nothing to be gained from an autopsy. We have enough facts, I think, to proceed without it. Undoubtedly Mrs. Garden's death was caused by the barbitol solution. The radioactive sodium is a separate and distinct issue."

Markham nodded in reluctant acquiescence as Doremus was led into the room by Miss Beeton. The Medical Examiner was in vile humor and complained bitterly about having been summoned personally on a Sunday morning. Vance placated him somewhat and introduced him to Doctor Siefert. After a brief interchange of explanations and comments Doremus readily agreed to Markham's suggestion that the case be regarded as resulting from an overdose of barbitol solution.

Doctor Siefert rose and looked hesitantly at Vance. "You will not need me further, I trust."

"Not at the moment, doctor." Vance rose also and bowed formally. "We may, however, communicate with you later. Again our thanks for your help and your candor...Sergeant, will you accompany Doctor Siefert and Doctor Doremus below and take care of any necessary details...And, Miss Beeton, please sit down for a moment. There are a few questions I want to ask you."

The girl came forward and seated herself in the nearest chair, as the three men went down the passageway.

## 15. THREE VISITORS

(Sunday, April 15; 10:45 a.m.)

"I don't mean to trouble you unduly, Miss Beeton," said Vance; "but we should like to have a firsthand account of the circumstances surrounding the death of Mrs. Garden."

"I wish there was something definite I could tell you," the nurse replied readily in a business-like manner, "but all I know is that when I arose this morning, a little after seven, Mrs. Garden seemed to be sleeping quietly. After dressing I went to the dining-room and had my breakfast; and then I took a tray in to Mrs. Garden. She always had tea and toast at eight o'clock, no matter how late she may have retired the night before. It wasn't until I had drawn up the shades and closed the windows, that I realized something was wrong. I spoke to her and she didn't answer me; and when I tried to rouse her I got no response. I saw then that she was dead. I called Doctor Siefert at once, and he came over as quickly as he could."

"You sleep, I believe, in Mrs. Garden's room?"

The nurse inclined her head. "Yes. You see, Mrs. Garden frequently needed some small service in the night."

"Had she required your attention at any time during the night?"

"No. The injection Doctor Siefert gave her before he left her seemed to have quieted her and she was sleeping peacefully when I went out—"

"You went out last night?...What time did you leave the house?" asked Vance.

"About nine o'clock. Mr. Floyd Garden suggested it, assuring me that he would be here and that he thought I needed a little rest. I was very glad of the opportunity, for I was really fatigued and unnerved."

"Had you no professional qualms about leaving a sick patient at such a time?"

"Ordinarily I might have had," the girl returned resentfully; "but Mrs. Garden had never shown me any consideration. She was the most selfish person I ever knew. Anyway, I explained to Mr. Floyd Garden about giving his mother a teaspoonful of the medicine if she should wake up and show any signs of restlessness. And then I went out into the park."

"At what time did you return, Miss Beeton?"

"It must have been about eleven," she told him. "I hadn't intended to stay out so long, but the air was invigorating, and I walked along the river almost to Grant's tomb. When I got back I went immediately to bed."

"Mrs. Garden was asleep when you came in?" The girl turned her eyes to Vance before answering.

"I—I thought—she was asleep," she said hesitantly. "Her color was all right. But perhaps—even then—"

"Yes, yes. I know," Vance put in quickly. "However..." He inspected his cigarette for a moment. "By the by, did you notice anything changed—anything, let us say, out of place—in the room, on your return?"

The nurse shook her head slowly.

"No. Everything seemed the same to me. The windows and shades were just as I had left them, and—Wait, there was something. The glass I had left on the night-table with drinking water was empty. I refilled it before going to bed."

Vance looked up quickly. "And the bottle of medicine?"

"I didn't particularly notice that; but it must have been just as I had left it, for I remember a fleeting sense of relief because Mrs. Garden hadn't needed a dose of the medicine."

Vance seemed profoundly puzzled and said nothing for some time. Then he glanced up suddenly.

"How much light was there in the room?"

"Only a dim shaded night-light by my bed."

"In that case, you might conceivably have mistaken an empty bottle for one filled with a colorless fluid."

"Yes, of course," the nurse returned reluctantly. "That must have been the case. Unless..." Her voice trailed off.

Vance nodded and finished the sentence for her. "Unless Mrs. Garden drank that medicine deliberately some time later." He studied the girl a moment. "But that isn't altogether reasonable. I don't care for the theory. Do you?"

She returned his gaze with complete frankness, and made a slight negative gesture of the head.

"No," she said. Then she added quickly: "But I wish it were true."

"Quite," agreed Vance. "It would be somewhat less terrible."

"I know what you mean." She took a deep tremulous breath and shuddered slightly.

"Tell me, when did you discover that all the medicine was gone?" Vance asked.

"Shortly before Doctor Siefert arrived this morning. I moved the bottle when I was arranging the table, and realized it was empty."

"I think that will be all just now, Miss Beeton." Vance glanced at the girl sombrely and then turned away. "Really, y' know, I'm deuced sorry. But you'd better not plan on leaving here just yet. We will undoubtedly want to see you again today."

As she got up her eyes rested on Vance with an enigmatic look. She seemed about to say something further, but instead she turned quickly and went from the room.

Heath must have been waiting in the passageway for the girl's dismissal, for just as she was going out, he came in to report that Siefert and Doremus had departed, and that Floyd Garden had made the arrangements for the removal of his mother's body.

"And what do we do now, Mr. Vance?" Heath asked.

"Oh, we carry on, Sergeant." Vance was unusually serious. "I want to talk to Floyd Garden first. Send him up. And call one of your men; but stay on the job downstairs yourself till he arrives. We may get this affair cleared up today."

"That wouldn't make me sore, Mr. Vance," returned Heath fervently, as he went toward the door.

Markham had risen and was pacing the floor, drawing furiously on his cigar.

"Evidently you see some light in this damnable situation," he grumbled to Vance. "I wish I could." He stopped and turned. "Are you

serious about the possibility of getting this thing cleared up today?"

"Oh, quite. It could be, don't y' know." Vance cocked an eye whimsically at Markham. "Not legally, of course. Not a case for the law. No. Legal technicalities quite useless in such an emergency. Deeper issues involved. Human issues, d' ye see?"

"You're talking nonsense," Markham muttered. "You and your damned pseudo-subtle moods!"

"I can change the mood," Vance offered cheerfully. "I'm frank to confess that I like the situation even less than you do. But there's no other procedure indicated. The law is helpless against it at present. And, frankly, I'm not interested in your law. I want justice."

Markham snorted. "And just what do you intend to do?"

Vance looked past Markham into some remote world of his own imagining. "I shall try to stage a tragic drama," he said evenly. "It may be effective. If it fails, I'm afraid there's no help for us."

Markham snorted again. "Philo Vance—impresario!"

"Quite," Vance nodded. "Impresario. As you say. Aren't we all?"

Markham looked at him steadily for a while. "When does the curtain go up?"

"Anon."

Footsteps sounded in the passageway, and Floyd Garden entered the study. He appeared deeply shaken. "I can't stand much today. What do you want?" His tone was unduly resentful. He sat down and seemed to ignore us entirely as he fussed nervously with his pipe.

"We understand just how you feel," Vance said. "It was not my intention to bother you unnecessarily. But if we are to get at the truth, we must have your cooperation."

"Go ahead, then," Garden mumbled, his attention still on his pipe.

Vance waited until the man got his pipe going. "We must have as many details as possible about last night. Did your expected guests come?"

Garden nodded cheerlessly. "Oh, yes. Zalia Graem, Madge Weatherby, and Kroon."

"And Hamble?"

"No, thank Heaven!"

"Didn't that strike you as a bit odd?"

"It didn't strike me as odd at all," Garden grumbled. "It struck me only as a relief. Hamble's all right, but he's a frightful bore—cold-blooded, self-sufficient. I never feel that the man has any real blood in him. Horses, dogs, foxes, game—anything but human beings. If one of his damned hounds had died he'd have taken it more to heart than Woody's death. I was glad he didn't show up."

Vance nodded with understanding. "Was there any one else here?"

"No, that was all."

"Which of your visitors arrived first?"

Garden took the pipe from his mouth and looked up swiftly.

"Zalia Graem. She came at half-past eight, I should say. Why?"

"Merely garnerin' facts," Vance replied indifferently. "And how long after Miss Graem came in did Miss Weatherby and Kroon arrive?"

"About half an hour. They came a few minutes after Miss Beeton had gone out."

Vance returned the man's steady scrutiny.

"By the by, why did you send the nurse out last night?"

"She looked as if she needed some fresh air," Garden answered with a show of complete frankness. "She'd had a tough day. Moreover, I didn't think there was anything seriously wrong with the mater. And I was going to be here myself and could have got her anything she might have needed." His eyes narrowed slightly. "Shouldn't I have let the nurse go out?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. Quite humane, don't y' know. A tryin' day for her."

Garden shifted his gaze heavily to the window, but Vance continued to study the man closely.

"What time did your guests depart?" he asked.

"A little after midnight. Sneed brought in sandwiches about half-past eleven. Then we had another round of highballs..." The man turned his eyes sharply back to Vance. "Does it matter?"

"I don't know. Perhaps not. However, it could...Did they all depart at the same time?"

"Yes. Kroon had his car below, and offered to drop Zalia at her apartment."

"Miss Beeton had returned by then, of course?"

"Yes, long before that. I heard her come in about eleven."

"And after your guests had gone, what did you do?"

"I sat up for half an hour or so, had another drink and a pipe; then I shut up the front of the house and turned in."

"Your bedroom is next to your mother's, I believe."

Garden nodded. "Father's been sharing it with me since the nurse has been here."

"Had your father retired when you went to your bedroom?"

"No. He rarely turns in before two or three in the morning. He works up here in the study till all hours."

"Was he up here last night?"

Garden looked a little disturbed.

"I imagine so. He couldn't very well have been anywhere else. He certainly didn't go out."

"Did you hear him when he came to bed?"

"No."

Vance lighted another cigarette, took several deep inhalations on it, and settled himself deeper in his chair.

"To go back a bit," he said casually. "The sleeping medicine Doctor Siefert prescribed for your mother seems to constitute a somewhat crucial point in the situation. Did you have occasion to give her a dose of it while the nurse was out?"

Garden drew himself up sharply and set his jaw. "No, I did not," he said through his teeth.

Vance took no notice of the change in the man's manner.

"The nurse, I understand, gave you explicit instructions about the medicine before she went out. Will you tell me exactly where this was?"

"In the hall," Garden answered with a puzzled frown. "Just outside the den door. I had left Zalia in the drawing-room and had gone to tell Miss Beeton she might go out for a while. I waited to help her on with her coat. It was then she told me what to do in case the mater woke up and was restless."

"And when she had gone you returned to the drawing-room?"

"Yes, immediately." Garden still looked puzzled. "That's exactly what I did. And a few minutes later Madge and Kroon arrived."

There was a short silence during which Vance smoked thoughtfully.

"Tell me, Garden," he said at length, "did any of your guests enter your mother's room last night?"

Garden's eyes opened wide: color came back into his face, and he sprang to his feet.

"Good God, Vance! Zalia was in mother's room!"

Vance nodded slowly. "Very interestin'. Yes, quite...I say, do sit down. Light your beastly pipe, and tell us about it."

Garden hesitated a moment. He laughed harshly and resumed his seat.

"Damn it! You take it lightly enough," he complained. "That may be the whole explanation."

"One never knows, does one?" Vance returned indifferently. "Carry on."

Garden had some difficulty getting his pipe going again. For a moment or two he sat with clouded, reminiscent eyes gazing out of the east window.

"It must have been about ten o'clock," he said at length. "The mater rang the little bell she keeps on the table beside her bed, and I was about to answer it when Zalia jumped up and said she would see what the mater wanted. Frankly, I was glad to let her go, after the scene you witnessed here yesterday—I had a feeling I might still be *persona non grata* there. Zalia came back in a few minutes and casually reported that the mater only wanted to have her water glass refilled."

"And did you yourself go into your mother's room at any time during Miss Beeton's absence?"

"No, I did not!" Garden looked defiantly at Vance.

"And you're sure that no one else entered your mother's room during the nurse's absence?"

"Absolutely."

I could tell by Vance's expression that he was not satisfied with Garden's answers. He broke the ashes from his cigarette with slow deliberation. His eyelids drooped a little with puzzled speculation. Without looking up, he asked:

"Were Miss Weatherby and Kroon in the drawing-room with you during their entire visit?"

"Yes—with the exception of ten minutes or so, when they walked out on the balcony."

"And you and Miss Graem remained in the drawing-room?"

"Yes. I was in no particular mood to view the nocturnal landscape—nor, apparently, was Zalia."

"About what time did Miss Weatherby and Kroon go out on the balcony?"

Garden thought a moment. "I'd say it was shortly before the nurse returned."

"And who was it," Vance went on, "that first suggested going home?"

Garden pondered the question.

"I believe it was Zalia."

Vance got up.

"Awfully good of you, Garden, to let us bother you with these queries at such a time," he said kindly. "We're deuced grateful...You won't be leaving the house today?"

Garden shook his head as he too stood up. "Hardly," he said. "I'll stay in with father. He's pretty well broken up. By the way, would you care to see him?"

Vance waved his hand negatively.

"No. That won't be necessary just now."

Garden went morosely from the room, his head down, like a man weighted with a great mental burden.

When he had gone Vance stood for a moment in front of Markham, eyeing him with cynical good-nature.

"Not a nice case, Markham. As I said. Frankly speakin', do you see any titbit for the law to get its teeth into?"

"No, damn it!" Markham blurted angrily. "No two things hang together. There's no straight line in any direction. Every thread in the case is tangled with every other thread. Heaven knows, there are enough motives and opportunities. But which are we to choose as a starting-point?...And yet," he added grimly, "a case could be made out—"

"Oh, quite," Vance interrupted. "A case against any one of various persons. And one case as good—or as bad—as another. Every one has acted in a perfect manner to bring suspicion upon himself." He sighed. "A sweet situation."

"And fiendish," supplemented Markham. "If it weren't for that fact, I'd be almost inclined to call it two suicides and let it go at that."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," countered Vance with an affectionate shake of the head. "Neither would I. Really, y' know, that's not the way to be humane." He moved toward the window and looked out. "But I have things pretty well in hand. The pattern is shaping itself perfectly. I've fitted together all the pieces, Markham,—all but one. And I hold that piece too, but I don't know where it goes, or how it fits into the ensemble."

Markham looked up. "What's the piece that's bothering you, Vance?"

"Those disconnected wires on the buzzer. They bother me frightfully. I know they have a bearing on the terrible things that have been going on here..." He turned from the window and walked up and down the room several times, his head down, his hands thrust deep into his pockets. "Why should those wires have been disconnected?" he murmured, as if talking to himself. "How could they have been related to Swift's death or to the shot we heard? There was no mechanism. No, I'm convinced of that. After all, the wires merely connect two buzzers...a signal...a signal between upstairs and downstairs...a signal—a call—a line of communication..."

Suddenly he stopped his meditative pacing. He was now facing the door into the passageway and he stared at it as if it were

something strange—as if he had never seen it before.

"Oh, my aunt!" he exclaimed. "My precious aunt! It was too obvious." He wheeled about to Markham, a look of self-reproach on his face. "The answer was here all the time," he said. "It was simple—and I was looking for complexities...The picture is complete now, Markham. Everything fits. Those disconnected wires mean that there's another murder contemplated—a murder that was intended from the first, but that did not come off." He took a deep breath. "This business must be cleared up today. Yes..."

He led the way downstairs. Heath was smoking gloomily in the lower hall.

"Sergeant," Vance said to him, "phone Miss Graem, Miss Weatherby, Kroon—and Hamble. Have them all here late this afternoon—say six o'clock. Floyd Garden can help you in getting in touch with them."

"They'll be here, all right, Mr. Vance," Heath assured him.

"And Sergeant, as soon as you have taken care of this, telephone me. I want to see you this afternoon. I'll be at home. But wait here for Snitkin and leave him in charge. No one is to come here but those I've asked you to get, and no one is to leave the apartment. And, above all, no one is to be permitted to go upstairs either to the study or the garden...I'm staggerin' along now."

"I'll be phoning you by the time you get home, Mr. Vance."

Vance went to the front door but paused with his hand on the knob.

"I think I'd better speak to Garden about the gathering before I go. Where is he, Sergeant?"

"He went into the den when he came downstairs," Heath told him with a jerk of the head.

Vance walked up the hall and opened the den door. I was just behind him. As the door swung inward and Vance stepped over the threshold, we were confronted by an unexpected tableau. Miss Beeton and Garden were standing just in front of the desk, outlined against the background of the window. The nurse's hands were pressed to her face, and she was leaning against Garden, sobbing. His arms were about her.

At the sound of Vance's entry they drew away from each other quickly. The girl turned her head to us with a sudden motion, and I could see that her eyes were red and filled with tears. She caught her breath and, turning with a start, half ran through the connecting door into the adjoining bedroom.

"I'm frightfully sorry," Vance murmured. "Thought you were alone."

"Oh, that's all right," Garden returned, although it was painfully evident the man was embarrassed. "But I do hope, Vance," he added with a forced smile, "that you won't misunderstand. Everything, you know, is in an emotional upheaval here. I imagine Miss Beeton had all she could stand yesterday and today, and when I found her in here she seemed to break down, and—put her head on my shoulder. I was merely trying to comfort her. I can't help feeling sorry for the girl."

Vance raised his hand in good-natured indifference.

"Oh, quite, Garden. A harassed lady always welcomes a strong masculine shoulder to weep on. Most of them leave powder on one's lapel, don't y' know; but I'm sure Miss Beeton wouldn't be guilty of that...Dashed sorry to interrupt you, but I wanted to tell you before I went that I have instructed Sergeant Heath to have all your guests of yesterday here by six o'clock this afternoon. Of course, we'll want you and your father here, too. If you don't mind, you might help the Sergeant with the phone numbers."

"I'll be glad to, Vance," Garden returned, taking out his pipe and beginning to fill it. "Anything special in mind?"

Vance turned toward the door.

"Yes. Oh, yes. Quite. I'm hopin' to clear this matter up later on. Meanwhile I'm running along. Cheerio." And he went out, closing the door.

As we walked down the outer hall to the elevator, Vance said to Markham somewhat sadly: "I hope my plan works out. I don't particularly like it. But I don't like injustice, either..."



## 16. THROUGH THE GARDEN DOOR

(Sunday, April 15; afternoon.)

We had been home but a very short time when Sergeant Heath telephoned as he had promised. Vance went into the anteroom to answer the call and closed the door after him. A few minutes later he rejoined us and, ringing for Currie, ordered his hat and stick.

"I'm running away for a while, old dear," he said to Markham. "In fact, I'm joining the doughty Sergeant at the Homicide Bureau. But I sha'n't be very long. In the meantime, I've ordered lunch for us here."

"Damn the lunch!" grumbled Markham. "What are you meeting Heath for?"

"I'm in need of a new waistcoat," Vance told him lightly.

"That explanation's a great help," Markham snorted.

"Sorry. It's the only one I can offer at present," Vance returned.

Markham stared at him, disgruntled, for several minutes.

"Why all this mystery?" he demanded.

"Really, y' know, Markham, it's necess'ry," Vance spoke seriously. "I'm hoping to work out this beastly affair tonight."

"For Heaven's sake, Vance, what are you planning?" Markham stood up in futile desperation.

Vance took a pony of brandy and lighted a *Régie*. Then he looked at Markham affectionately.

"I'm plannin' to entice the murderer into making one more bet—a losing bet...Cheerio." And he was gone.

Markham fumed and fretted during Vance's absence. He showed no inclination to talk, and I left him to himself. He tried to interest himself in Vance's library, but evidently found nothing to hold his attention. Finally he lit a cigar and settled himself in an easy chair before the window, while I busied myself with some notes I was preparing for Vance.

It was a little after half-past two when Vance returned to the apartment.

"Everything is in order," he announced as he came in. "There are no horses running today, of course, but nevertheless I'm looking forward to a big wager being laid this evening. If the bet isn't placed, we're in for it, Markham. Every one will be present, however. The Sergeant, with Garden's help, has got in touch with all those who were present yesterday, and they will foregather again in the Gardens' drawing-room at six o'clock. I myself have left a message for Doctor Siefert, and I hope he gets it in time to join us. I think he should be there..." He glanced at his watch and, ringing for Currie, ordered a bottle of 1919 Montrachet chilled for our lunch.

"If we don't tarry too long at table," he said, "we'll be able to hear the second half of the Philharmonic programme. Melinoff is doing Grieg's piano concerto, and I think it might do us all a bit of spiritual good. A beautiful climax, Markham—one of the most stirring in all music—simple, melodious, magistral. Curious thing about Grieg: it's taken the world a long time to realize the magnitude of the man's genius. One of the truly great composers..."

But Markham did not go with us to the concert. He pleaded an urgent political appointment at the Stuyvesant Club, but promised to meet us at the Garden apartment at six o'clock. As if by tacit agreement, no word regarding the case was spoken during lunch. When we had finished Markham excused himself and departed for the club, while Vance and I drove to Carnegie Hall. Melinoff gave a competent, if not an inspired, performance, and Vance seemed in a more relaxed frame of mind as we started for home.

Sergeant Heath was waiting for us when we reached the apartment.

"Everything's set, sir," he said to Vance; "I got it here."

Vance smiled a little sadly. "Excellent, Sergeant. Come into the other room with me while I get out of these Sunday togs."

Heath picked up a small package wrapped in brown paper, which he had evidently brought with him, and followed Vance into the bedroom. Ten minutes later they both came back into the library. Vance was now wearing a heavy dark tweed sack suit; and on Heath's face was a look of smug satisfaction.

"So long, Mr. Vance," he said, shaking hands. "Good luck to you." And he lumbered out.

We arrived at the Garden apartment a few minutes before six o'clock. Detectives Hennessey and Burke were in the front hall. As soon as we were inside Burke came up and, putting his hand to his mouth, said to Vance *sotto voce*:

"Sergeant Heath told me to tell you everything's all right. He and Snitkin are on the job."

Vance nodded and started up the stairs.

"Wait down here for me, Van," he said over his shoulder. "I'll be back immediately."

I wandered into the den, the door of which was ajar, and walked aimlessly about the room, looking at the various pictures and etchings. One behind the door attracted my attention—I think it was a Blampied—and I lingered before it for several moments. Just then Vance entered the room. As he came in he threw the door open wider, half pocketing me in the corner behind it, where I was not immediately noticeable. I was about to speak to him, when Zalia Graem came in.

"Philo Vance." She called his name in a low, tremulous voice.

He turned and looked at the girl with a quizzical frown.

"I've been waiting in the dining-room," she said. "I wanted to see you before you spoke to the others."

I realized immediately, from the tone of her voice, that my presence had not been noticed, and my first impulse was to step out from the corner. But, in the circumstances, I felt there could be nothing in her remarks which would be beyond the province of my privilege of hearing, and I decided not to interrupt them.

Vance continued to look squarely at the girl, but did not speak. She came very close to him now.

"Tell me why you have made me suffer so much," she said.

"I know I have hurt you," Vance returned. "But the circumstances made it imperative. Please believe that I understand more of this case than you imagine I do."

"I am not sure that I understand." The girl spoke hesitantly. "But I want you to know that I trust you." She looked up at him, and I

could see that her eyes were glistening. Slowly she bowed her head. "I have never been interested in any man," she went on—and there was a quaver in her voice. "The men I have known have all made me unhappy and seemed always to lead me away from the things I longed for..." She caught her breath. "You are the one man I have ever known whom I could—care for."

So suddenly had this startling confession come, that I did not have time to make my presence known, and after Miss Graem finished speaking I remained where I was, lest I cause her embarrassment.

Vance placed his hands on the girl's shoulders and held her away from him.

"My dear," he said, with a curiously suppressed quality in his voice, "I am the one man for whom you should not care." There was no mistaking the finality of his words.

Behind Vance the door to the adjoining bedroom opened suddenly, and Miss Beeton halted abruptly on the threshold. She was no longer wearing the nurse's uniform, but a plain tailored tweed suit, severe in cut.

"I'm sorry," she apologized. "I thought Floyd—Mr. Garden—was in here."

Vance looked at her sharply.

"You were obviously mistaken, Miss Beeton."

Zalia Graem was staring at the nurse with angry resentment.

"How much did you hear," she asked, "before you decided to open the door?"

Miss Beeton's eyes narrowed and there was a look of scorn in her steady gaze.

"You perhaps have something to hide," she answered coldly, as she walked across the room to the hall door and went toward the drawing-room.

Zalia Graem's eyes followed her as if fascinated, and then she turned back to Vance.

"That woman frightens me," she said. "I don't trust her. There's something dark—and cruel—back of that calm self-sufficiency of hers... And you've been so kind to her—but you have made *me* suffer."

Vance smiled wistfully at the girl.

"Would you mind waiting in the drawing-room a little while?..."

She gave him a searching look and, without speaking, turned and went from the den.

Vance stood for some time gazing at the floor with a frown of indecision, as if loath to proceed with whatever plans he had formulated. Then he turned to the window.

I took this opportunity to come out from my corner, and just as I did so Floyd Garden appeared at the hall door.

"Oh, hello, Vance," he said. "I didn't know you had returned until Zalia just told me you were in here. Anything I can do for you?"

Vance swung around quickly.

"I was just going to send for you. Every one here?"

Garden nodded gravely. "Yes, and they're all frightened to death—all except Hammle. He takes the whole thing as a lark. I wish somebody had shot him instead of Woody."

"Will you send him in here," Vance asked. "I want to talk to him. I'll see the others presently."

Garden walked up the hall, and at that moment I heard Burke speaking to Markham at the front door. Markham immediately joined us in the den.

"Hope I haven't kept you waiting," he greeted Vance.

"No. Oh, no." Vance leaned against the desk. "Just in time. Every one's here except Siefert, and I'm about to have Hammle in here for a chat. I think he'll be able to corroborate a few points I have in mind. He hasn't told us anything yet. And I may need your moral support."

Markham had barely seated himself when Hammle strutted into the den with a jovial air. Vance nodded to him brusquely and omitted all conventional preliminaries.

"Mr. Hammle," he said, "we're wholly familiar with your philosophy of minding your own business and keeping silent in order to avoid all involvements. A defensible attitude—but not in the present circumstances. This is a criminal case, and in the interest of justice to every one concerned, we must have the whole truth. Yesterday afternoon you were the only one in the drawing-room who had even a partial view down the hallway. And we must know everything you saw, no matter how trivial it may seem to you."

Hammle, assuming his poker expression, remained silent; and Markham leaned forward glowering at him.

"Mr. Hammle"—he spoke with cold, deadly calm—"if you don't wish to give us here what information you can, you will be taken before the Grand Jury and put under oath."

Hammle gave in. He spluttered and waved his arms.

"I'm perfectly willing to tell you everything I know. You don't have to threaten me. But to tell you the truth," he added suavely, "I didn't realize how serious the matter was." He sat down with pompous dignity and assumed an air which was obviously meant to indicate that for the time being he was the personification of law, order and truth.

"First of all, then," said Vance, without relaxing his stern gaze, "when Miss Graem left the room, ostensibly to answer a telephone call, did you notice exactly where she went?"

"Not exactly," Hammle returned; "but she turned to the left, toward the den. You understand, of course, that it was impossible for me to see very far down the hall, even from where I sat."

"Quite." Vance nodded. "And when she came back to the drawing-room?"

"I saw her first opposite the den door. She went to the hall closet where the hats and wraps are kept, and then came back to stand in the archway until the race was over. After that I didn't notice her either coming or going, as I had turned to shut off the radio."

"And what about Floyd Garden?" asked Vance. "You remember he followed Swift out of the room. Did you notice which way they went, or what they did?"

"As I remember, Floyd put his arm around Swift and led him into the dining-room. After a few moments they came out. Swift seemed to be pushing Floyd away from him, and then he disappeared down the hall toward the stairs. Floyd stood outside the dining-room door for several minutes, looking after his cousin, and then went down the hall after him; but he must have changed his mind, for

he came back into the drawing-room in short order."

"And you saw no one else in the hall?"

Hammle shook his head ponderously. "No. No one else."

"Very good." Vance took a deep inhalation on his cigarette. "And now let's go to the roof-garden, figuratively speaking. You were in the garden, waiting for a train, when the nurse was almost suffocated with bromin gas in the vault. The door into the passageway was open, and if you had been looking in that direction you could easily have seen who passed up and down the corridor." Vance looked at the man significantly. "And I have a feelin' you were looking through that door, Mr. Hammle. Your reaction of astonishment when we came out on the roof was a bit overdone. And you couldn't have seen much of the city from where you had been standing, don't y' know."

Hammle cleared his throat and grinned.

"You have me there, Vance," he admitted with familiar good-humor. "Since I couldn't make my train, I thought I'd satisfy my curiosity and stick around for a while to see what happened. I went out on the roof and stood where I could look through the door into the passageway—I wanted to see who was going to get hell next, and what would come of it all."

"Thanks for your honesty." Vance's face was coldly formal. "Please tell us now exactly what you saw through that doorway while you were waiting, as you've confessed, for something to happen."

Again Hammle cleared his throat.

"Well, Vance, to tell you the truth, it wasn't very much. Just people coming and going. First I saw Garden go up the passageway toward the study; and almost immediately he went back downstairs. Then Zalia Graem passed the door on her way to the study. Five or ten minutes later the detective—Heath, I think his name is—went by the door, carrying a coat over his arm. A little later—two or three minutes, I should say—Zalia Graem and the nurse passed each other in the passageway, Zalia going toward the stairs, and the nurse toward the study. A couple of minutes after that Floyd Garden passed the door on his way to the study again—"

"Just a minute," Vance interrupted. "You didn't see the nurse return downstairs after she passed Miss Graem in the passageway?"

Hammle shook his head emphatically. "No. Absolutely not. The first person I saw after the two girls was Floyd Garden going toward the study. And he came back past the door in a minute or so..."

"You're quite sure your chronology is accurate?"

"Absolutely."

Vance seemed satisfied and nodded.

"That much checks accurately with the facts as I know them," he said. "But are you sure no one else passed the door, either coming or going, during that time?"

"I would swear to that."

Vance took another deep puff on his cigarette.

"One more thing, Mr. Hammle: while you were out there in the garden, did any one come out on the roof from the terrace gate?"

"Absolutely not. I didn't see anybody at all on the roof."

"And when Garden had returned downstairs, what then?"

"I saw you come to the window and look out into the garden. I was afraid I might be seen, and the minute you turned away I went over to the far corner of the garden, by the gate. The next thing I knew, you gentlemen were coming out on the roof with the nurse."

Vance moved forward from the desk against which he had been resting.

"Thank you, Mr. Hammle. You've told me exactly what I wanted to know. It may interest you to learn that the nurse informed us she was struck over the head in the passageway, on leaving the study, and forced into the vault which was full of bromin fumes."

Hammle's jaw dropped and his eyes opened. He grasped the arms of his chair and got slowly to his feet.

"Good Gad!" he exclaimed. "So that's what it was! Who could have done it?"

"A pertinent question," returned Vance casually. "Who could have done it, indeed? However, the details of your secret observations from the garden have corroborated my private suspicions, and it's possible I may be able to answer your question before long. Please sit down again."

Hammle shot Vance an apprehensive look and resumed his seat. Vance turned from the man and looked out of the window at the darkening sky. Then he swung about to Markham. A sudden change had come over his expression, and I knew, by his look, that some deep conflict was going on within him.

"The time has come to proceed, Markham," he said reluctantly. Then he went to the door and called Garden.

The man came from the drawing-room immediately. He seemed nervous, and eyed Vance with inquisitive anxiety.

"Will you be so good as to tell every one to come into the den," Vance requested.

With a barely perceptible nod Garden turned back up the hall; and Vance crossed the room and seated himself at the desk.

## 17. AN UNEXPECTED SHOT

(Sunday, April 15; 6:20 p.m.)

Zalia Graem was the first to enter the den. There was a strained, almost tragic look on her drawn face. She glanced at Vance appealingly and seated herself without a word. She was followed by Miss Weatherby and Kroon, who sat down uneasily beside her on the davenport. Floyd Garden and his father came in together. The professor appeared dazed, and the lines on his face seemed to have deepened during the past twenty-four hours. Miss Beeton was just behind them and stopped hesitantly in the doorway, looking uncertainly at Vance.

"Did you want me too?" she asked diffidently.

"I think it might be best, Miss Beeton," said Vance. "We may need your help."

She gave him a nod of acquiescence and, stepping into the room, sat down near the door.

At that moment the front door bell rang, and Burke ushered Doctor Siefert into the den.

"I just got your message, Mr. Vance, and came right over." He looked about the room questioningly and then brought his eyes back to Vance.

"I thought you might care to be present," Vance said, "in case we can reach some conclusion about the situation here. I know you are personally interested. Otherwise I wouldn't have telephoned you."

"I'm glad you did," said Siefert blandly, and walked across to a chair before the desk.

Vance lighted a cigarette with slow deliberation, his eyes moving aimlessly about the room. There was a tension over the assembled group. But as future events indicated, no one could have known what was in Vance's mind or his reason for bringing them all together.

The taut silence was broken by Vance's voice. He spoke casually, but with a curious emphasis.

"I have asked you all to come here this afternoon in the hope that we could clear up the very tragic situation that exists. Yesterday Woode Swift was murdered in the vault upstairs. A few hours later I found Miss Beeton locked in the same vault, half suffocated. Last night, as you all know by now, Mrs. Garden died from what we have every reason to believe was an overdose of barbitol prescribed by Doctor Siefert. There can be no question that these three occurrences are closely related—that the same hand participated in them all. The pattern and the logic of the situation point indisputably to that assumption. There was, no doubt, a diabolical reason for each act of the murderer—and the reason was fundamentally the same in each instance. Unfortunately, the stage setting for this multiple crime was so confused that it facilitated every step of the murderer's plan, and at the same time tended to disperse suspicion among many people who were entirely innocent."

Vance paused for a moment.

"Luckily, I was present when the first murder was committed, and I have since been able to segregate the various facts connected with the crime. In that process of segregation I may have seemed unreasonable and, perhaps, harsh to several persons present. And during the process of my brief investigation, it has been necessary for me to withhold any expression of my personal opinions for fear of providing the perpetrator with an untimely warning. This, of course, would have proved fatal, for so cleverly was the whole plot conceived, so fortuitous were many of the circumstances connected with it, that we would never have succeeded in bringing the crime home to the true culprit. Consequently, an interplay of suspicion between the innocent members and guests of this household was essential. If I have offended any one or seemed unjust, I trust that, in view of the abnormal and terrible circumstances, I may be forgiven—"

He was interrupted by the startling sound of a shot ominously like that of the day before. Everyone in the room stood up quickly, aghast at the sudden detonation. Every one except Vance. And before any one could speak, his calm authoritative voice was saying:

"There is no need for alarm. Please sit down. I expressly arranged that shot for all of you to hear—it will have an important bearing on the case..."

Burke appeared suddenly at the door.

"Was that all right, Mr. Vance?"

"Quite all right," Vance told him. "The same revolver and blanks?"

"Sure. Just like you told me. And from where you said. Wasn't it like you wanted it?"

"Yes, precisely," nodded Vance. "Thanks, Burke." The detective grinned broadly and moved away down the hall.

"That shot, I believe," resumed Vance, sweeping his eyes lazily over those present, "was similar to the one we heard yesterday afternoon—the one that summoned us to Swift's dead body. It may interest you to know that the shot just fired by Detective Burke was fired from the same revolver, with the same cartridges, that the murderer used yesterday—and from about the same spot."

"But this shot sounded as if it were fired down here somewhere," cut in Siefert.

"Exactly," said Vance with satisfaction. "It was fired from one of the windows on this floor."

"But I understood that the shot yesterday came from upstairs," Siefert looked perplexed.

"That was the general, but erroneous, assumption," explained Vance. "Actually it did not. Yesterday, because of the open roof door and the stairway, and the closed door of the room from which the shot was fired, and mainly because we were psychologically keyed to the idea of a shot from the roof, it gave us all the impression of coming from the garden. We were misled by our manifest, but unformulated, fears."

"By George, you're right, Vance!" It was Floyd Garden who spoke almost excitedly. "I remember wondering at the time of the shot where it could have come from, but naturally my mind went immediately to Woody, and I assumed it came from the garden."

Zalia Graem turned quickly to Vance.

"The shot yesterday didn't sound to me as if it came from the garden. When I came out of the den I wondered why you were all hurrying upstairs."

Vance returned her gaze squarely.

"No, it must have sounded much closer to you," he said. "But why didn't you mention that important fact yesterday when I talked with you about the crime?"

"I—don't know," the girl stammered. "When I saw Woody dead up there, I naturally thought I'd been mistaken."

"But you couldn't have been mistaken," returned Vance, half under his breath. His eyes drifted off into space again. "And after the revolver had been fired yesterday from a downstairs window, it was surreptitiously placed in the pocket of Miss Beeton's top-coat in the hall closet. Had it been fired from upstairs it could have been hidden to far better advantage somewhere on the roof or in the study. Sergeant Heath, having searched both upstairs and down, later found it in the hall closet." He turned again to the girl. "By the by, Miss Graem, didn't you go to that closet after answering your telephone call here in the den?"

The girl gasped.

"How—how did you know?"

"You were seen there," explained Vance. "You must remember that the hall closet is visible from one end of the drawing-room."

"Oh!" Zalia Graem swung around angrily to Hammle. "So it was you who told him!"

"It was my duty," returned Hammle, drawing himself up righteously.

The girl turned back to Vance with flashing eyes.

"I'll tell you why I went to the hall closet. I went to get a handkerchief I had left in my handbag. Does that make me a murderer?"

"No. Oh, no." Vance shook his head and sighed. "Thank you for the explanation...And will you be so good as to tell me exactly what you did last night when you answered Mrs. Garden's summons?"

Professor Garden who had been sitting with bowed head, apparently paying no attention to any one, suddenly looked up and let his hollow eyes rest on the girl with a slight show of animation.

Zalia Graem glared defiantly at Vance.

"I asked Mrs. Garden what I could do for her, and she requested me to fill the water glass on the little table beside her bed. I went into the bathroom and filled it; then I arranged her pillows and asked her if there was anything else she wanted. She thanked me and shook her head; and I returned to the drawing-room."

Professor Garden's eyes clouded again, and he sank back in his chair, once more oblivious to his surroundings.

"Thank you," murmured Vance, nodding to Miss Graem and turning to the nurse. "Miss Beeton," he asked, "when you returned last night, was the bedroom window which opens on the balcony bolted?"

The nurse seemed surprised at the question. But when she answered, it was in a calm, professional tone.

"I didn't notice. But I know it was bolted when I went out—Mrs. Garden always insisted on it. I'm sorry I didn't look at the window when I returned. Does it really matter?"

"No, not particularly." Vance then addressed Kroon. "I understand you took Miss Weatherby out on the balcony last night. What were you doing there during the ten minutes you remained outside?"

Kroon bristled. "If you must know, we were fighting about Miss Fruemon—"

"We were not!" Miss Weatherby's shrill voice put in. "I was merely asking Cecil—"

"That's quite all right." Vance interrupted the woman sharply and waved his hand deprecatingly. "Questions or recriminations—it really doesn't matter, don't y' know." He turned leisurely to Floyd Garden. "I say, Garden, when you left the drawing-room yesterday afternoon, to follow Swift on your errand of mercy, as it were, after he had given you his bet on Equanimity, where did you go with him?"

"I led him into the dining-room." The man was at once troubled and aggressive. "I argued with him for a while, and then he came out and went down the hall to the stairs. I watched him for a couple of minutes, wondering what else I might do about it, for, to tell you the truth, I didn't want him to listen in on the race upstairs. I was pretty damned sure Equanimity wouldn't win, and he didn't know I hadn't placed his bet. I was rather worried about what he might do. For a minute I thought of following him upstairs, but changed my mind. I decided there was nothing more to be done about it except to hope for the best. So I returned to the drawing-room."

Vance lowered his eyes to the desk and was silent for several moments, smoking meditatively.

"I'm frightfully sorry, and all that," he murmured at length, without looking up; "but the fact is, we don't seem to be getting any forrader. There are plausible explanations for everything and everybody. For instance, during the commission of the first crime, Doctor Garden was supposedly at the library or in a taxicab. Floyd Garden, according to his own statement, and with the partial corroboration of Mr. Hammle here, was in the dining-room and the lower hallway. Mr. Hammle himself, as well as Miss Weatherby, was in the drawing-room. Mr. Kroon explains that he was smoking somewhere on the public stairway, and left two cigarette butts there as evidence. Miss Graem, so far as we can ascertain, was in the den here, telephoning. Therefore, assuming— merely as a hypothesis—that any one here could be guilty of the murder of Swift, of the apparent attempt to murder Miss Beeton, and of the possible murder of Mrs. Garden, there is nothing tangible to substantiate an individual accusation. The performance was too clever, too well conceived, and the innocent persons seem unconsciously and involuntarily to have formed a conspiracy to aid and abet the murderer."

Vance looked up and went on.

"Moreover, nearly every one has acted in a manner which conceivably would make him appear guilty. There have been an amazing number of accusations. Mr. Kroon was the first victim of one of these unsubstantiated accusations. Miss Graem has been pointed out to me as the culprit by several persons. Mrs. Garden last night directly accused her son. In fact, there has been a general tendency to involve various people in the criminal activities here. From the human and psychological point of view the issue has been both deliberately and unconsciously clouded, until the confusion was such that no clear-cut outline remained. And this created an atmosphere which perfectly suited the murderer's machinations, for it made detection extremely difficult and positive proof almost impossible...And yet," Vance added, "some one in this room is guilty."

He rose dejectedly. I could not understand his manner: it was so unlike the man as I had always known him. All of his assurance seemed gone, and I felt that he was reluctantly admitting defeat. He turned and looked out of the window into the gathering dusk. Then he swung round quickly, and his eyes swept angrily about the room, resting for a brief moment on each one present.

"Furthermore," he said with a staccato stress on his words, "*I know who the guilty person is!*"

There was an uneasy stir in the room and a short tense silence which was broken by Doctor Siefert's cultured voice.

"If that is the case, Mr. Vance—and I do not doubt the sincerity of your statement—I think it your duty to name that person."

Vance regarded the doctor thoughtfully for several moments before answering. Then he said in a low voice: "I think you are right, sir." Again he paused and, lighting a fresh cigarette, moved restlessly up and down in front of the window. "First, however," he said, stopping suddenly, "there's something upstairs I wish to look at again—to make sure...You will all please remain here for a few minutes." And he moved swiftly toward the door. At the threshold he hesitated and turned to the nurse. "Please come with me, Miss Beeton. I think you can help me."

The nurse rose and followed Vance into the hall. A moment later we could hear them mounting the stairs.

A restlessness swept over those who remained below. Professor Garden got slowly to his feet and went to the window, where he stood looking out. Kroon threw a half-smoked cigarette away and, taking out his case offered it to Miss Weatherby. As they lighted their cigarettes they murmured something to each other which I could not distinguish.

Floyd Garden shifted uncomfortably in his chair and resumed his nervous habit of packing his pipe. Siefert moved around the room, pretending to inspect the etchings, and Markham's eyes followed his every move. Hammle cleared his throat loudly several times, lighted a cigarette, and busied himself with various papers which he took from his pocket folder. Only Zalia Graem remained unruffled. She leaned her head against the back of the davenport and, closing her eyes, smoked languidly. I could have sworn there was the trace of a smile at the corners of her mouth...

Fully five minutes passed, and then the tense silence of the room was split by a woman's frenzied and terrifying cry for help, from somewhere upstairs. As we reached the hallway the nurse came stumbling down the stairs, holding with both hands to the, bronze railing. Her face was ghastly pale, and there was a wild, frightened look in her eyes.

"Mr. Markham! Mr. Markham!" she called hysterically. "Oh, my God! The most terrible thing has happened!"

She had just reached the foot of the stairs when Markham came up to her. She stood clutching the railing for support.

"It's Mr. Vance!" she panted excitedly. "He's—gone!"

A chill of horror passed over me, and every one in the hall seemed stunned. I noticed—as something entirely apart from my immediate perceptions—Heath and Snitkin and Peter Quackenbush, the official police photographer, step into the hall through the main entrance. Quackenbush had his camera and tripod with him; and the three men stood calmly just inside the door, detached from the amazed group around the foot of the stairs. I vaguely wondered why they were accepting the situation with such smug indifference...

In broken phrases, interspersed with gasping sobs, the nurse was explaining to Markham.

"He went over.—Oh, God, it was horrible! He said he wanted to ask me something, and led me out into the garden. He began questioning me about Doctor Siefert, and Professor Garden, and Miss Graem. And while he talked he moved over to the parapet—you remember where he stood last night. He got up there again, and looked down. I was frightened—the way I was yesterday. And then—and then—while I was talking to him—he bent over, and I could see—oh, God!—he had lost his balance." She stared at Markham wild-eyed. "I reached toward him...and suddenly he wasn't there any more...He had gone over!..."

Her eyes lifted suddenly over our heads and peered past us transfixed. A sudden change came over her. Her face seemed contorted into a hideous mask. Following her horrified gaze, we instinctively turned and glanced up the hallway toward the drawing-room...

There, near the archway, looking calmly toward us, was Vance.

I have had many harrowing experiences, but the sight of Vance at that moment, after the horror I had been through, affected me more deeply than any shock I can recall. A numbness overcame me, and I could feel cold perspiration breaking out all over my body. The sound of Vance's voice merely tended to upset me further.

"I told you last night, Miss Beeton," he was saying, his eyes resting sternly on the nurse, "that no gambler ever quits with his first winning bet, and that in the end he always loses." He came forward a few steps. "You won your first gamble, at long odds, when you murdered Swift. And your poisoning of Mrs. Garden with the barbitol also proved a winning bet. But when you attempted to add me to your list of victims, because you suspected I knew too much—you lost. That race was fixed—you hadn't a chance."

Markham was glaring at Vance in angry amazement.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he fairly shouted, despite his obvious effort to suppress his excitement.

"It merely means, Markham," explained Vance, "that I gave Miss Beeton an opportunity to push me over the parapet to what ordinarily would have been certain death. And she took that opportunity. This afternoon I arranged for Heath and Snitkin to witness the episode; and I also arranged to have it permanently recorded."

"Recorded? Good God! What do you mean?" Markham seemed half dazed.

"Just that," returned Vance calmly. "An official photograph taken with a special lens adapted to the semi-light—for the Sergeant's archives." He looked past Markham to Quackenbush. "You got the picture, I hope," he said.

"I sure did," the man returned with a satisfied grin. "At just the right angle too. A pippin."

The nurse, who had been staring at Vance as if petrified, suddenly relaxed her hold on the stair railing, and her hands went to her face in a gesture of hopelessness and despair. Then her hands dropped to her sides to reveal a face of haggard defeat.

"Yes!" she cried at Vance; "I tried to kill you. Why shouldn't I? You were about to take everything—*everything*—away from me."

She turned quickly and ran up the stairs. Almost simultaneously Vance dashed forward.

"Quick, quick!" he called out. "Stop her before she gets to the garden."

But before any of us realized the significance of his words, Vance was himself on the stairs. Heath and Snitkin were just behind him, and the rest of us, stupefied, followed. As I came out on the roof, I could see Miss Beeton running toward the far end of the garden, with Vance immediately behind her. Twilight had nearly passed, and a deep dusk had settled over the city. As the girl leaped up on the parapet at the same point where Vance had stood the night before, she was like a spectral silhouette against the faintly glowing sky. And then she disappeared down into the deep shadowy abyss, just before Vance could reach her...

## 18. THE SCRATCH SHEET

(Sunday, April 15; 7:15 p.m.)

A half hour later we were all seated in the den again. Heath and the detectives had gone out immediately after the final catastrophe to attend to the unpleasant details occasioned by Miss Beeton's suicide.

Vance was once more in the chair at the desk. The tragic termination of the case seemed to have saddened him. He smoked gloomily for a few minutes. Then he spoke.

"I asked all of you to stay because I felt you were entitled to an explanation of the terrible events that have taken place here, and to hear why it was necessary for me to conduct the investigation in the manner I did. To begin with, I knew from the first that I was dealing with a very shrewd and unscrupulous person, and I knew it was some one who was in the house yesterday afternoon. Therefore, until I had some convincing proof of that person's guilt, it was imperative for me to appear to doubt every one present. Only in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and recrimination—in which I myself appeared to be as much at sea as any one else—was it possible to create in the murderer that feeling of security which I felt would lead to his final undoing.

"I was inclined to suspect Miss Beeton almost from the first, for, although every one here had, through some act, drawn suspicion upon himself, only the nurse had the time and the unhampered opportunity to commit the initial crime. She was entirely unobserved when she put her plan into execution; and so thoroughly familiar was she with every arrangement of the household, that she had no difficulty in timing her every step so as to insure this essential privacy. Subsequent events and circumstances added irresistibly to my suspicion of her. For instance, when Mr. Floyd Garden informed me where the key to the vault was kept, I sent her to see if it was in place, without indicating to her where its place was, in order to ascertain if she knew where the key hung. Only some one who knew exactly how to get into the vault at a moment's notice could have been guilty of killing Swift. Of course, the fact that she did know was not definite proof of her guilt, as there were others who knew; but at least it was a minor factor in the case against her. If she had not known where the key was kept, she would have been automatically eliminated. My request that she look for the key was made with such casualness and seeming indifference that it apparently gave her no inkling of my ulterior motive.

"Incidentally, one of my great difficulties in the case has been to act in such a way, at all times, that her suspicions would not be aroused at any point. This was essential because, as I have said, I could hope to substantiate my theory of her guilt only by making her feel sufficiently secure to do or say something which would give her away.

"Her motive was not clear at first, and, unfortunately, I thought that by Swift's death alone she had accomplished her purpose. But after my talk with Doctor Siefert this morning, I was able to understand fully her whole hideous plot. Doctor Siefert pointed out definitely her interest in Floyd Garden, although I had had hints of it before. For instance, Floyd Garden was the only person here about whom she spoke to me with admiration. Her motive was based on a colossal ambition—the desire for financial security, ease and luxury; and mixed with this over-weening desire was a strange twisted love. These facts became clear to me only today."

Vance glanced at young Garden.

"It was you she wanted," he continued. "And I believe her self-assurance was such that she did not doubt for a minute that she would be successful in attaining her goal."

Garden sprang to his feet.

"Good God, Vance!" he exclaimed. "You're right. I see the thing now. She has been making up to me for a long time; and, to be honest with you, I may have said and done things which she could have construed as encouragement—God help me!" He sat down again in dejected embarrassment.

"No one can blame you," Vance said kindly. "She was one of the shrewdest women I have ever encountered. But the point of it all is, she did not want you—she wanted the Garden fortune as well. That's why, having learned that Swift would share in the inheritance, she decided to eliminate him and leave you sole beneficiary. But this murder did not, by any means, constitute the whole of her scheme."

Vance again addressed us in general.

"Her whole terrible plot was clarified by some other facts that Doctor Siefert brought out this morning during my talk with him. The death, either now or later, of Mrs. Garden was also an important integer of that plot; and Mrs. Garden's physical condition had, for some time, shown certain symptoms of poisoning. Of late these symptoms have increased in intensity. Doctor Siefert informed me that Miss Beeton had been a laboratory assistant to Professor Garden during his experiments with radioactive sodium, and had often come to the apartment here for the purpose of typing notes and attending to other duties which could not conveniently be performed at the University. Doctor Siefert also informed me that she had actually entered the household here about two months ago, to take personal charge of Mrs. Garden's case. She had, however, continued to assist Professor Garden occasionally in his work and naturally had access to the radioactive sodium he had begun to produce; and it was since she had come here to live that Mrs. Garden's condition had grown worse—the result undoubtedly of the fact that Miss Beeton had greater and more frequent opportunities for administering the radioactive sodium to Mrs. Garden. Her decision to eliminate Mrs. Garden, so that Floyd Garden would inherit her money, undoubtedly came shortly after she had become the professor's assistant and had, through her visits to the apartment, become acquainted with Floyd Garden and familiar with the various domestic arrangements here."

Vance turned his eyes to Professor Garden.

"And you too, sir," he said, "were, as I see it, one of her intended victims. When she planned to shoot Swift I believe she planned a double murder—that is, you and Swift were to be shot at the same time. But, luckily, you had not returned to your study yesterday afternoon at the time fixed for the double shooting, and her original plan had to be revised."

"But—but," stammered the professor, "how could she have killed me and Woody too?"

"The disconnected buzzer wires gave me the answer this morning," explained Vance. "Her scheme was both simple and bold. She

knew that, if she followed Swift upstairs before the big race, she would have no difficulty in enticing him into the vault on some pretext or other— especially in view of the fact that he had shown a marked interest in her. Her intention was to shoot him in the vault, just as she did, and then go into the study and shoot you. Swift's body would then have been placed in the study, with the revolver in his hand. It would appear like murder and suicide. As for the possibility of the shot in the study being heard downstairs, I imagine she had tested that out beforehand under the very conditions obtaining yesterday afternoon. Personally, I am of the opinion that a shot in the study could not be heard down here during the noise and excitement of a race broadcast, with the study door and windows shut. For the rest, her original plan would have proceeded just as her revised one did. She would merely have fired two blanks out of the bedroom window instead of one. In the event that you should have guessed her intent when she entered the study, and tried to summon help, she had previously disconnected the wires of the buzzer just behind your chair at the desk."

"But, good Lord!" exclaimed Floyd Garden in an awed tone. "It was she herself who told Sneed about the buzzer being out of order."

"Precisely. She made it a point to be the one to discover that fact, in order to draw suspicion entirely away from herself; for the natural assumption, she must have reasoned, would be that the person who had disconnected the wires for some criminal purpose would be the last one to call attention to them. It was a bold move, but it was quite in keeping with her technique throughout."

Vance paused. After a moment he went on.

"As I say, her plan had to be revised somewhat because Doctor Garden had not returned. She had chosen the Rivermont Handicap as the background for her manoeuvres, for she knew Swift was placing a large bet on the race—and if he lost, it would give credence to the theory of suicide. As for the shooting of Doctor Garden, that would, of course, be attributed to his attempt to thwart his nephew's suicide. And, in a way, Doctor Garden's absence helped her, though it required quick thinking on her part to cover up this unexpected gap in her well-laid plans. Instead of placing Swift in the study, as she originally intended, she placed him in his chair on the roof. She carefully wiped up the blood in the vault so that no trace of it remained on the floor. A nurse with operating-room experience in removing blood from sponges, instruments, operating table and floor, would have known how. Then she came down and fired a blank shell out of the bedroom window just as soon as the outcome of the race had been declared official. Substantiatin' suicide."

"Of course, one of her chief difficulties was the disposal of the second revolver—the one she fired down here. She was confronted with the necessity either of getting rid of the revolver—which was quite impossible in the circumstances—or of hiding it safely till she could remove it from the apartment; for there was always the danger that it might be discovered and the whole technique of the plot be revealed. Since she was the person apparently least under suspicion, she probably considered that placing it temporarily in the pocket of her own top-coat, would be sufficiently safe. It was not an ideal hiding-place; but I have little doubt that she was frustrated in an attempt to hide it somewhere on the roof or on the terrace upstairs, until she could take it away at her convenience without being observed. She had no opportunity to hide the revolver upstairs after we had first gone to the roof and discovered Swift's body. However, I think it was her intention to do just this when Miss Weatherby saw her on the stairs and resentfully called my attention to the fact. Naturally, Miss Beeton denied having been on the stairs at all. And the significance of the situation did not occur to me at the moment; but I believe that she had the revolver on her person at the time Miss Weatherby saw her. She evidently thought she would have sufficient time while I was in the den, to run to the roof and hide the revolver; but when she had barely started upstairs, Miss Weatherby came unexpectedly out of the drawing-room with the intention of going to the garden herself. It was immediately after that, no doubt, that she dropped the revolver into her coat pocket in the hall closet..."

"But why," asked Professor Garden, "didn't she fire the revolver upstairs in the first place—it would certainly have made the shot sound more realistic—and then hide it in the garden before coming down?"

"My dear sir! That would have been impossible, as you can readily see. How would she have got back downstairs? We were ascending the stairs a few seconds after we heard the shot, and would have met her coming down. She could, of course, have come down by the public stairs and re-entered the apartment at the front door without being seen; but in that event she could not have established her presence down here at the time the shot was fired—and this was of utmost importance to her. When we reached the foot of the stairs, she was standing in the doorway of Mrs. Garden's bedroom, and she made it clear that she had heard the shot. It was, of course, a perfect alibi, provided the technique of the crime had not been revealed by the evidence she left in the vault...No. The shot could not have been fired upstairs. The only place she could have fired it and still have established her alibi, was out of the bedroom window."

He turned to Zalia Graem.

"Now do you see why you felt so definitely that the shot did not sound as if it came from the garden? It was because, being in the den, you were the person nearest to the shot when it was fired and could more or less accurately gauge the direction from which it came. I'm sorry I could not explain that fact to you when you mentioned it, but Miss Beeton was in the room, and it was not then the time to reveal my knowledge to her."

"Well, anyway, you were horrid about it," the girl complained. "You acted as if you believed the reason I heard the shot so distinctly was that I had fired it."

"Couldn't you read between the lines of my remarks? I was hoping you would."

She shook her head. "No, I was too worried at the time; but I'll confess that when you asked Miss Beeton to go to the roof with you, the truth dawned on me."

(The moment she made this remark I recalled that she was the only person in the room who was entirely at ease when Vance had gone upstairs.)

There was another brief silence in the room, which was broken by Floyd Garden.

"There's one point that bothers me, Vance," he said. "If Miss Beeton counted on our accepting the suicide theory, what if Equanimity had won the race?"

"That would have upset her entire calculations," answered Vance. "But she was a great gambler. And, remember, she was playing for the highest stakes. She was practically betting her life. I'll warrant it was the biggest wager ever made on Equanimity."

"Good God!" Floyd Garden murmured. "And I thought Woody's bet was a big one!"



"But, Mr. Vance," put in Doctor Siefert, frowning, "your theory of the case does not account for the attempt made on her own life."

Vance smiled faintly.

"There was no attempt on her life, doctor. When Miss Beeton left the study, a minute or so after Miss Graem, to take my message to you, she went instead into the vault, shut the door, making sure this time that the lock snapped, and gave herself a superficial blow on the back of the head. She had reason to believe, of course, that it would be but a short time before we looked for her; and she waited till she heard the key in the lock before she broke the vial of bromin. It is possible that when she went out of the study she had begun to fear that I might have some idea of the truth, and she enacted this little melodrama to throw me off the track. Her object undoubtedly was to throw suspicion on Miss Graem."

Vance looked at the girl sympathetically.

"I think when you were called from the drawing-room to the phone, Miss Graem—at just the time Miss Beeton was on her way upstairs to shoot Swift—she decided to use you, should it be necessary to save herself. Undoubtedly she knew of your feud with Swift, and capitalized it; and she also undoubtedly realized that you would be a suspect in the eyes of the others who were here yesterday. That is why, my dear, I sought to lead her on by seeming to regard you as the culprit. And it had its effect...I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me for having made you suffer."

The girl did not speak—she seemed to be struggling with her emotions.

Siefert had leaned forward and was studying Vance closely.

"As a theory, that may be logical," he said with skeptical gravity. "But, after all, it is only a theory."

Vance shook his head slowly.

"Oh, no, doctor. It's more than a theory. And you should be the last person to put that name on it. Miss Beeton herself—and in your presence—gave the whole thing away. Not only did she lie to us, but she contradicted herself when you and I were on the roof and she was recovering from the effects of the bromin gas—effects, incidentally, which she was able to exaggerate correctly as the result of her knowledge of medicine."

"But I don't recall—"

Vance checked him. "Surely, doctor, you remember the story she told us. According to her voluntary account of the episode, she was struck on the head and forced into the vault; and she fainted immediately as the result of the bromin gas; then the next thing she knew was that she was lying on the settee in the garden, and you and I were standing over her."

Siefert inclined his head.

"That is quite correct," he said, frowning at Vance.

"And I am sure you also remember, doctor, that she looked up at me and thanked me for having brought her out into the garden and saved her, and also asked me how I came to find her so soon."

Siefert was still frowning intently at Vance.

"That also is correct," he admitted. "But I still don't understand wherein she gave herself away."

"Doctor," asked Vance, "if she had been unconscious, as she said, from the time she was forced into the vault to the time she spoke to us in the garden, how could she possibly have known who it was that had found her and rescued her from the vault? And how could she have known that I found her soon after she had entered the vault?...You see, doctor, she was never unconscious at all: she was taking no chances whatever of dying of bromin gas. As I have said, it was not until I had started to unlock the door that she broke the vial of bromin; and she was perfectly aware who entered the vault and carried her out to the garden. Those remarks of hers to me were a fatal error on her part."

Siefert relaxed and leaned back in his chair with a faint wry smile.

"You are perfectly right, Mr. Vance. That point escaped me entirely."

"But," Vance continued, "even had Miss Beeton not made the mistake of lying to us so obviously, there was other proof that she alone was concerned in that episode. Mr. Hammle here conclusively bore out my opinion. When she told us her story of being struck on the head and forced into the vault, she did not know that Mr. Hammle had been in the garden observing every one who came and went in the passageway. And she was alone in the corridor at the time of the supposed attack. Miss Graem, to be sure, had just passed her and gone downstairs; and the nurse counted on that fact to make her story sound plausible, hoping, of course, that it would produce the effect she was striving for—that is, to make it appear that Miss Graem had attacked her."

Vance smoked in silence for a moment.

"As for the radioactive sodium, doctor, Miss Beeton had been administering it to Mrs. Garden, content with having her die slowly of its cumulative effects. But Mrs. Garden's threat to erase her son's name from her will necessitated immediate action, and the resourceful girl decided on an overdose of the barbitol last night. She foresaw, of course, that this death could easily be construed as an accident or as another suicide. As it happened, however, things were even more propitious for her, for the events of last night merely cast further suspicion on Miss Graem."

"From the first I realized how difficult, if not impossible, it would be to prove the case against Miss Beeton; and during the entire investigation I was seeking some means of trapping her. With that end in view, I mounted the parapet last night in her presence, hoping that it might suggest to her shrewd and cruel mind a possible means of removing me from her path, if she became convinced that I had guessed too much. My plan to trap her was, after all, a simple one. I asked you all to come here this evening, not as suspects, but to fill the necessary roles in my grim drama."

Vance sighed deeply before continuing.

"I arranged with Sergeant Heath to equip the post at the far end of the garden with a strong steel wire such as is used in theatres for flying and levitation acts. This wire was to be just long enough to reach as far as the height of the balcony on this floor. And to it was attached the usual spring catch which fastens to the leather equipment worn by the performer. This equipment consists of a heavy cowhide vest resembling in shape and cut the old Ferris waist worn by young girls in post-Victorian days, and even later. This afternoon Sergeant Heath brought such a leather vest—or what is technically known in theatrical circles as a 'flying corset'—to my apartment, and I put it on before I came here...You might be interested in seeing it. I took it off a little while ago, for it's frightfully

uncomfortable..."

He rose and went through the door into the adjoining bedroom. A few moments later he returned with the leather "corset." It was made of very heavy brown leather, with a soft velour finish, and was lined with canvas. The sides, instead of being seamed, were held together by strong leather thongs laced through brass eyelets. The closing down the middle was effected by a row of inch-wide leather straps and steel buckles by which the vest was tightened to conform to the contour of the person who wore it. There were adjustable shoulder straps of leather, and thigh straps strongly made and cushioned with thick rolls of rubber.

Vance held up this strange garment.

"Here it is," he said. "Ordinarily, the buckles and straps are in front and the attachment for the spring catch is in back. But for my purpose this had to be reversed. I needed the rings in front because the wire had to be attached at this point when my back was turned to Miss Beeton." He pointed to two heavy overlapping iron rings, about two inches in diameter, held in place by nuts and bolts in a strip of canvas, several layers in thickness, in the front of the corset.

Vance threw the garment on the desk.

"This waistcoat, or corset," he said, "is worn under the actor's costume; and in my case I put on a loose tweed suit today so that the slightly protruding rings in front would not be noticeable.

"When I took Miss Beeton upstairs with me, I led her out into the garden and confronted her with her guilt. While she was protesting, I mounted the parapet, standing there with my back to her, ostensibly looking out over the city, as I had done last evening. In the semi-darkness I snapped the wire to the rings on the front of my leather vest without her seeing me do so. She came very close to me as she talked, but for a minute or so I was afraid she would not take advantage of the situation. Then, in the middle of one of her sentences, she lurched toward me with both hands outstretched, and the impact sent me over the parapet. It was a simple matter to swing myself over the balcony railing. I had arranged for the drawing-room door to be unlatched, and I merely disconnected the suspension wire, walked in, and appeared in the hallway. When Miss Beeton learned that I had witnesses to her act, as well as a photograph of it, she realized that the game was up.

"I admit, however, that I had not foreseen that she would resort to suicide. But perhaps it is just as well. She was one of those women who through some twist of nature—some deep-rooted wickedness—personify evil. It was probably this perverted tendency which drew her into the profession of nursing, where she could see, and even take part in, human suffering."

Vance leaned back in his chair and smoked abstractedly. He seemed to be deeply affected, as were all of us. Little more was said—each, of us, I think, was too much occupied with his own thoughts for any further discussion of the case. There were a few desultory questions, a few comments, and then a long silence.

Doctor Siefert was the first to take his departure. Shortly afterward the others rose restlessly.

I felt shaken from the sudden let-down of the tension through which I had been going, and walked into the drawing-room for a drink of brandy. The only light in the room came through the archway from the chandelier in the hall and from the after-glow of the sky which faintly illumined the windows, but it was sufficient to enable me to make my way to the little cabinet bar in the corner. I poured myself a pony of brandy and, drinking it quickly, stood for a moment looking out of the window over the slaty waters of the Hudson.

I heard some one enter the room and cross toward the balcony, but I did not look round immediately. When I did turn back to the room I saw the dim form of Vance standing before the open door to the balcony, a solitary, meditative figure. I was about to speak to him when Zalia Graem came softly through the archway and approached him.

"Good-by, Philo Vance," she said.

"I'm frightfully sorry," Vance murmured, taking her extended hand. "I was hoping you would forgive me when you understood everything."

"I do forgive you," she said. "That's what I came to tell you."

Vance bowed his head and raised her fingers to his lips.

The girl then withdrew her hand slowly and, turning, went from the room.

Vance watched her till she had passed through the archway. Then he moved to the open door and stepped out on the balcony.

When Zalia Graem had gone, I went into the den where Markham sat talking with Professor Garden and his son. He looked up at me as I entered, and glanced at his watch.

"I think we'd better be going, Van," he said. "Where's Vance?"

I went reluctantly back into the drawing-room to fetch him. He was still standing on the balcony, gazing out over the city with its gaunt spectral structures and its glittering lights.

To this day Vance has not lost his deep affection for Zalia Graem. He has rarely mentioned her name, but I have noted a subtle change in his nature, which I attribute to the influence of that sentiment. Within a fortnight after the Garden murder case, Vance went to Egypt for several months; and I have a feeling that this solitary trip was motivated by his interest in Miss Graem. One evening after his return from Cairo he remarked to me: "A man's affections involve a great responsibility. The things a man wants most must often be sacrificed because of this exacting responsibility." I think I understood what was in his mind. With the multiplicity of intellectual interests that occupied him, he doubted (and I think rightly so) his capacity to make any woman happy in the conventional sense.

As for Zalia Graem, she married Floyd Garden the following year, and they are now living on Long Island, only a few miles distant from Hammle's estate. Miss Weatherby and Kroon are still seen together; and there have been rumors from time to time that she is about to sign a contract with a Hollywood motion-picture producer. Professor Garden is still living in his penthouse apartment, a lonely and somewhat pathetic figure, completely absorbed in his researches.

A year or so after the tragedies at the Garden apartment, Vance met Hannix, the book-maker, at Bowie. It was a casual meeting, and I doubt if Vance remembered it afterward. But Hannix remembered. One day, several months later, when Vance and I were sitting in the downstairs dining-hall of the club-house at Empire, Hannix came over and drew up a chair.

"What's happened to Floyd Garden, Mr. Vance?" he asked. "I haven't heard from him for over a year. Given up the horses?"

"It's possible, don't y' know," Vance returned with a faint smile.

"But why?" demanded Hannix. "He was a good sport, and I miss him."

"I dare say." Vance nodded indifferently. "Perhaps he grew a bit weary of contributing to your support."

"Now, now, Mr. Vance." Hannix assumed an injured air and extended his hands appealingly. "That was a cruel remark. I never held out with Mr. Garden for the usual bookie maximum. Believe, me, I paid him mutuel prices on any bet up to half a hundred...By the way, Mr. Vance,"—Hannix leaned forward confidentially—"the Butler Handicap is coming up in a few minutes, and the slates are all quoting Only One at eight. If you like the colt, I'll give you ten on him. He's got a swell chance to win."

Vance looked at the man coldly and shook his head. "No, thanks, Hannix. I'm already on Discovery."

Discovery won that race by a length and a half. Only One, incidentally, finished a well-beaten second.

THE END

## Footnotes

[1] "The Casino Murder Case" [1934]

[2] I realize that this statement will call forth considerable doubt, for real Napoléon brandy is practically unknown in America. But Vance had obtained a case in France; and Lawton Mackall, an exacting connoisseur, has assured me that, contrary to the existing notion among experts, there are at least eight hundred cases of this brandy in a warehouse in Cognac at the present day.

[3] It is interesting to note the recent announcement that a magnetic accelerator of five million volts and weighing ten tons for the manufacture of artificial radium for the treatment of malignant growths, such as cancer, is being built by the University of Rochester.

[4] At one time Vance was a polo enthusiast and played regularly. He too had a five-goal rating.

[5] When Vance read the proof of this record, he made a marginal notation: "And I might also have mentioned Sir Barton, Sysonby, Colin, Crusader, Twenty Grand, and Equipoise."

[6] Miles Siefert was, at that time, one of the leading pathologists of New York, with an extensive practice among the fashionable element of the city.

[7] Vance at one time owned several excellent race-horses. His Magic Mirror, Smoke Maiden, and Aldeen were well known in their day; and Magic Mirror, as a three-year-old won two of the most important handicaps on the eastern tracks. But when, in the famous Elmswood Special, this horse broke a leg on entering the back-stretch and had to be destroyed, Vance seemed to lose all interest in racing and disposed of his entire stable. He is probably not a true horseman, any more than he is a truly great breeder of Scottish terriers, for his sentiments are constantly interfering with the stern and often ruthless demands of the game.

[8] These three horses were the first to better, by fractions of a second, Jack High's 1:35 record for the mile at Belmont.

[9] In America, where earths are not stopped, not more than one fox in twenty is actually killed in the open, and it is very unpopular—and by many considered unsportsmanlike—to force a fox out of a place in which he has taken refuge, in order to kill him. But this practice is regularly resorted to in England, for various reasons; and occasionally an American Master will ape the English to this extent in order to boast that he had killed his fox and not merely accounted for him.

[10] "Lucky" Baldwin, the owner of Los Angeles, insisted upon run-off (which was the privilege of the owners of dead-heat winners up to 1932), and Los Angeles won.

[11] On the "cards" for New York State, however, the numbers do not correspond to the post positions, as here these positions are drawn shortly before the races begin, except in stake races.

[12] Alexis Flint was the service announcer at the central news station.

[13] Vance was referring to Nash's famous couplet: "Philo Vance Needs a kick in the pance."

[14] Hannix was Floyd Garden's book-maker.

[15] The pari-mutuel prices.

[16] David Alexander, the entertaining turf chronicler, wrote an item about these two horses recently. "Morestone," said Mr. Alexander, "could run plenty fast—up to six furlongs. But after six furlongs he flagged the horse ambulance. Morestone could quit in track record time. Nothing like it had been seen since they tried to make Nevada Queen go more than a half-mile a few years ago. There were two mysteries about Morestone. One was how he could run so fast, and the other was how he could quit so fast."

[17] Mutuel prices are figured on the basis of a two-dollar bet made at the track, and already paid in there. Therefore, away from the track, where the money wagered has not actually been passed over, the two dollars is subtracted from the mutuel price and the remainder is then divided by two to ascertain the exact odds which the horse paid on one dollar. In this particular race, Vance's horse paid \$3.90 to come in second, or place. Two dollars subtracted from this leaves \$1.90, and this amount divided by two gives ninety-five cents—that is, in the position in which Vance played him, Black Revel paid ninety-five cents on the dollar. Hence, Vance, having wagered \$100 on the horse to place, won \$95. In Hammle's case, the horse paid \$5.80 in third place, so that the net odds were \$1.90 to the dollar in that position. And, since he bet \$25 on the horse to come in third, he won \$47.50. But, from this must be deducted the \$25 he played on the horse to win, and the \$25 he put on the same horse to come in second—both of which bets he lost. This left him minus \$2.50.

[18] Short for totalizator, an electrical, automatic betting device used at mutuel tracks.

[19] Garden was referring to the last race of the final day of a recent Saratoga season, when Anna V. L., Noble Spirit, and Semaphore finished in that order, and all were disqualified, Anna V. L. for swerving sharply at the start and causing other horses to take up, Noble Spirit for swerving badly at the eighth pole, and Semaphore for alleged interference with Anna V. L. The official placing, after the disqualifications, was Just Cap, first; Celiba, second; and Bahadur, third—the only other three horses in the race.

[20] Sergeant Ernest Heath of the Homicide Bureau, who had had charge of the various criminal investigations with which Vance had been associated.

[21] This collection was later sold at auction, and many of the items are now in the various museums of the country.

[22] Snitkin and Hennessey were two detectives of the Homicide Bureau, who had worked as associates of Sergeant Heath on the various criminal cases with which Vance had previously been connected.

[23] Doctor Emanuel Doremus, the Chief Medical Examiner of New York.

[24] Vance was referring to the suicide of a man in Houston, Texas, who left the following note: "To the public—Race horses caused this. The greatest thing the Texas Legislature can do is to repeal and enforce the gambling law."

[25] Hugo Kattelbaum, though a comparatively young man, was one of the country's leading authorities on cancer, and his researches on the effect of radium on the human viscera had, for the past year, been receiving considerable attention in the leading medical journals.

[26] Doctor Siefert was undoubtedly alluding to recent distressing stories in the press of radium poisoning—one of the death of a prominent steel manufacturer and sportsman, presumably resulting from the continued use of a radioactive water extensively advertised as a cure for various ailments; and another of the painful and fatal poisoning of several women and girls whose occupation was painting so-called radiolite watch-dials.

## 10. KIDNAP

### 1. KIDNAPPED!

(Wednesday, July 20; 9:30 a.m.)

Philo Vance, as you may remember, took a solitary trip to Egypt immediately after the termination of the Garden murder case.<sup>[1]</sup> He did not return to New York until the middle of July. He was considerably tanned, and there was a tired look in his wide-set grey eyes. I suspected, the moment I greeted him on the dock, that during his absence he had thrown himself into Egyptological research, which was an old passion of his.

"I'm fagged out, Van," he complained good-naturedly, as we settled ourselves in a taxicab and started uptown to his apartment. "I need a rest. We're not leavin' New York this summer—you won't mind, I hope. I've brought back a couple of boxes of archaeological specimens. See about them tomorrow, will you?—there's a good fellow."

Even his voice sounded weary. His words carried a curious undertone of distraction; and the idea flashed through my mind that he had not altogether succeeded in eliminating from his thoughts the romantic memory of a certain young woman he had met during the strange and fateful occurrences in the penthouse of Professor Ephraim Garden.<sup>[2]</sup> My surmise must have been correct, for it was that very evening, when he was relaxing in his roof-garden, that Vance remarked to me, apropos of nothing that had gone before: "A man's affections involve a great responsibility. The things a man wants most must often be sacrificed because of this exacting responsibility." I felt quite certain then that his sudden and prolonged trip to Egypt had not been an unqualified success as far as his personal objective was concerned.

For the next few days Vance busied himself in arranging, classifying and cataloging the rare pieces he had brought back with him. He threw himself into the work with more than his wonted interest and enthusiasm. His mental and physical condition showed improvement immediately, and it was but a short time before I recognized the old vital Vance that I had always known, keen for sports, for various impersonal activities, and for the constant milling of the undercurrents of human psychology.

It was just a week after his return from Cairo that the famous Kidnap murder case broke. It was an atrocious and clever crime, and more than the usual publicity was given to it in the newspapers because of the wave of kidnapping cases that had been sweeping over the country at that time. But this particular crime of which I am writing from my voluminous notes was very different in many respects from the familiar "snatch"; and it was illumined by many sinister high lights. To be sure, the motive for the crime, or, I should say, crimes, was the sordid one of monetary gain; and superficially the technique was similar to that of the numerous cases in the same category. But through Vance's determination and fearlessness, through his keen insight into human nature, and his amazing flair for the ramifications of human psychology, he was able to penetrate beyond the seemingly conclusive manifestations of the case.

In the course of this investigation Vance took no thought of any personal risk. At one time he was in the gravest danger, and it was only through his boldness, his lack of physical fear, and his deadly aim and quick action when it was a matter of his life or another's—partly the result, perhaps, of his World-War experience which won him the *Croix de Guerre*—that he saved the lives of several innocent persons as well as his own, and eventually put his finger on the criminal in a scene of startling tragedy.

There was a certain righteous indignation in his attitude during this terrible episode—an attitude quite alien to his customarily aloof and cynical and purely academic point of view—for the crime itself was one of the type he particularly abhorred.

As I have said, it was just a week after his return to New York that Vance was unexpectedly, and somewhat against his wishes, drawn into the investigation. He had resumed his habit of working late at night and rising late; but, to my surprise, when I entered the library at nine o'clock on that morning of July 20, he was already up and dressed and had just finished the Turkish coffee and the *Régie* cigarette that constituted his daily breakfast. He had on his patch-pocket grey tweed suit and a pair of heavy walking boots, which almost invariably indicated a contemplated trip into the country.

Before I could express my astonishment (I believe it was the first time in the course of our relationship that he had risen and started the day before I had) he smilingly explained to me with his antemeridian drawl:

"Don't be shocked by my burst of energy, Van. It really can't be helped, don't y' know. I'm driving out to Dumont, to the dog show. I've a little chap entered in the puppy and American-bred classes, and I want to take him into the ring myself. He's a grand little fellow, and this is his début.<sup>[3]</sup> I'll return for dinner."

I was rather pleased at the prospect of being left alone for the day, for there was much work for me to do. I admit that, as Vance's legal advisor, monetary steward and general overseer of his affairs, I had allowed a great deal of routine work to accumulate during his absence, and the assurance of an entire day, without any immediate or current chores, was most welcome to me.

As Vance spoke he rang for Currie, his old English butler and majordomo, and asked for his hat and chamois gloves. Filling his cigarette case, he waved a friendly good-bye to me and started toward the door. But just before he reached it, the front doorbell sounded, and a moment later Currie ushered in John F.-X. Markham, District Attorney of New York County.<sup>[4]</sup>

"Good heavens, Vance!" exclaimed Markham. "Going out at such an early hour? Or have you just come in?" Despite the jocularity of his words, there was an unwonted sombreness in his face and a worried look in his eyes, which belied the manner of his greeting.

Vance smiled with a puzzled frown.

"I don't like the expression on your Hellenic features this morning, old dear. It bodes ill for one who craves freedom and surcease from earthly miseries. I was just about to escape by hieing me to a dog show in the country. My little Sandy—"

"Damn your dogs and your dog shows, Vance!" Markham growled. "I've serious news for you."

Vance shrugged his shoulders with resignation and heaved an exaggerated sigh.

"Markham—my very dear Markham! How did you time your visit so accurately? Thirty seconds later and I would have been on my way and free from your clutches." Vance threw his hat and gloves aside. "But since you have captured me so neatly, I suppose I must listen, although I am sure I shall not like the tidin's. I know I'm going to hate you and wish you had never been born. I can tell from the doleful look on your face that you're in for something messy and desire spiritual support." He stepped a little to one side. "Enter, and

pour forth your woes."

"I haven't time—"

"Tut, tut." Vance moved nonchalantly to the centre-table and pointed to a large comfortable upholstered chair. "There's always time. There always has been time—there always will be time. Represented by *n*, don't y' know. Quite meaningless—without beginning and without end, and utterly indivisible. In fact, there's no such thing as time—unless you're dabblin' in the fourth dimension. . . ."

He walked back to Markham, took him gently by the arm and, ignoring his protests, led him to the chair by the table.

"Really, y' know, Markham, you need a cigar and a drink. Let calm be your watchword, my dear fellow,—always calm. Serenity. Consider the ancient oaks. Or, better yet, the eternal hills—or is it the everlasting hills? It's been so long since I penned poesy. Anyway, Swinburne did it much better. . . . *Eheu, eheu!* . . ."

As he babbled along, with seeming aimlessness, he went to a small side-table and, taking up a crystal decanter, poured some of its contents into a tulip-shaped glass, and set it down before the District Attorney.

"Try that old Amontillado." He then moved the humidor forward. "And these panetelas are infinitely better than the cigars you carry around to dole out to your constituents."

Markham made a restless, annoyed gesture, lighted one of the cigars, and sipped the old syrupy sherry.

Vance seated himself in a near-by chair and carefully lighted a *Régie*.

"Now try me," he said. "But don't make the tale too sad. My heart is already at the breaking-point."

"What I have to tell you is damned serious." Markham frowned and looked sharply at Vance. "Do you like kidnappings?"

"Not passionately," Vance answered, his face darkening. "Bestly crimes, kidnappings. Worse than poisonings. About as low as a criminal can sink." His eyebrows went up. "Why?"

"There's been a kidnapping during the night. I learned about it half an hour ago. I'm on my way—"

"Who and where?" Vance's face had now become sombre too.

"Kaspar Kenting. Heath and a couple of his men are at the Kenting house in 86th Street now. They're waiting for me."

"Kaspar Kenting . . ." Vance repeated the name several times, as if trying to recall some former association with it. "In 86th Street, you say?"

He rose suddenly and went to the telephone stand in the anteroom where he opened the directory and ran his eye down the page.

"Is it number 86 West 86th Street, perhaps?"

Markham nodded. "That's right. Easy to remember."

"Yes—quite." Vance came strolling back into the library, but instead of resuming his chair he stood leaning against the end of the table. "Quite," he repeated. "I seemed to remember it when you mentioned Kenting's name. . . . The domicile's an interestin' old landmark. I've never seen it, however. Had a fascinatin' reputation once. Still called the Purple House."

"Purple house?" Markham looked up. "What do you mean?"

"My dear fellow! Are you entirely ignorant of the history of the city which you adorn as District Attorney? The Purple House was built by Karl K. Kenting back in 1880, and he had the bricks and slabs of stone painted purple, in order to distinguish his abode from all others in the neighborhood, and to flaunt it as a challenge to his numerous enemies. 'With a house that color,' he used to say, 'they won't have any trouble finding me, if they want me.' The place became known as the Purple House. And every time the house was repainted, the original color was retained. Sort of family tradition, don't y' know. . . . But what about your Kaspar Kenting?"

"He disappeared some time last night," Markham explained impatiently. "From his bedroom. Open window, ladder, ransom note thumbtacked to the window-sill. No doubt about it."

"Details familiar—eh, what?" mused Vance. "And I presume the ransom note was concocted with words cut from a newspaper and pasted on a sheet of paper?"

Markham looked astonished.

"Exactly! How did you guess it?"

"Nothing new or original about it—what? Highly conventional. Bookish, in fact. But not being done this season in the best kidnapping circles. . . . Curious case. . . . How did you learn about it?"

"Eldridge Fleel was waiting at my office when I arrived this morning. He's the lawyer for the Kenting family. One of the executors for the old man's estate. Kaspar Kenting's wife naturally notified him at once at his home—called him before he was up. He went to the house, looked over the situation, and then came directly to me."

"Level-headed chap, this Fleel?"

"Oh, yes. I've known the man for years. Good lawyer. He was wealthy and influential once, but was badly hit by the depression. We were both members of the Lawyers' Club, and we had offices in the same building on lower Broadway before I was cursed with the District Attorneyship. . . . I got in touch with Sergeant Heath immediately, and he went up to the house with Fleel. I told them I'd be there as soon as I could. I dropped off here, thinking—"

"Sad . . . very sad," interrupted Vance with a sigh, drawing deeply on his cigarette. "I still wish you had made it a few minutes later. I'd have been safely away. You're positively ineluctable."

"Come, come, Vance. You know damned well I may need your help." Markham sat up with a show of anger. "A kidnapping isn't a pleasant thing, and the city's not going to like it. I'm having enough trouble as it is.[5] I can't very well pass the buck to the federal boys. I'd rather clean up the mess from local headquarters. . . . By the way, do you know this young Kaspar Kenting?"

"Slightly," Vance answered abstractedly. "I've run into the johnnie here and there, especially at old Kinkaid's Casino[6] and at the race-tracks. Kaspar's a gambler and pretty much a ne'er-do-well. Full of the spirit of frivolity and not much else. Ardent play-boy, as it were. Always hard up. And trusted by no one. Can't imagine why any one would want to pay a ransom for him."

Vance slowly exhaled his cigarette smoke, watching the long blue ribbons rise and disperse against the ceiling.

"Queer background," he murmured, almost as if to himself. "Can't really blame the chappie for being such a blighter. Old Karl K., the author of his being, was a bit queer himself. Had more than enough money, and left it all to the older son, Kenyon K., to dole out to Kaspar as he saw fit. I imagine he hasn't seen fit very often or very much. Kenyon is the solid-citizen type, in the worst possible

meaning of the phrase. Came to the Belmont track in the highest of dudgeons one afternoon and led Kaspar righteously home. Probably goes to church regularly. Marches in parades. Applauds the high notes of sopranos. Feels positively nude without a badge of some kind. That sort of johnnie. Enough to drive any younger brother to hell. . . . The old man, as you must know, wasn't a block from which you could expect anything in the way of fancy chips. A rabid and fanatical Ku-Klux-Klanner. . . ."

"You mean his initials?" asked Markham.

"No. Oh, no. His convictions." Vance looked at Markham inquiringly. "Don't you know the story?"

Markham shook his head despondently.

"Old K. K. Kenting originally came from Virginia and was a King Kleagle in that sheeted Order.<sup>[7]</sup> So rabid was he that he changed the *C* in his name, Carl, to a *K*, and gave himself a middle initial, another *K*, so that his monogram would be the symbol of his fanatical passion. And he went even further. He had two sons and a daughter, and he gave them all names beginning with *K*, and added for each one a middle initial *K*—Kenyon K. Kenting, Kaspar K. Kenting, and Karen K. Kenting. The girl died shortly after Karl himself was gathered to Abraham's bosom. The two sons remaining, being of a new generation and less violent, dropped the middle *K*—which never stood for anything, by the by."

"But why a purple house?"

"No symbolism there," returned Vance. "When Karl Kenting came to New York and went into politics he became boss of his district. And he had an idea his sub-Potomac enemies were going to persecute him; so, as I say, he wanted to make it easy for 'em to find him. He was an aggressive and fearless old codger."

"I seem to remember they eventually found him, and with a vengeance," Markham mumbled impatiently.

"Quite." Vance nodded indifferently. "But it took two machine-guns to translate him to the Elysian Fields. Quite a scandal at the time. Anyway, the two sons, while wholly different from each other, are both unlike their father."

Markham stood up with deliberation.

"That may all be very interesting," he grumbled; "but I've got to get to 86th Street. This may prove a crucial case, and I can't afford to ignore it." He looked somewhat appealingly at Vance.

Vance rose likewise and crushed out his cigarette.

"Oh, by all means," he drawled. "I'll be delighted to toddle along. Though I can't even vaguely imagine why kidnappers should select Kaspar Kenting. The Kentings are no longer a reputedly wealthy family. True, they might be able to produce a fairly substantial sum on short notice, but they're not, d' ye see, in the class which professional kidnappers enter up on their list of possible victims. . . . By the by, do you know how much ransom was demanded?"

"Fifty thousand. But you'll see the note when we get there. Nothing's been touched. Heath knows I'm coming."

"Fifty thousand. . . ." Vance poured himself a pony of his *Napoléon* cognac. "That's most interestin'. Not an untidy sum—eh, what?"

When he had finished his brandy he rang again for Currie.

"Really, y' know," he said to Markham—his tone had suddenly changed to one of levity—, "I can't wear chamois gloves in a purple house. Most inappropriate."

He asked Currie for a pair of doeskin gloves, his wanghee cane, and a town hat. When they were brought in he turned to me.

"Do you mind calling MacDermott<sup>[8]</sup> and explainin'?" he asked. "The old boy himself will have to show Sandy. . . . And do you care to come along, Van? It may prove more fascinatin' than it sounds."

Despite my accumulated work, I was glad of the invitation. I caught MacDermott on the telephone just as he was packing his crated entries into the station-wagon. I wasted few words on him, in true Scotch fashion, and immediately joined Vance and Markham in the lower hallway where they were waiting for me.

We entered the District Attorney's car, and in fifteen minutes we were at the scene of what proved to be one of the most unusual criminal cases in Vance's career.



## 2. THE PURPLE HOUSE

(Wednesday, July 20; 10:30 a.m.)

The Kenting residence in 86th Street was not as bizarre a place as I had expected to see after Vance's description of it. In fact, it differed very little from the other old brownstone residences in the street, except that it was somewhat larger. I might even have passed it or driven by it any number of times without noticing it at all. This fact was, no doubt, owing to the dullness of its faded color, since the house had apparently not been repainted for several years, and sun and rain had not spared it. Its tone was so dingy and superficially nondescript that it blended unobtrusively with the other houses of the neighborhood. As we approached it that fateful morning it appeared almost a neutral grey in the brilliant summer sunshine.

On closer inspection I could see that the house had been built of bricks put together in English cross bond with weathered mortar joints, trimmed at the cornices, about the windows and door, and below the eaves, with great rectangular slabs of brownstone. Only in the shadow along the eaves and beneath the projections of the sills was there any distinguishable tint of purple remaining. The architecture of the house was conventional enough—a somewhat free adaptation of combined Georgian and Colonial, such as was popular during the middle of the last century.

The entrance, which was several feet above the street level and reached by five or six broad sandstone steps, was a spacious one; and there was the customary glass-enclosed vestibule. The windows were high, and old-fashioned shutters folded back against the walls of the house. Instead of the regulation four stories, the house consisted of only three stories, not counting the sunken basement; and I was somewhat astonished at this fact when it came to my attention, for the structure was even higher than its neighbors. The windows, however, were not on a line with those in the other houses, and I realized that the ceilings of the "Purple House" must be unusually high.

Another thing which distinguished the Kenting residence from the neighboring buildings was the existence of a fifty-foot court to the east. This court was covered with a neatly kept lawn, with hedges on all four sides. There were two flower-beds—one star-shaped and the other in the form of a crescent; and an old gnarled maple tree stood at the rear, with its branches extending almost the entire width of the yard. Only a low iron picket fence, with a swinging gate, divided the yard from the street.

This refreshing quadrangle was bathed with sunshine, and it seemed a very pleasant spot, with its blooming hedges and its scattered painted metal chairs. But there was one sinister note—one item which in itself was not sinister at all, but which had acquired a malevolent aspect from the facts Markham had related to us in Vance's apartment that morning. It was a long, heavy ladder, such as outdoor painters use, leaning against the house, with its upper end just below a second-story window—the window nearest the street.

The "Purple House" itself was set about ten feet in from the sidewalk, and we immediately crossed the irregular flagstones and proceeded up the steps to the front door. But there was no need to ring the bell. Sergeant Ernest Heath, of the Homicide Bureau, greeted us in the vestibule. After saluting Markham, whom he addressed as Chief, he turned to Vance with a grin and shook his head ponderously.

"I didn't think you'd be here, Mr. Vance," he said good-naturedly. "Ain't this a little out of your line? But howdy, anyway." And he held out his hand.

"I myself didn't think I'd be here, Sergeant. And everything is out of my line today except dog shows. Fact is, I almost missed the present pleasure of seeing you." Vance shook hands with him cordially, and cocked one eye inquiringly. "What's the exhibit I'm supposed to view?"

"You might as well have stayed home, Mr. Vance," Heath told him. "Hell, there's nothing to this case. It ain't even a fancy one. A little routine police work is all that's needed to clear it up. There ain't a chance for what you call psychological deduction."

"My word!" sighed Vance. "Most encouragin', Sergeant. I hope you're right. Still, since I'm here, don't y' know, I might as well look around in my amateurish way and try to learn what it's all about. I promise not to complicate matters for you."

"That's a little more than O.-K. with me, Mr. Vance," the Sergeant grinned. And, opening the heavy glass-panelled oak door, he led us into the dingy but spacious hallway, and then through partly-opened sliding doors at the right, into a stuffy drawing-room.

"Cap Dubois and Bellamy<sup>[9]</sup> are upstairs, getting the finger-prints; and Quackenbush<sup>[10]</sup> took a few shots and went away." Heath seated himself at a small Jacobean desk and drew out his little black leather-bound note-book. "Chief," he said to Markham, "I think maybe you'd better get the whole story direct from Mrs. Kenting, the wife of the gentleman who was kidnapped."

I now noticed three other persons in the room. At the front window stood a solid, slightly corpulent man of successful, professional mien. He turned and came forward as we entered, and Markham bowed to him cordially and greeted him by the name Feel. He was the lawyer of the Kenting family.

At his side was a somewhat aggressive middle-aged man, rather thin, with a serious and pinched expression. Feel introduced him to us cursorily, with a careless wave of the hand, as Kenyon Kenting, the brother of the missing man. Then the lawyer turned stiffly to the other side of the room, and said in a suave, businesslike voice:

"But I particularly wish to present you gentlemen to Mrs. Kaspar Kenting."

We all turned to the pale, terrified woman seated at one end of a small davenport, in the shadows of the west wall. She appeared at first glance to be in her early thirties; but I soon realized that my guess might be ten years out, one way or the other. She seemed exceedingly thin, even beneath the full folds of the satin dressing-gown she wore; and although her eyes were large and frankly appealing, there was in her features evidence of a shrewd competency amounting almost to hardness. It struck me that a painter could have used her for the perfect model of the clinging, nervous, whiny woman. But, on the other hand, she impressed me as being capable of assuming the role of a strong-minded and efficient person when the occasion demanded. Her hair was thin and stringy and of the lustreless ashen-blond variety; and her eyelashes and eyebrows were so sparse and pale, that she gave the impression, sitting there in the dim light, of having none at all.



When Fleel presented us to her she nodded curtly with a frightened air, and kept her eyes focused sharply on Markham. Kenyon Kenting went directly to her and, sitting down on the edge of the sofa, put his arm half around her and patted her gently on the back.

"You must be brave, my dear," he said in a tone that was almost endearing. "These gentlemen have come to help us, and I'm sure they'll be wanting to know all you can tell them about the events of last night."

The woman drew her eyes slowly away from Markham and looked up wistfully and trustingly at her brother-in-law. Then she nodded her head slowly, in complete and confiding acquiescence and again turned her eyes to Markham.

Sergeant Heath broke gruffly into the scene.

"Don't you want to go upstairs, Chief, and see the room from where the snatch was made? Snitkin's on duty up there, to see that nothing is moved around or changed."

"I say, just a moment, Sergeant." Vance sat down on the sofa beside Mrs. Kenting. "I'd like to ask Mrs. Kenting a few questions first." He turned to the woman. "Do you mind?" he asked in a mild, almost deferential tone. As she silently shook her head in reply he continued: "Tell me, when did you first learn of your husband's absence?"

The woman took a deep breath, and after a barely perceptible hesitation answered in a slightly rasping, low-pitched voice which contrasted strangely with her colorless, semi-anæmic appearance.

"Early this morning—about six o'clock, I should say. The sun had just risen."[\[11\]](#)

"And how did you happen to become aware of his absence?"

"I wasn't sleeping well last night," the woman responded. "I was restless for some unknown reason, and the early morning sun coming through the shutters into my room not only awakened me, but prevented me from going back to sleep. Then I thought I heard a faint unfamiliar sound in my husband's room—you see, we occupy adjoining rooms on the next floor—and it seemed to me I heard some one moving stealthily about. There was the unmistakable sound of footsteps across the floor—that is, like some one walking around in soft slippers."

She took another deep breath, and shuddered slightly.

"I was already terribly nervous, anyway, and these strange noises frightened me, for Kaspar—Mr. Kenting—is usually sound asleep at that hour of the morning. I got up, put on my slippers, threw a dressing-gown around me, and went to the door which connects our two rooms. I called to my husband, but got no answer. Then I called again, and still again, in louder tones, at the same time knocking at the door. But there was no response of any kind—and I realized that everything had suddenly become quiet in the room. By this time I was panicky; so I pulled open the door quickly and entered the room. . . ."

"Just a moment, Mrs. Kenting," Vance interrupted. "You speak of having been startled by an unfamiliar sound in your husband's room this morning, and you say you heard some one walking about in the room. Just what kind of sound was it that first caught your attention?"

"I don't know exactly. It might have been some one moving a chair, or dropping something, or maybe it was just a door surreptitiously opened and shut. I can't describe it any better than that."

"Could it have been a scuffle of some kind—I mean, did it sound as if more than one person might have been making the noise?"

The woman shook her head vaguely.

"I don't think so. It was over too quickly for that. I should say it was a sound that was not intended—something accidental—do you see what I mean? I can't imagine what it could have been—so many things might have happened. . . ."

"When you entered the room, were the lights on?" Vance asked, with what appeared to be almost utter indifference.

"Yes," the woman hastened to answer animatedly. "That was the curious thing about it. Not only was the chandelier burning brightly, but the light beside the bed also. They were a ghastly yellow in the day-light."

"Are the two fixtures controlled with the same switch?" Vance asked, frowning down at his unlighted *Régie*.

"No," the woman told him. "The switch for the chandelier is near the hall door, while the night-lamp is connected to an outlet in the baseboard and is worked by a switch on the lamp itself. And another strange thing was that the bed had not been slept in."

Vance's eyebrows rose slightly, but he did not look up from his fixed contemplation of the cigarette between his fingers.

"Do you know what time Mr. Kenting came to his bedroom last night?"

The woman hesitated a moment and flashed a glance at Kenyon Kenting.

"Oh, yes," she said hurriedly. "I heard him come in. It must have been soon after three this morning. He had been out for the evening, and I happened to be awake when he got back—or else the unlocking and closing of the front door awakened me—I really don't know. I heard him enter his bedroom and turn on the lights. Then I heard him telephoning to some one in an angry voice. Right after that I fell asleep again."

"You say he was out last night. Do you know where or with whom?"

Mrs. Kenting nodded, but again she hesitated. Finally she answered in the same brittle, rasping voice:

"A new gambling casino was opened in Jersey yesterday, and my husband was invited to be a guest at the opening ceremonies. His friend Mr. Quaggy called for him about nine o'clock—"

"Please repeat the name of your husband's friend."

"Quaggy—Porter Quaggy. He's a very trustworthy and loyal man, and I've never objected to my husband's going out with him. He has been more or less a friend of the family for several years, and he always seems to know just how to handle my husband when he shows an inclination to go a little too far in his—his, well, his drinking. Mr. Quaggy was here at the house yesterday afternoon, and it was then that he and Kaspar made arrangements to go together to the new casino."

Vance nodded slightly, and directed his gaze to the floor as if trying to connect something the woman had told him with something already in his mind.

"Where does Mr. Quaggy live?" he asked.

"Just up the street, near Central Park West, at the Nottingham. . . ." She paused, and drew a deep breath. "Mr. Quaggy's a frequent and welcome visitor here."

Vance threw Heath a significant *coup d'œil*, and the Sergeant made a note in the small leather-bound black book which lay before

him on the desk.

"Do you happen to know," Vance continued, still addressing the woman, "whether Mr. Quaggy returned to the house last night with Mr. Kenting?"

"Oh, no; I'm quite sure he did not," was the prompt reply. "I heard my husband come in alone and mount the stairs; and I heard him alone in his bedroom. As I said, I dozed off shortly afterwards, and didn't wake up again until after the sun rose."

"May I offer you a cigarette?" said Vance, holding out his case.

The woman shook her head slightly and glanced questioningly at Kenyon Kenting.

"No, thank you," she returned. "I rarely smoke. But I don't in the least mind others smoking, so please light your own cigarette."

With a courteous bow in acknowledgment, Vance proceeded to do so, and then asked:

"When you found that your husband was not in his room at six this morning, and that the lights were on and the bed had not been slept in, what did you think?—and what did you do?"

"I was naturally upset and troubled and very much puzzled," Mrs. Kenting explained; "and just then I noticed that the big side window overlooking the lawn was open and that the Venetian blind had not been lowered. This was queer, because Kaspar was always fussy about this particular blind in the summer-time because of the early morning sun. I immediately ran to the window and looked down into the yard, for a sudden fear had flashed through my mind that perhaps Kaspar had fallen out. . . . You see," she added reluctantly, "my husband often has had too much to drink when he comes home late at night. . . . It was then I saw the ladder against the house; and I was wondering about that vaguely, when suddenly I noticed that horrible slip of paper pinned to the window-sill. Immediately I realized what had happened, and why I had heard those peculiar noises in his room. The realization made me feel faint."

She paused and dabbed gently at her eyes with a lace-trimmed handkerchief.

"When I recovered a little from the shock of this frightful thing," she continued, "I went to the telephone and called up Mr. Feel. I also called Mr. Kenyon Kenting here—he lives on Fifth Avenue, just across the park. After that I simply ordered some black coffee, and waited, frantic, until their arrival. I said nothing about the matter to the servants, and I didn't dare inform the police until I had consulted with my brother-in-law and especially with Mr. Feel, who is not only the family's legal advisor, but also a very close friend. I felt that he would know the wisest course to follow."

"How many servants are there here?" Vance asked.

"Only two—Weem, our butler and houseman, and his wife, Gertrude, who cooks and does maid service."

"They sleep where?"

"On the third floor, at the rear."

Vance had listened to the woman's account of the tragic episode with unusual attentiveness, and while to the others he must have seemed casual and indifferent, I had noticed that he shot the narrator several appraising glances from under his lazily drooping eyelids.

At last he rose and, walking to the desk, placed his half-burnt cigarette in a large onyx ash receiver. Turning to Mrs. Kenting again, he asked quietly:

"Had you, or your husband, any previous warning of this event?"

Before answering, the woman looked with troubled concern at Kenyon Kenting.

"I think, my dear," he encouraged her, in a ponderous, declamatory tone, "that you should be perfectly frank with these gentlemen."

The woman shifted her eyes back to Vance slowly, and after a moment of indecision said:

"Only this: several nights, recently, after I had retired, I have heard Kaspar dialing a number and talking angrily to some one over the telephone. I could never distinguish any of the conversation—it was simply a sort of muffled muttering. And I always noticed that the next day Kaspar was in a terrible humor and seemed worried and agitated about something. Twice I tried to find out what the trouble was, and asked him to explain the phone calls; but each time he assured me nothing whatever was wrong, and refused to tell me anything except that he had been speaking to his brother regarding business affairs. . . ."

"That was wholly a misleading statement on Kaspar's part," put in Kenyon Kenting with matter-of-fact suavity. "As I've already said to Mrs. Kenting, I can't remember ever having had any telephone conversation with Kaspar at night. Whenever we had business matters to discuss he either came to my office, or we talked them over here at the house. . . . I can't understand these phone conversations—but, of course, they may have no relation whatsoever to this present enigma."

"As you say, sir," Vance nodded. "No plausible connection with this crime apparent. But one never knows, does one? . . ." His eyes moved slowly back to Mrs. Kenting. "Was there nothing else recently which you can recall, and which might be helpful now?"

"Yes, there was." The woman nodded with a show of vigor. "About a week ago a strange, rough-looking man came here to see Kaspar—he looked to me like an underworld character. Kaspar took him immediately into the drawing-room here and closed the doors. They remained in the room a long time. I had gone up to my boudoir, but when the man left the house I heard him say to Kaspar in a loud tone, 'There are ways of getting things.' It wasn't just a statement—the words sounded terribly unfriendly. Almost like a threat."

"Has there been anything further?" Vance asked.

"Yes. Several days later, the same man came again, and an even more sinister-looking individual was with him. I got only the merest glimpse of them as Kaspar led them into this room and closed the doors. I can't even remember what either of them looked like—except that I'm sure they were dangerous men and I know they frightened me. I asked Kaspar about them the next morning, but he evaded the question and said merely that it was a matter of business and I wouldn't understand. That was all I could get out of him."

Kenyon Kenting had turned his back to the room and was looking out of the window, his hands clasped behind him.

"I hardly think these two mysterious callers," he commented with pompous finality, without turning, "have any connection with Kaspar's kidnapping."

Vance frowned slightly and cast an inquisitive glance at the man's back.

"Can you be sure of that, Mr. Kenting?" he asked coldly.

"Oh, no—oh, no," the other replied apologetically, swinging about suddenly and extending one hand in an oratorical gesture. "I can't be sure. I merely meant it isn't logical to suppose that two men would expose themselves so openly if they contemplated a step

attended by such serious consequences as a proven kidnapping. Besides, Kaspar had many strange acquaintances, and these men were probably in no way connected with the present situation."

Vance kept his eyes fixed on the man, and his expression did not change.

"It might be, of course, as you say," he remarked lightly. "Also it might not be—what? Interestin' speculation. But quite futile. I wonder. . . ." He drew himself up and, meditatively taking out his cigarette case, lighted another *Régie*. "And now I think we might go above, to Mr. Kaspar Kenting's bedroom."

We all rose and went toward the sliding doors.

As we came out into the main hall, the door to a small room just opposite was standing ajar, and through it I saw what appeared to be a miniature museum of some kind. There were the slanting cases set against the walls, and a double row of larger cases down the centre of the room. It looked like a private exhibition, arranged on the lines of the more extensive ones seen in any public museum.

"Ah! a collection of semiprecious stones," commented Vance. "Do you mind if I take a brief look?" he asked, addressing Mrs. Kenting. "Tremendously interested in the subject, don't y' know." [12]

The woman looked a little astonished, but answered at once.

"By all means. Go right in."

"Your own collection?" Vance inquired casually.

"Oh, no," the woman told him—somewhat bitterly, it seemed to me. "It belonged to Mr. Kenting senior. It was here in the house when I first came, long after his death. It was part of the estate he left—residuary property, I believe they call it."

Fleel nodded, as if he considered Mrs. Kenting's explanation correct and adequate.

Much to Markham's impatience and annoyance, Vance immediately entered the small room and moved slowly along the cases. He beckoned to me to join him.

Neatly arranged in the cases were specimens, in various shapes and sizes, of aquamarine, topaz, spinel, tourmaline, and zircon; rubelite, amethyst, alexandrite, peridot, hessonite, pyrope, demantoid, almandine, kinzite, andalusite, turquoise, and jadeite. Many of these gem-stones were beautifully cut and lavishly faceted, and I was admiring their lustrous beauty, impressed by what I assumed to be their great value, when Vance murmured softly:

"A most amazin' and disquietin' collection. Only one gem of real value here, and not a rare specimen among the rest. A schoolgirl's assortment, really. Very queer. And there seem to be many blank spaces. Judgin' by the vacancies and general distribution, old Kenting must have been a mere amateur. . . ."

I looked at him in amazement. Then his voice trailed off, and he suddenly wheeled about and returned to the hall.

"A most curious collection," he murmured again.

"Semiprecious stones were one of my father's hobbies," Kenting returned.

"Yes, yes. Of course." Vance nodded abstractedly. "Most unusual collection. Hardly representative, though. . . . Was your father an expert, Mr. Kenting?"

"Oh, yes. He studied the subject for many years. He was very proud of this gem-room, as he called it."

"Ah!"

Kenting shot the other a peculiar, shrewd look but said nothing; and Vance at once followed Heath toward the wide stairway.

### 3. THE RANSOM NOTE

(Wednesday, July 20; 11 a.m.)

As we entered Kaspar Kenting's bedroom, Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy were just preparing to leave it.

"I don't think there's anything for you, Sergeant," Dubois reported to Heath after his respectful greetings to Markham. "Just the usual kind of marks and smudges you'd find in any bedroom—and they all check up with the finger-prints on the silver toilet set and the glass in the bathroom. Can't be any one else's finger-prints except the guy what lives here. Nothing new anywhere."

"And the window-sill?" asked Heath with desperate hopefulness.

"Not a thing, Sarge,—absolutely not a thing," Dubois replied. "And I sure went over it carefully. If any one went out that window during the night, they certainly wiped it clean, or else wore gloves and was mighty careful. And there's just the kind of finish on that window-sill—that old polished ivory finish—that'll take finger-prints like smoke-paper. . . . Anyhow, I may have picked up a stray print here and there that'll check with something we've got in the files. I'll let you know more about it, of course, when we've developed and enlarged what we got."

The Sergeant seemed greatly disappointed.

"I'll be wanting you later for the ladder," he told Dubois, shifting the long black cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. "I'll get in touch with you when we're ready."

"All right, Sergeant." Dubois picked up his small black case. "That'll be a tough job though. Don't make it too late in the afternoon—I'll want all the light I can get." And he waved a friendly farewell to Heath and departed, followed by Bellamy.

Kaspar Kenting's bedroom was distinctly old-fashioned, and conventional in the extreme. The furniture was shabby and worn. A wide Colonial bed of mahogany stood against the south wall, and there was a mahogany chest of drawers, with a hanging mirror over it, near the entrance to the room. Several easy chairs stood here and there about the room, and a faded flower-patterned carpet covered the floor. In one corner at the front of the room was a small writing-table on which stood a French telephone.

There were two windows in the room, one at the front of the house, overlooking the street; the other was in the east wall, and I recognized it at once as the window to which Mrs. Kenting said she had run in her fright. It was thrown wide open, with the Venetian blind drawn up to the top, and the outside shutters were invisible from where we stood; whereas the front window was half closed, with its blind drawn half-way down. At the rear of the room, to the right of the bed, was a door, now wide open. Beyond it another bedroom, similar to the one in which we stood, was identifiable: it was obviously Mrs. Kenting's boudoir. Between Kaspar Kenting's bed and the east wall two narrower doors led into the bathroom and a closet respectively.

The electric lights were still burning with a sickly illumination in the old-fashioned crystal chandelier hanging from the centre of the ceiling, and in the standard modern fixture near the head of the bed.

Vance looked about him with seeming indifference; but I knew that not a single detail of the setting escaped him. His first words were directed to the missing man's wife.

"When you came in here this morning, Mrs. Kenting, was this hall door locked or bolted?"

The woman looked uncertain and faltered in her answer.

"I—I—really, I can't remember. It must have been unlocked, or else I would probably have noticed it. I went out through the door when the coffee was ready, and I don't recall unlocking it."

Vance nodded understandingly.

"Yes, yes; of course," he murmured. "A deliberate act like unlocking a door would have made a definite mental impression on you. Simple psychology. . . ."

"But I really don't know, Mr. Vance. . . . You see," she added hurriedly, "I was so upset. . . . I wanted to get out of this room."

"Oh, quite. Wholly natural. But it really doesn't matter." Vance dismissed the subject. Then he went to the open window and looked down at the ladder.

As he did so Heath took from his pocket a knife such as boy scouts use, and pried loose the thumbtack which held a soiled and wrinkled sheet of paper to the broad window-sill. He picked up the paper gingerly and handed it to Markham. The District Attorney took it and looked at it, his face grim and troubled. I glanced over his shoulder as he read it. The paper was of the ordinary typewriter quality and had been trimmed irregularly at the edges to disguise its original size. On it were pasted words and separate characters in different sizes and styles of type, apparently cut from a newspaper. The uneven lines, crudely put together, read:

If you want him back safe price will be 50 thousands \$ otherwise killed will let you no ware & when to leave money later.

This ominous communication was signed with a cabalistic signature consisting of two interlocking uneven squares which were outlined with black ink. (I am herewith including a copy of the ransom note which was found that morning at the Kenting home.)



Vance had turned back to the room, and Markham handed him the note. Vance glanced at it, as if it were of little interest to him, and read it through quickly, with the faint suggestion of a cynical smile.

"Really, y' know, Markham old dear, it isn't what you could possibly term original. It's been done so many times before."

He was about to return the paper to Markham when he suddenly drew his hand back and made a new examination of the note. His eyes grew serious and clouded, and the smile faded from his lips.

"Interestin' signature," he murmured. He took out his monocle and, carefully adjusting it, scrutinized the paper closely. "Made with a Chinese pencil," he announced, "—a Chinese brush—held vertically—and with China ink. . . . And those small squares . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Sure!" Sergeant Heath slapped his thigh and puffed vigorously at his cigar. "Same as the holes like I've seen in Chinese money."

"Quite so, Sergeant." Vance was still studying the cryptic signature. "Not illuminatin', however. But worth remembering." He returned his monocle to his waistcoat pocket and gave the paper back to Markham. "Not an upliftin' case, old dear. . . . Let's stagger about a bit. . . ."

He moved to the chest of drawers and adjusted his cravat before the mirror: then he smoothed back his hair and flicked an imaginary speck of dust from the left lapel of his coat. Markham glowered, and Heath made an expressive grimace of disgust.

"By the by, Mrs. Kenting," Vance asked casually, "is your husband, by any chance, bald?"

"Of course not," she answered indignantly. "What makes you ask that?"

"Queer—very queer," murmured Vance. "All the necess'ry toilet articles are in place on the top of this low-boy except a comb."

"I—don't understand," the woman returned in amazement. She moved swiftly across the room and stood beside Vance. "Why, the comb *is* gone!" she exclaimed in a tone of bewilderment. "Kaspar always kept it right here." And she pointed to a vacant place on the faded silk covering of what had obviously served Kaspar Kenting as a dresser.

"Most extr'ordin'ry. Let's see whether your husband's toothbrush is also missing. Do you know where he kept it?"

"In the bathroom, of course,"—Mrs. Kenting seemed frightened and breathless—"in a little rack beside the medicine cabinet. I'll see." As she spoke she turned and went quickly toward the door nearest the east wall. She pushed it open and stepped into the bathroom. After a moment she rejoined us.

"It's not there," she remarked dejectedly. "It isn't where it should be—and I've looked in the cabinet for it too."

"That's quite all right," Vance returned. "Do you remember what clothes your husband was wearing last night when he went to the opening of the casino in New Jersey with Mr. Quaggy?"

"Why, he wore evening dress, of course," the woman answered without hesitation. "I mean, he wore a tuxedo."

Vance walked quickly across the room and, opening the door beside the bathroom, looked into the narrow clothes closet. After a brief inspection of its contents he turned and again addressed Mrs. Kenting who now stood near the open east window, her hands clasped on her breast, and her eyes wide with apprehension.

"But his dinner jacket is hanging here in the closet, Mrs. Kenting. Has he more than one? . . ."

The woman shook her head vaguely.

"And I say, I suppose that Mr. Kenting wore the appropriate evening oxfords with his dinner coat."

"Naturally," the woman said.

"Amazin'," murmured Vance. "There are a pair of evening oxfords standin' neatly on the floor of the closet, and the soles are dampish—it was rather wet out last night, don't y' know, after the rain."

Mrs. Kenting moved slowly across the room to where Kenyon Kenting was standing and put her arm through his, seeming to lean against him. Then she said in a low voice, "I really don't understand, Mr. Vance."

Vance gave the woman and her brother-in-law a thoughtful glance and stepped inside the closet. But he turned back to the room in a moment and once more addressed Mrs. Kenting.

"Are you familiar with your husband's wardrobe?" he asked.

"Of course, I am," she returned with an undertone of resentment. "I help him select the materials for all his clothes."

"In that case," Vance said politely, "you can be of great assistance to me if you will glance through this closet and tell me whether anything is missing."

Mrs. Kenting withdrew her arm from that of her brother-in-law and, with a dazed and slightly startled expression, joined Vance at the clothes closet. As he took a step to one side, she turned her back to him and gave her attention to the row of hangers. Then she faced him with a puzzled frown.

"His Glen Urquhart suit is missing," she said. "It's the one he generally wears when he goes away for a week-end or a short trip."

"Very interestin'," Vance murmured. "And is it possible for you to tell me what shoes he may have substituted for his evening oxfords?"

The woman's eyes narrowed, and she looked at Vance with dawning comprehension.

"Yes!" she said, and immediately swung about to inspect the shoe rack in the closet. After a moment she again turned to Vance with a look of bewilderment in her eyes. "One pair of his heavy tan bluchers are not here," she announced in a hollow, monotonous tone. "That's what Kaspar generally wears with his Glen Urquhart."

Vance bowed graciously and muttered a conventional "thank-you," as Mrs. Kenting returned slowly to Kenyon Kenting and stood rigid and wide-eyed beside him.

Vance turned back into the closet and it was but a minute before he came out and walked to the window. Between his thumb and forefinger he held a small cut gem—a ruby, I thought—which he examined against the light.

"Not a genuine ruby," he murmured. "Merely a balas-ruby—the two are often confused. A necess'ry item, to be sure, for a representative collection of gem-stones, but of little worth in itself. . . . By the by, Mrs. Kenting, I found this in the outer side-pocket of your husband's dinner jacket. I took the liberty of ascertaining whether he had transferred the contents of his pockets when he changed his clothes after returning home last night. This bit of balas-ruby was all I found. . . ."

He looked at the stone again and placed it carefully in his waistcoat pocket. Then he took out another cigarette and lighted it slowly and thoughtfully.

"Another thing that would interest me mildly," he remarked, looking vaguely before him, "is what kind of pajamas Mr. Kenting wears."

"Shantung silk," Mrs. Kenting asserted, stepping suddenly forward. "I just gave him a new supply on his birthday." She was looking directly at Vance, but now her eyes shifted quickly to the bed.

"There's a pair on—" She left the sentence unfinished, and her pale eyes opened still wider. "They're not there!" she exclaimed excitedly.

"No. As you say. Bed neatly turned down. Slippers in place. Glass of orange juice on the night-stand. But no pajamas laid out. I did notice the omission. A bit curious. But it may have been an oversight. . . ."

"No," the woman interrupted emphatically. "It was not an oversight. I placed his pajamas at the foot of the bed myself, as I always do."

"Thin Shantung?" Vance asked, without looking at her.

"Yes—the sheerest summer-weight."

"Might easily be rolled up and placed in a pocket?"

The woman nodded vaguely. She was now staring at Vance.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Tell me, what is it?"

"I really don't know." Vance spoke with kindness. "I'm merely observing things. There is no answer as yet. It's most puzzlin'."

Markham had been standing in silence near the door, watching Vance with grim curiosity. Now he spoke.

"I see what you're getting at, Vance," he said. "The situation is damnably peculiar. I don't know just how to take it. But, at any rate, if the indications are correct, I think we can safely assume that we are not dealing with inhuman criminals. When they came here and took Mr. Kenting to be held for ransom, they at least permitted him to get dressed, and to take with him two or three of the things a man misses most when he's away from home."

"Yes, yes. Of course." Vance spoke without enthusiasm. "Most kind of them—eh, what? If true."

"If true?" repeated Markham aggressively. "What else have you in mind?"

"My dear Markham!" protested Vance mildly. "Nothing whatever. Mind an utter blank. Evidence points in various directions. Whither go we?"

"Well, anyway," put in Sergeant Heath, "I don't see that there's any reason to worry about any harm coming to the fella. It looks to me like the guys who did the job were only after the money."

"It could be, of course, Sergeant." Vance nodded. "But I think it is a bit early to jump to conclusions." He gave Heath a significant look under drooped eyelids, and the Sergeant merely shrugged his shoulders and said no more.

Fleed had been watching and listening attentively, with a shrewd, judicial air.

"I think, Mr. Vance," he said, "I know what is in your mind. Knowing the Kentings as well as I do, and knowing the circumstances in this household for a great number of years, I can assure you that it would be no shock to either of them if you were to state exactly

what you think regarding this situation."

Vance looked at the man for several seconds with the suggestion of an amused smile. At length he said: "Really, y' know, Mr. Feel, I don't know exactly what I do think."

"I beg to differ with you, sir," the lawyer returned in a court-room manner. "And from my personal knowledge—the result of my many years of association with the Kenting family—I know that it would be heartening—I might even say, an act of mercy—if you stated frankly that you believe, as I am convinced you do, that Kaspar planned this *coup* himself for reasons that are only too obvious."

Vance looked at the man with a slightly puzzled expression and then said noncommittally: "If you believe that to be the case, Mr. Feel, what procedure would you suggest be followed? You have known the young man for a long time and are possibly in a position to know how best to handle him."

"Personally," answered Feel, "I think it is about time Kaspar should be taught a rigorous lesson. And I think we shall never have a better opportunity. If Kenyon agrees, and is able to provide this preposterous sum, I would be heartily in favor of following whatever further instructions are received, and then letting the law take its course on the ground's of extortion. Kaspar must be taught his lesson." He turned to Kenting. "Don't you agree with me, Kenyon?"

"I don't know just what to say," Kenting returned in an obvious quandary. "But somehow I feel that you are right. However, remember that we have Madelaine to consider."

Mrs. Kenting began crying softly and dabbing her eyes.

"Still," she demurred, "Kaspar may not have done this terrible thing at all. But if he did . . ."

Feel swung round again to Vance. "Don't you see what I meant when I asked you to state frankly your belief? It would, I am sure, greatly relieve Mrs. Kenting's anxiety, even though she thought her husband was guilty of having planned this whole frightful affair."

"My dear sir!" returned Vance. "I would be glad to say anything which might relieve Mrs. Kenting's anxiety regarding the fate of her husband. But I assure you that at the present moment the evidence does not warrant extending the comfort of any such belief, either to you or to any member of the Kenting family. . . ."

At this moment there was an interruption. At the hall door appeared a short, middle-aged man with a sallow moon-like face, sullen in expression. Scant, colorless blond hair lay in straight long strands across his bulging pate, in an unsuccessful effort to cover up his partial baldness. He wore thick-lensed rimless glasses through which one of his watery blue eyes looked somehow different from the other, and he stared at us as if he resented our presence. He had on a shabby butler's livery which was too big for him and emphasized his awkward posture. A cringing and subservient self-effacement marked his general attitude despite his air of insolence.

"What is it, Weem?" Mrs. Kenting asked, with no more than a glance in the man's direction.

"There is a gentleman—an officer—at the front door," the butler answered in a surly tone, "who says he wants to see Sergeant Heath."

"What's his name?" snapped Heath, eyeing the butler with belligerent suspicion.

The man looked at Heath morosely and answered, "He says his name is McLaughlin."

Heath nodded curtly and looked up at Markham.

"That's all right, Chief," he said. "McLaughlin was the man on this beat last night, and I left word at the Bureau to send him up here as soon as they could locate him. I thought he might know something, or maybe he saw something, that would give us a line on what happened here last night." Then he turned back to the butler. "Tell the officer to wait for me. I'll be down in a few minutes."

"Just a moment, Weem,—have I the name right?" Vance put in. "You're the butler here, I understand."

The man inclined his head.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a low rumbling voice.

"And your wife is the cook, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time," asked Vance, "did you and your wife go to bed last night?"

The butler hesitated a moment, and then looked shiftily at Mrs. Kenting, but her back was to him.

He transferred his weight from one foot to the other before he answered Vance.

"About eleven o'clock. Mr. Kenting had gone out, and Mrs. Kenting said she would not need me any more after ten o'clock."

"Your quarters are at the rear of the third floor, I believe?"

"Yes," the man returned with an abrupt, stiff nod.

"I say, Weem," Vance went on, "did either you or your wife hear anything unusual in the house, after you had gone to your quarters?"

The man again shifted his weight.

"No," he answered. "Everything was quiet until I went to sleep—and I didn't wake up till Mrs. Kenting rang for coffee around six."

"Then you didn't hear Mr. Kenting return to the house—or any one else moving about the house between eleven o'clock last night and six this morning?"

"No, nobody—I was asleep."

"That's all, Weem." Vance nodded curtly and turned away. "You'd better take the Sergeant's message to Officer McLaughlin."

The butler shuffled away lackadaisically.

"I think," Vance said to Heath, "it was a good idea to get McLaughlin. . . . There's really nothing more to be done up here just now. Suppose we go down and find out what he can tell us."

"Right!" And the Sergeant started toward the door, followed by Vance, Markham, and myself.

Vance paused leisurely just before reaching the door and turned to the small writing-table at the front of the room, on which the telephone stood. He regarded it contemplatively as he approached it. Opening the two shallow drawers, he peered into them. He took up the bottle of ink which stood at the rear of the table, just under the low stationery rack, and read the label. Setting the ink-bottle back in its place, he turned to the small wastepaper basket beside the table and bent over it.

When he rose he asked Mrs. Kenting:

"Does your husband do his writing at this table?"

"Yes, always," the woman answered, staring at Vance with a puzzled frown.

"And never anywhere else?"

The woman shook her head slowly.

"Never," she told him. "You see, he has very little correspondence, and that writing-table was always more than adequate for his needs."

"But did he never need any paste or mucilage?" Vance asked. "I don't see any here."

"Paste?" Mrs. Kenting appeared still more puzzled. "Why, no. As a matter of fact, I don't believe there's any in the house. . . . But why—why do you ask?"

Vance looked up at the woman and smiled at her somewhat sympathetically.

"I'm merely trying to learn the truth about everything, and I beg that you forgive any questions which seem irrelevant."

The woman made no reply, and Vance again went toward the door where Markham and Heath and I were waiting, and we all went out into the hall.

As we reached the narrow landing half-way down the stairs, Markham suddenly stopped, letting Heath proceed on his way. He took Vance by the arm, detaining him.

"See here, Vance," he said aggressively, but in a subdued tone, so that no one in the room from which we had just come should overhear him. "This kidnapping doesn't strike me as being entirely on the level. And I don't believe you yourself think that it is."

"Oh, my Markham!" deplored Vance. "Art thou a mind-reader?"

"Drop that," continued Markham angrily. "Either the kidnappers have no intention of harming young Kenting, or else—as Fleel suggests—Kenting staged the whole affair and kidnapped himself."

"I am waiting patiently for the question I fear is *en route*," sighed Vance with resignation.

"What I want to know," Markham went on doggedly, "is why you refused to offer any hope, or to admit the possibility of either of these hypotheses, when you know damn well that the mere expression of such an opinion by you would have mitigated the apprehensions of both Mrs. Kenting and the young fellow's brother."

Vance heaved a deep sigh and gazed at Markham a moment with a look of mock commiseration.

"Really, y' know, Markham," he said lightly, but with a certain seriousness, "you're a most admirable character, but you're far too naïve for this unscrupulous world. Both you and your legal friend, Fleel, are quite wrong in your suppositions. I assure you, don't y' know, that I am not sufficiently cruel to extend false hopes to any one."

"What do you mean by that, Vance?" Markham demanded.

"My word, Markham! I can mean only one thing."

Vance continued to gaze at the District Attorney with sympathetic affection and lowered his voice.

"The chappie, I fear, is already dead."



#### 4. A STARTLING DECLARATION

(Wednesday, July 20; 11:45 a.m.)

There was something as startling as it was ominous about Vance's astonishing words. However, even in the dim light of the stairway I could see the serious expression on his face, and the finality of his tone convinced me that there was little or no doubt in his mind as to the truth of his words regarding Kaspar Kenting's fate.

Markham was stunned for a moment, but he was, I could see, frankly skeptical. The various bits of evidence uncovered in Kaspar Kenting's room seemed to point indisputably toward a very definite conclusion, which was quite the reverse of the conclusion which Vance had evidently reached. And I was sure that Markham felt as I did about it, and that he was as much surprised and confused as I at Vance's amazing statement. Markham did not relinquish his hold on Vance's arm. He apparently recovered his poise almost immediately and spoke in a hoarse undertone.

"You have a reason for saying that, Vance?"

"Tut, tut, my dear fellow," Vance returned lightly "This is neither the place nor the time to discuss the matter. I'll be quite willin' to point out all the obvious evidence to you later on. We are not dealing here with surface indications—those are quite consistent with the pattern which has been so neatly cut out for us. We are dealing with falsifications and subtleties; and I abhor them. . . . We'd better wait a while, don't y' know. At the moment I am most anxious to hear what McLaughlin has to say to the Sergeant. Let's descend and listen, what?"

Markham shrugged, gave Vance a nettled look, and relaxed his grip on the other's arm.

"Have it your own way," he grumbled. "Anyway," he added stubbornly, "I think you're wrong."

"It could be, of course," returned Vance with a nod. "Really, I'd like to believe it."

Slowly he went down the remaining steps to the lower hallway. Markham and I followed in silence.

McLaughlin, a heavy-footed Irishman, was just entering the drawing-room in answer to a peremptory beckoning finger from the Sergeant, who had preceded him. The officer looked overgrown and abnormally muscular in his tight civilian suit of blue serge. I caught a whimsical look in Vance's eyes as his glance followed the man through the open sliding doors.

Weem was just closing the street door, with his sullen, indifferent manner. A moment after we had reached the lower hallway, he turned and, without a glance in our direction as he passed us, went swiftly but awkwardly toward the rear of the house. Vance watched him pass from our line of vision, shook his head musingly, and then went toward the drawing-room.

McLaughlin (whom I remembered from the famous case of Alvin Benson,<sup>[13]</sup> when he came to that fateful house on West 48th Street, to report the presence of a mysterious grey Cadillac) was just about to speak to the Sergeant when he heard us enter the drawing-room. Recognizing Markham, he saluted respectfully and stepped to one side, facing us and waiting for orders.

"McLaughlin," Heath began—his tone carried that official gruffness he always displayed to his inferior officers, much to Vance's amusement—"something damn wrong happened in this house last night—or maybe it was early this morning, to be more exact. What time are you relieved from your beat here?"

"Regular time—eight o'clock," answered the man. "I was just fixing to go to bed an hour ago when the Inspector—"

"All right, all right," snapped Heath. "I ordered the Department to send you up. We need a report.—Listen: where were you around six o'clock this morning?"

"Doing my duty, sir," the officer assured Heath earnestly; "walking down the other side of the street opposite here, makin' my regular rounds."

"Did you see anybody, or anything, that looked suspicious?" demanded the Sergeant, thrusting his jaw forward belligerently.

The man started slightly and squinted as if trying to recall something.

"I did, at that, Sergeant!" he said. "Only I wouldn't say as how it was suspicious at the time, although the idea passed through my mind. But there wasn't any cause to take action."

"What was it, McLaughlin? Shoot everything, whether you think it's important or not."

"Well, Sergeant, a coupé—it was a dirty green color—pulled up on this side of the street along about that time. There were two men in it, and one of the guys got out and opened the hood and took a look at the engine. I came across the street and gave the car the once-over. But everything seemed on the up-and-up, and I didn't bother 'em. Anyhow, I stood there and watched, and pretty soon the driver got in and the coupé drove away. When it went down the block toward Columbus Avenue, the exhaust was open. . . . Well, Sergeant, there was nothing I could do about it then, so I went back across the street and walked on up to Broadway."

"That all you noticed?"

"No, it ain't, Sergeant." McLaughlin was looking a little uncomfortable. "I was just coming round the corner from Central Park West, back into 86th Street again, about twenty minutes later, when the same coupé went by me like hell—only, this time it was headed east instead of west—and it turned into the park—"

"How do you know it was the same coupé, McLaughlin?"

"Well, I ain't takin' no oath on it, Sergeant," the officer answered; "but it was the same kinda car, and the same dirty-green color, and the exhaust was still open. And there was two guys in it, just like before, and the driver looked to me like the same big, smooth-faced guy who had his head stuck in the hood when I first crossed the street to look the situation over." McLaughlin took a deep breath and gave the Sergeant an apprehensive look, as if he expected a reprimand.

"You didn't see or hear anything else?" growled Heath. "It musta been pretty light at that time of the morning, with the sun up."

"Not another thing, Sergeant," the officer asserted, with obvious relief. "When I first seen the car I was headed toward Columbus; and I went on down to Broadway, and then swung round through 87th Street to Central Park West and over again on 86th. As I says, it took me about twenty minutes."

"Exactly where was that coupé when you first got a squint at it?"

"Right along the curb, about a hundred feet up the street from here, toward the park."

"Why didn't you ask some questions of them guys in the car?"

"I told you before, there was nothing suspicious about 'em—not until they went by me, going in the other direction. When I first seen 'em I thought they was just a couple of bums goin' home from a joy-ride. They was quiet and polite enough, and didn't act like trouble. These guys was plenty sober, and they was total strangers to me. There wasn't no reason to interfere with 'em—honest to God!"

Heath thought for a moment and puffed on his cigar.

"Which way did the car go when it entered the park?"

"Well, Sergeant, it went into the transverse, as if it was headed for the east side. Even if I'd wanted to grab the gorillas I wouldn'ta had time. Before I coulda got the call-box on the Avenue and talked to the fella over there, the car woulda been to hell and gone. And there was no car or taxi anywhere round that I coulda chased 'em in. Anyway, I figured they was on the level."

Heath turned with annoyance and paced impatiently up and down the room.

"I say, officer," put in Vance, "were both occupants of the coupé white men?"

"Sure they was, sir." The officer answered emphatically, but with an air of deference which he had not shown to the Sergeant. Vance was standing beside Markham, and McLaughlin must have assumed that Vance was speaking for the District Attorney, as it were.

"And couldn't there have been a third man in the coupé?" Vance proceeded. "A smaller man, let us say, whom you didn't see—on his knees, and hidden from view, perhaps?"

"Well, there mighta been, sir,—I ain't swearin' there wasn't. I didn't open either one of the doors and look in. But there was plenty of room in the car for him to be sittin' up. Why should he be lying on the floor?"

"I haven't the remotest idea—except that he might have been hiding because he didn't wish to be seen," Vance returned apathetically.

"Gosh!" muttered McLaughlin. "You think there was three men in that car?"

"Really, McLaughlin, I don't know," Vance drawled. "It would simplify matters if we knew there had been three men in the car. I crave a small pussy-footed fellow."

The Sergeant had stopped his pacing across the room and now stood near the desk, listening to Vance with an amused interest.

"I don't getcha at all, Mr. Vance," he muttered respectfully. "Two tough guys is enough for any snatch."

"Oh, quite, Sergeant. As you say. Two are quite sufficient," Vance returned somewhat cryptically. Again he addressed himself to McLaughlin. "By the by, officer, did you, by any chance, stumble upon a ladder during your nocturnal circuit in these parts last night?"

"I seen a ladder, if that's what you mean," the man admitted. "It was leanin' up against that maple tree in the garden out here. I noticed it when it began to get light. But I figured it was only being used to prune the tree, or something. There certainly wasn't any use in reportin' a ladder in a gent's yard, was there?"

"Oh, no," Vance assured him indifferently. "Silly idea, going about reportin' ladders—eh, what? . . . That ladder's still in the yard, officer; only, this morning it was restin' up against the house, under an open window."

"Honest to God?" McLaughlin's eyes grew bigger. "I hope it was O.-K. not to report it."

"Oh, quite," Vance encouraged him. "It wouldn't have done a particle of good, anyway. Some one, don't y' know, moved it from the tree and placed it against the house while you were strollin' up Broadway and round 87th Street. Probably doesn't mean anything of any particular importance, however. . . . I say, did you ever notice a ladder in this yard before?"

The man shook his head ponderously.

"No, sir," he said, with a certain vague emphasis. "Can't say that I ever have. They generally keep that yard looking pretty neat and nice."

"Thanks awfully." Vance sauntered to the sofa and sat down lazily, stretching his legs out before him. It was obvious he had no other questions to put to the officer.

Heath straightened up and took the cigar from his mouth.

"That's all, McLaughlin. Much obliged for coming down. Go on home and hit the hay. I may, and may not, want to see you again later."

The officer saluted half-heartedly and went toward the door.

"Look here, Sergeant," he said, halting and turning around. "Do you mind telling me what happened here last night? You got me worryin' about that coupé."

"Oh, nothing much happened, I guess. A phony snatch of some kind. It don't look serious, but we have to check up. Young fella named Kaspar Kenting ain't anywhere abouts. And there was a cockeyed ransom note."

The officer seemed speechless for a moment. Then he half gasped.

"Honest? Jeez!"

"Do you know him, McLaughlin?"

"Sure I know him. I see him lots of times coming home at all hours of the mornin'. Half the time he's pie-eyed."

Heath showed no further inclination to talk, and McLaughlin went lumbering from the room. A moment later the front door shut noisily after him.

"What now, Mr. Vance?" Heath was again resting his weight against the desk, puffing vigorously on his cigar.

Vance drew in his legs, as if with great effort, and sighed.

"Oh, much more, Sergeant," he yawned in answer. "You haven't the faintest idea of how much I'd really like to learn about a number of things. . . ."

"But see here, Vance," interrupted Markham, "I first want to know what you meant by that statement you made as we were coming down the stairs. I can't see it at all, and I'd bet money that fellow Kaspar is as safe as you or I."

"I'm afraid you'd lose your wager, old dear."

"But all the evidence points—" began Markham.

"Please, oh, please, Markham," implored Vance. "Must we necessarily lean wherever a finger points? I say, let's get the completed picture first. Then we can speak with more or less certainty about the indications. Can't a johnnie hazard a guess without being quizzed by the great Prosecutor for the Common People?"

"Damn it, Vance!" Markham returned angrily; "drop the persiflage and get down to business. I want to know why you said what you did on the stairs, in the face of all the evidence to the contrary. Are you in possession of any facts to which I have not had access?"

"Oh, no—no," replied Vance mildly, stretching out still further in the chair. "You've seen and heard everything I have. Only, we interpret the findin's in different ways."

"All right." Markham made an effort to curb his impatience. "Let's hear how you interpret these facts."

"Pardon me, Chief," put in Heath; "I didn't hear what Mr. Vance said to you on the stairs. I don't know what his ideas on the case are."

Markham took the cigar from his mouth and looked at the Sergeant.

"Mr. Vance doesn't believe that Kaspar Kenting was kidnapped merely for money or that he may have walked out and staged the kidnapping himself. He said he thinks that the fellow is already dead."

Heath spun round abruptly to Vance.

"The hell you say!" he exclaimed. "How in the name of God did you get such an idea, Mr. Vance?"

Vance smoked a moment before replying. Then he spoke as if the explanation were of no importance:

"My word, Sergeant! It seems sufficiently indicated."

He paused again and looked back meditatively to the District Attorney, who was standing before him, teetering impatiently on his toes.

"Do you really think, Markham, that your plotting Kaspar would have gone to the Jersey casino to indulge in a bit of gamblin' on his big night—that is to say, on the night he intended to carry out his *grand coup* involvin' fifty thousand dollars?"

"And why not?" Markham wanted to know.

"It's quite obvious this criminal undertaking was carefully prepared in advance. The note itself is sufficient evidence of this, with its letters and words painstakingly cut out and all neatly pasted on a piece of disguised paper."

"The criminal undertaking, as you call it, need not necessarily have been prepared very far in advance," objected Markham. "Kaspar would have had time to do his cutting and pasting when he returned from the casino."

"Oh, no, I don't think so," Vance returned at once. "I took a good look at the desk and the wastepaper basket. No evidence whatever of such activity. Moreover, the johnnie's phone call in the wee hours of the morning shows a certain amount of expectation on his part of getting the matter of his financial difficulties settled."

"Go on," said Markham, as Vance paused once more.

"Very good," continued Vance. "Why should Kaspar Kenting have taken three hours to change to street clothes after he had returned from his pleasant evening of desult'ry gambling? A few minutes would have sufficed. And another question: Why should he wait until bright daylight before going forth? The darkness would have been infinitely safer and better suited to his purpose."

"How do you know he didn't go much earlier—before it was daylight?" demanded Markham.

"But, my dear fellow," explained Vance, "the ladder was still leanin' against the tree around dawn, when McLaughlin saw it, and therefore was not placed against the window until after sun-up. I'm quite sure that, had Kaspar planned a disappearance, he would have placed the ladder at the window ere he departed—eh, what?"

"I see what you mean, Mr. Vance," Heath threw in eagerly. "And Mrs. Kenting herself told us that she heard some one in the room at six o'clock this morning."

"True, Sergeant; but that's not the important thing," Vance answered casually. "As a matter of fact, I don't think it was Kaspar at all whom Mrs. Kenting says she heard in her husband's room at that hour this morning. . . . And, by the by, Markham, here's still another question to be considered: Why was the communicatin' door between Kaspar's room and his wife's left unlocked, if the gentleman contemplated carrying out a desperate and important plot that night? He would certainly not have left that door unlocked if he planned any such action. He would have guarded against any unwelcome intrusion on the part of his wife, who had merely to turn the knob and walk in and spoil all the fun, as it were. . . . And, speakin' of the door, you remember the lady opened it at six, right after hearin' some one walkin' in the room in what she described as soft slippers. But when she went into the room there was no one there. *Ergo*: Whoever it was she heard must have left the room hurriedly when she first knocked and called to her husband. And don't forget that it is his heavy blucher shoes that are gone—not his slippers. If it had been Kaspar she heard, imitatin' a slipper-shod gentleman, and if Kaspar had quickly gone out the hall door and down the front stairs, she would certainly have heard him, as she was very much on the alert at that moment. And, also, if he'd scrambled through the window and down the ladder with his heavy shoes on, he could hardly have done so without a sound. But the tellin' question in this connection is: Why, if the soft-footed person in the master bedroom was Kaspar, did he wait till his wife knocked on the door and called to him before he made a precipitate getaway? He could have left at any time during the three hours after he had come home from his highballs and roulette-playin'. All of which, I rather think, substantiates the assumption that it was another person that the lady heard at six o'clock this morning."

Markham's head moved slowly up and down. His cigar had gone out, but he paid no attention to it.

"I'm beginning to see what you mean, Vance; and I can't say your conclusions leave me happy. But what I want to know is—"

"Just a moment, Markham old dear. Just a wee moment." Vance raised his hand to indicate that he had something further to say. "If it had been Kaspar that Mrs. Kenting heard at six o'clock, he would hardly have had time, before he scooted off at his wife's knock, to collect his comb and toothbrush and pajamas. Why should the chappie have bothered to take them, in the first place? True, they are things he could well make use of on his hypothetical jaunt for the purpose of getting hold of brother Kenyon's lucre, but he would hardly go to that trouble on so vital and all-important a venture,—the toilet articles would be far too trivial and could easily be bought wherever he was going, if he was finicky about such details. Furthermore, if so silly a plot had been planned by him he would have equipped himself surreptitiously beforehand and would have had the beautifyin' accessories waitin' for him wherever he had decided to go, rather than grabbin' them up at the last minute."

Markham made no comment, and after a moment or two Vance resumed.

"Carryin' the supposition a bit forrader, he would have realized that the absence of these necess'ry articles would be highly suspicious and would point too obviously to the impression he would have wished to avoid—namely, his own wilful participation in the attempt to extort the fifty thousand dollars. I'd say, y' know, that these items for the gentleman's toilet were collected and taken away—in order to give just this impression—by the soft-footed person heard by Mrs. Kenting. . . . No, no, Markham. The comb and the toothbrush and the pajamas and the shoes are only textural details—like the cat, the shawl-fringe, the posies, the ribbon, and the bandanna in Manet's *Olympia*. . . ."

"Manufactured evidence—that's your theory, is it?" Markham spoke without any show of aggressiveness or antagonism.

"Exactly," nodded Vance. "Far too many leadin' clues. Really, the culprit overdid it. An *embarras de richesses*. Whole structure does a bit of topplin' of its own weight. Very thorough. Too dashed thorough. Nothing left to the imagination."

Markham took a few steps up the room, turned, and then walked back.

"You think it's a real kidnapping then?"

"It could be," murmured Vance. "But that doesn't strike me as wholly consistent either. Too many counter-indications. But I'm only advancin' a theory. For instance, if Kaspar was allowed time to change his suit and shoes—as we know he did—he had time to call out, or to make a disturbance of some kind which would have upset all the kind-hearted villain's plans. Hanging up his dinner jacket so carefully, transferring things from his pockets, and putting away his oxfords in the closet, all indicate leisure in the process—a leisure which the kidnappers would hardly have permitted. Kidnappers are not benevolent persons, Markham."

"Well, what do you think happened?" Markham asked in a subdued, worried tone.

"Really, I don't know." Vance studied the tip of his cigarette with concern. "We do know, however, that Kaspar had an engagement last night which kept him out until three this morning; and that upon his return here he telephoned to some one and then changed to street clothes. It might therefore be assumed that he made some appointment to be kept between three and six and saw no necessity of going to bed in the interval. This would also account for the leisurely changing of his attire; and it is highly possible he went quietly out through the front door when he fared forth to keep his early-morning rendezvous. Assumin' that this theory is correct, I'd say further that he expected to return anon, for he left all the lights on. And one more thing: I think it safe to assume that the door from his bedroom into the hall was unlocked this morning—otherwise, Mrs. Kenting would have remembered unlocking it when she ordered coffee and went downstairs."

"And even if everything you say is true," argued Markham, "what could have happened to him?"

Vance sighed deeply.

"All we actually know at the moment, my dear Markham," he answered, "is that the johnnie did not come back. He seems to have disappeared. At any rate, he isn't here."

"Even so,"—Markham drew himself up with a slight show of annoyance—"why do you take it for granted that Kaspar Kenting is already dead?"

"I don't take it for granted." Vance, too, drew himself up and spoke somewhat vigorously. "I said merely that I *feared* the johnnie is already dead. If he did not, as it were, kidnap himself, d' ye see, and if he wasn't actually kidnapped as the term is commonly understood, then the chances are he was murdered when he went forth to keep his appointment. His disappearance and the elaborate clues arranged hereabouts to make it appear like a deliberate self-abduction, imply a connection between his appointment and the evidence we observed in his room. Therefore, it's more than likely, don't y' know, that if he were held alive and later released, he could relate enough—whom he had the appointment with, for instance—to lead us to the guilty person or persons. His immediate death would have been the only safe course."

As Vance spoke Heath had come forward and stood close to Markham.

"Your theory, Mr. Vance, sounds reasonable enough the way you tell it," the Sergeant commented doggedly. "But still and all—"

Vance had risen and was breaking his cigarette in an ash tray.

"Why argue about the case, Sergeant," he interrupted, "when, as yet, there is so little evidence to go on? . . . Let's dawdle about a bit longer and learn more about things."

"Learn what, and about what things?" Markham almost barked.

Vance was in one of his most dulcet moods.

"Really, if we knew, Markham, we wouldn't have to learn, would we? But Kenyon Kenting, I ween, harbors a number of fruitful items:—I'm sure a bit of social intercourse with the gentleman would be most illuminatin'. And then there's your friend, Mr. Fleel, the trusted Justinian of the Kenting household: I've a feelin' he might be prevailed upon to suggest a few details here and there and elsewhere. And Mrs. Kenting herself might cast a few more rays of light into the darkness. And let's not overlook old Mrs. Falloway—Mrs. Kenting's mother, y' know—who I think lives here. Exceptional old dowager. I met her once or twice before she became an invalid. Fascinatin' creature, Markham; bulgin' with original ideas, and shrewd no end. And it could be that even the butler Weem would be willin' to spin a yarn or two—he appears displeased and restive enough to give vent to some unflatterin' family confidences. . . . Really, y' know, I think all these seemingly trivial matters should be attended to ere we depart."

"Don't worry about such things, Vance," Markham advised him gravely. "They are all routine matters, and they'll be taken care of at the proper time."

"Oh, Markham—my dear Markham!" Vance was lighting another cigarette. "The present time is always the proper time." He took a few inhalations and blew the smoke forth indolently. "Really, I'm rather interested in the case, don't y' know. It has most amazin' possibilities. And as long as you've deprived me of attendin' the dog show today, I think I'll do a bit of snoopin' here and about."

"All right," Markham acquiesced. "What is it you wish to focus your prodigious powers on first?"

"My word, such flattery!" exclaimed Vance. "I haven't a single prodigious power—I'm a mere broken reed. But I simply can't bear not to inspect that ladder."

Heath chuckled. "Well, that's easy, Mr. Vance. Come on round to the yard. No trouble getting in from the street." And he started energetically toward the front door.

## 5. ON THE RUNGS OF THE LADDER

(Wednesday, July 20; 12:30 p.m.)

We followed the Sergeant through the ponderous front door, down the stone steps, and across the flagstones. The sun was still shining brightly, and there was hardly a cloud in the sky. The light was so brilliant that for a moment it almost blinded me after the dimness of the Kenting interior. The Sergeant led the way thirty or forty feet east, along the sidewalk, until he came to the small gate in the low iron fence which divided the attractively sodded court of the Kenting house from the street. The gate was not on the latch, but stood slightly ajar, and the Sergeant pushed it wide open with his foot.

Heath was first to enter the enclosure, and he walked ahead with arms outstretched, holding us back from a too precipitate intrusion, like a prudent brood-hen guiding her recalcitrant and over-ambitious chicks.

"Don't come too close," he admonished us with a solemn air. "There are footprints at the bottom of the ladder and we gotta save 'em for Cap Jerym's[14] plaster casts."

"Well, well," smiled Vance. "Maybe you'll permit me to come as near as Captain Jerym will have to go to perform his sculpture?"

"Sure." Heath grinned. "But I don't want them footprints interfered with. They may be the best clue we'll get."

"Dear me!" sighed Vance. "As important as all that, Sergeant?"

Heath leaned forward and scowled as Vance stood beside him.

"Look at this one, Mr. Vance,"—and the Sergeant pointed to an impression in the border of the hedge within a foot of where the ladder stood.

"My word!" exclaimed Vance. "I'm abominably flattered by even such consideration as letting me come within viewing distance of the bally footprints." Again taking out his monocle he adjusted it carefully and, kneeling down on the lawn, inspected the imprint. He took several moments doing so, and a puzzled frown slowly spread over his face as he carefully scrutinized the mark in the neatly raked soil of the hedge.

"You know, sir, we was lucky," Heath asserted. "It drizzled most of yesterday afternoon, and around about eight o'clock last night it got to raining pretty hard, though it did clear up before midnight."

"Really, Sergeant! I knew it only too well!" Vance did not look up. "I planned to go to the tennis matches at Forest Hills yesterday afternoon, to see young Henshaw[15] play, but I simply couldn't bear the inclement weather." He said nothing more for several moments—his entire interest seemed to be centred on the footprint he was inspecting. At length he murmured without turning: "Rather small footprint here—eh, what?"

"I'll say it is," agreed Heath. "Mighta been a dame. And it looks like it was made with flat slippers of some kind. There's no heel mark."

"No, no heel mark," agreed Vance abstractedly. "As you say, no heel mark. Quite right. Obvious, in fact. Curious. I wonder. . . ."

He leaned closer to the impression in the sod of the hedge, and went on:

"But really, y' know, I shouldn't say the print was made by a slipper—unless, of course, you wish to call a sandal a slipper."

"Is that it, Mr. Vance?" The Sergeant was half contemptuous and half interested.

"Yes, yes; rather plain," Vance returned in a low voice. "Not an ordin'ry sandal, either. A Chinese sandal I'd say. Slightly turned-up tip."

"A Chinese sandal?" Heath's tone was almost one of ridicule now.

"More than likely, don't y' know." Vance rose and brushed the soil from his trousers.

"I suppose you'll be telling us next that this whole case is just another Tong war." Heath evidently did not deem Vance's conclusion worthy of serious consideration.

Vance was still leaning forward, rubbing vigorously at a spot on one knee. He stopped suddenly and, ignoring the Sergeant's raillery, leaned still farther forward.

"And, by Jove! here's another imprint." He pointed with his cigarette to a slight depression in the lawn just at the foot of the ladder.

The Sergeant leaned over curiously.

"So it is, sir!" he exclaimed, and his tone had become respectful. "I didn't see that one before."

"It really doesn't matter, y' know. Similar to the other one." Vance stepped past Heath and grasped the ladder with both hands.

"Look out, sir!" cautioned Heath angrily. "You'll make finger-prints on that ladder."

Vance relaxed his hold on the ladder momentarily, and turned to Heath with an amused smile.

"I'll at least give Dubois and Bellamy something to work on," he said lightly. "I fear there won't be any other finger-prints on this irrelevant exhibit. And it will be rather difficult to pin the crime on me. I've an unimpeachable alibi. Sittin' at home with Van Dine here, and readin' a bedtime story from Boccaccio."

Heath was spluttering. Before he could answer, Vance turned, grasped the ladder again, and lifted it so that its base was clear of the ground. Then he set it down several inches to the right.

"Really, Sergeant, you have nothing whatever to be squeamish about. Cheer up, and be more trustin'. Consider the lilies, and don't forget that the snail's on the thorn."

"What's lilies and snails gotta do with it?" demanded Heath irritably. "I'm tryin' to tell you—"

Before the Sergeant could protest Vance had thrown his cigarette carelessly away and was moving quickly up the ladder, rung by rung. When he was about three-quarters of the way up he stopped and made his way down. When he had descended and stood again on the lawn, he carefully and deliberately lighted another cigarette.

"I'm rather afraid to look and see just what happened. It would be most humiliatin' if I were wrong. However. . . ."

Again he lifted the ladder and moved it still farther to the right. Then he went a second time on his knees and inspected the new

imprints which the two uprights of the ladder had made in the ground. After a moment he looked studiously at the original imprints of the ladder; and I could see that he was comparing the two sets.

"Very interestin'," he murmured as he rose and turned to Heath.

"What's interesting?" demanded the Sergeant. He again seemed to be nettled by Vance's complete disregard of the risk of making finger-prints on the ladder.

"Sergeant," Vance told him seriously, "the imprints I just made when I mounted the ladder are of practically the same depth as the imprints made by the ladder last night." Vance took a deep puff on his cigarette. "Do you see the significance of the results of that little test of mine?"

Heath corrugated his forehead, pursed his lips, and looked at Vance questioningly.

"Well, Mr. Vance, to tell you the truth—" He hesitated. "I can't say as I do see what it means—except that you've maybe spoiled a lot of good finger-prints."

"It means several other things. And don't stew so horribly about your beloved hypothetical fingerprints." Vance broke the ashes from his cigarette against the ladder, and sat down lazily on the second rung. "*Imprimis*, it means that two men were not on the ladder at the same time last night—or, rather, this morning. Secondly, it means that whoever was on that ladder was a very slight person who could not have weighed over 120 or 130 pounds. Thirdly, it means that Mr. Kaspar Kenting was not kidnapped via yon open window at all. . . . Does any of that help?"

"I still can't see it." Heath was holding his cigar meditatively between thumb and forefinger.

"My dear Sergeant!" sighed Vance. "Let us reflect and analyze for a moment. When the ladder was placed against this window between dawn and six o'clock, before the sun had come up, the ground was much softer than it is now, and any weight or pressure on the ladder would have created imprints of a certain depth in the moist sod. At the present time the soil is obviously drier and harder, for the sun has been shining on it for several hours. However, you noted—did you not?—that the ladder sank into the ground—or, rather, made impressions in the ground—when I mounted it, of equal depth with that of the earlier imprints. I have a feelin' that if I had mounted the ladder when the ground was considerably damper the ladder would have gone in deeper—eh, what?"

"I getcha now," blurted Heath. "The guy who went up that ladder early this morning musta been a damn sight lighter than you, Mr. Vance."

"Right-o, Sergeant." Vance smiled musingly. "It was a very small person. And if *two* persons had been on that ladder—that is, Mr. Kaspar Kenting and his supposed abductor—I rather think the original impressions made by the ladder would have been far deeper."

"Sure they would." Heath was gazing down at the two sets of impressions as if hypnotized.

"Therefore," Vance went on casually, "aren't we justified in assuming that only one person stepped on this ladder early this morning, and that that person was a very slight and fragile human being?"

Heath looked up at Vance with puzzled admiration.

"Yes, sir. But where does that get us?"

"The findings, as it were," continued Vance, "taken in connection with the footprints, seem to tell us that a Chinese gentleman of small stature was the only person who used this ladder. Pure supposition, of course, Sergeant; but I rather opine that—"

"Yes, yes," Markham interrupted. He had been drawing vigorously on his cigar, giving his earnest attention to the demonstration and Vance's subsequent conversation with Heath. He now nodded comprehendingly. "Yes," he repeated. "You see some connection between these footprints and the more-or-less Chinese signature on that ransom note."

"Oh, quite—quite," agreed Vance. "You show amazin' perspicacity. That's precisely what I was thinkin'."

Markham was silent for a moment.

"Any other ideas, Vance?" he demanded somewhat peevishly.

"Oh, no—not a thing, old dear." Vance blew a ribbon of smoke into the air, and rose lackadaisically.

He cast a meditative glance back at the ladder and at the trimmed privet hedge behind it, which ran the full length of the house. He stood motionless for a moment and squinted.

"I say, Markham," he commented in a low voice; "there's something shining there in the hedge. I don't think it's a leaf that's reflecting the light at that one spot."

As he spoke he moved quickly to a point just at the left of where the ladder now stood. He looked down at the small green leaves of the privet for a moment, and then, reaching forward with both hands, he separated the dense foliage and leaned over, as if seeking something.

"Ah! . . . My word!"

As Vance separated the foliage still farther, I saw a silver-backed dressing comb wedged between two closely forked branches of the privet.

Markham, who was standing at an angle to Vance, started forward.

"What is it, Vance?" he demanded.

Vance, without answering him, reached down and retrieving the comb, turned and held it out in the palm of his hand.

"It's just a comb, as you see, old dear," he said. "An ordin'ry comb from a gentleman's dressing set. Ordin'ry, except for the somewhat elaborate scrollwork of the silver back." He glanced at the astonished Heath. "Oh, no need to be upset, Sergeant. The scrolled silver wouldn't take any clear finger-prints, anyway. And I'm quite certain you wouldn't find any, in any event."

"You think that's Kaspar Kenting's missing comb?" asked Markham quickly.

"It could be, of course," nodded Vance. "I rather surmise as much. It was just beneath the open window of the chappie's boudoir."

Heath was shaking his head somewhat shamefacedly.

"How the hell did Snitkin and I miss that?" His tone carried a tinge of regret and self-criticism.

"Oh, cheer up, Sergeant," Vance encouraged him good-naturedly. "You see, it was caught in the hedge before reaching the ground, and was jolly well hidden by the density of the leaves. I happened to be standing at just the right angle to get a glimpse of it through the leaves with the sun on it. . . . I imagine that whoever dropped it couldn't find it either, and, as time was pressin', the curs'ry search

was abandoned. Interestin' item—what?" He tucked the comb into his upper waistcoat pocket.

Markham was still scowling, his eyes fixed inquiringly on Vance.

"What do you think about it?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm not thinkin', Markham." Vance started toward the gate. "I'm utterly exhausted. Let's stagger back into the Kenting domicile."

As we entered the front door, Mrs. Kenting, Kenyon Kenting, and Fleel were just descending the stairs.

Vance approached them and asked, "Do any of you happen to know anything about that ladder in the yard?"

"I never saw it before this morning," Mrs. Kenting answered slowly, in a deadened voice.

"Nor I," added her brother-in-law. "I can't imagine where it came from, unless it was brought here last night by the kidnappers."

"And I, of course," said Fleel, "would have no way of knowing anything about any ladders here. I haven't been here for a long time, and I never remember seeing a ladder around the premises before."

"You're quite sure, Mrs. Kenting," pursued Vance, "the ladder doesn't belong here? Might it, perhaps, have been kept somewhere at the rear of the house without your having seen it?" He looked at the woman with a slight frown.

"I'm quite sure it doesn't belong here," she said in the same muffled tone of voice. "Had it ever been here, I should have known about it. And, anyway, we have no need of such a ladder."

"Most curious," murmured Vance. "The ladder was resting against the maple tree in your courtyard early this morning when Officer McLaughlin passed the house."

"The maple tree?" Kenyon Kenting spoke with noticeable astonishment. "Then it was moved from the maple tree to the side of the house later?"

"Exactly. Obviously the people concerned in this affair made two trips here last night. Very confusin'—what?"

Vance dismissed the subject, and, reaching in his pocket, brought out the comb he had found in the privet hedge, and held it out to the woman.

"By the by, Mrs. Kenting, is this, by any chance, your husband's comb?"

The woman stared at it with frightened eyes.

"Yes, yes!" she exclaimed almost inaudibly. "That's Kaspar's comb. Where did you find it, Mr. Vance,—and what does it mean?"

"I found it in the privet hedge just beneath his window," Vance told her. "But I don't know yet what it means, Mrs. Kenting."

Before the woman could ask further questions Vance turned quickly to Kenyon Kenting and said:

"We should like to have a little chat with you, Mr. Kenting. Where can we go?"

The man looked around as if slightly dazed and undecided.

"I think the den might be the best place," he said. He walked down the hall to a room just beyond the still open entrance to the gem-room, and, throwing the door wide, stepped to one side for us to enter. Mrs. Kenting and Fleel proceeded through the sliding doors into the drawing-room on the opposite side of the hall.

## 6. \$50,000

(Wednesday, July 20; 12:45 p.m.)

Kenyon Kenting followed us into the den and, closing the door, stepped to a large leather armchair, and sat down uneasily on the edge of it.

"I will be very glad to tell you anything I know," he assured us. Then he added, "But I'm afraid I can be of little help."

"That, of course, remains to be seen," murmured Vance. He had gone to the small bay window and stood looking out with his hands deep in his coat pockets. "First of all, we wish to know just what the financial arrangement is between you and your brother. I understand that when your father died the estate was all left at your disposal, and that whatever money Kaspar Kenting should receive would be subject to your discretion."

Kenting nodded his head repeatedly, as if agreeing; but it was evident that he was thinking the matter over. Finally he said:

"That is quite right. Fleel, however, was appointed the custodian, so to speak, of the estate. And I wish to assure you that not only have I maintained this house for Kaspar, but have given him even more money than I thought was good for him."

"Your brother is a bit of a spendthrift—eh, what?"

"He is very wasteful—and very fond of gambling," Kenting spoke in a guarded semi-resentful tone. "He is constantly making demands on me for his gambling debts. I've paid a great many of them, but I had to draw the line somewhere. He has a remarkable facility for getting into trouble. He drinks far too much. He has always been a very difficult problem—especially in view of the fact that Madelaine, his wife, has to be considered."

"Did you always decide these monetary matters entirely by yourself?" Vance asked the man casually. "Or did you confer with Mr. Fleel about them?"

Kenting shot Vance a quick look and then glanced down again.

"I naturally consulted Mr. Fleel on any matters of importance regarding the estate. He is co-executor, appointed by my father. In minor matters this is not necessary, of course; but I do not have a free hand, as the distribution of the money is a matter of joint responsibility; and, as I say, Mr. Fleel has, in a way, complete legal charge of it. But I can assure you that there were never any clashes of opinion on the subject,—Fleel is wholly reasonable and understands the situation thoroughly. I find it an ideal arrangement."

Vance smoked for several moments in silence, while the other man looked vaguely before him. Then Vance turned from the window and sat down in the swivel chair before the old-fashioned roll-top desk of oak at one side of the window.

"When was the last time you saw your brother?" he asked, busying himself with his cigarette.

"The day before yesterday," the man answered promptly. "I generally see him at least three times a week—either here or at my office downtown—there are always minor matters of one kind or another to decide on, and he naturally depends a great deal on my judgment. In fact, the situation is such that even the ordinary household expenses have always been referred to me."

Vance nodded without looking up.

"And did your brother bring up the subject of finances on Monday?"

Kenyon Kenting fidgeted a bit and shifted his position in the chair. He did not answer at once. But at length he said, in a half-hearted tone, "I would prefer not to go into that, inasmuch as I regard it as a personal matter, and I cannot see that it has any bearing on the present situation."

Vance studied the man for a moment.

"That is a point for us to decide, I believe," he said in a peculiarly hard voice. "We should like you to answer the question."

Kenting looked again at Vance and then fixed his eyes on the wall ahead of him.

"If you deem it necessary, of course—" he began. "But I would much prefer to say nothing about it."

"I'm afraid, sir," put in Markham, in his most aggressive official manner, "we must insist that you answer the question."

Kenting shrugged reluctantly and settled back in his chair, joining the tips of his fingers.

"Very well," he said resignedly. "If you insist. On Monday my brother asked me for a large sum of money—in fact, he was persistent about it, and became somewhat hysterical when I refused him."

"Did he state what he required this money for?" asked Vance.

"Oh, yes," the man said angrily. "The usual thing—gambling and unwarranted debts connected with some woman."

"Would you be more specific as to the gambling debts?" pursued Vance.

"Well, you know the sort of thing," Kenting again shifted in his chair. "Roulette, black-jack, the bird-cage, cards—but principally horses. He owed several book-makers some preposterous amount."

"Do you happen to know the names of any of these book-makers?"

"No, I don't." Once more the man glanced momentarily at Vance then lowered his eyes. "Wait—I think one of them had a name something like Hannix."<sup>[16]</sup>

"Ah! Hannix, eh?" Vance contemplated his cigarette for a few moments. "What was so urgent about this as to produce hysterics?"

"The fact is," the other went on, "Kaspar told me the men were unscrupulous and dangerous, and that he feared for himself if he did not pay them off immediately. He said he had already been threatened."

"That doesn't sound like Hannix," mused Vance. "Hannix looks pretty hard, I know, but he's really a babe at heart. He's a shrewd gentleman, but hardly a vicious one. . . . And I say, Mr. Kenting, what was the nature of your brother's debts in connection with the mysterious lady you mentioned? Jewelry, perhaps?"

The man nodded vigorously.

"Yes, that's just it," he said emphatically.

"Well, well. Everything seems to be running true to form. Your brother's position was not in the least original—what? Gamblin'



debts, liquor, and ladies cravin' precious gems. Most conventional, don't y' know." A faint smile played over Vance's lips. "And you denied your brother the money?"

"I had to," asserted Kenting. "The amount would almost have beggared the estate, what with so much tied up in what we've come to call 'frozen assets.' It was far more than I could readily get together at the time, and anyway, I would have had to take the matter up with Fleel, even if I had been inclined to comply with Kaspar's demands. And I knew perfectly well that Fleel would not approve my doing so. He has a moral as well as legal responsibility, you understand."

Vance took several deep inhalations on his *Régie* and sent a succession of ribbons of blue smoke toward the old discolored Queen-Anne ceiling.

"Did your brother approach Mr. Fleel about the matter?"

"Yes, he did," the other returned. "Whenever I refuse him anything he goes immediately to Fleel. As a matter of fact, Fleel has always been more sympathetic with Kaspar than I have. But Kaspar's demand this time was too utterly outrageous, and Fleel turned him down as definitely as I did. And—although I don't like to say so—I really think Kaspar was grossly exaggerating his needs. Fleel got the same impression, and mentioned to me over the phone the next morning that he was very angry with Kaspar. He told me, too, that legally he was quite helpless in the matter and could not accommodate Kaspar, even if he had personally wanted to."

"Has Mrs. Kenting any money of her own?" Vance asked unexpectedly.

"Nothing—absolutely nothing!" the man assured him. "She is entirely dependent upon what Kaspar gives her—which, of course, means some part of what I allow him from the estate. Often I think that he does not do the right thing by her and deprives her of many of the things she should have, so that he himself can fritter the money away." A scowl came over the man's face. "But there's nothing I can do about it. I have tried to remonstrate with him, but it's worse than useless."

"In view of this morning's occurrence," suggested Vance, "it may be that your brother was not unduly exaggerating about the necessity for this money."

Kenting became suddenly serious, and his eyes wandered unhappily about the room.

"That is a horrible thought, sir," he said, half under his breath. "But it is one that occurred to me immediately when I arrived here early this morning. And you can be sure it left me uncomfortable."

Vance regarded the man dubiously as he addressed him again.

"When you receive further instructions regarding the ransom money, what do you intend to do about it—that is to say, just what is your feeling in the matter?"

Kenting rose from his chair and stood looking down at the floor. He appeared deeply troubled.

"As a brother," he said slowly, "what can I do? I suppose I must manage somehow to get the money and pay it. I can't let Kaspar be murdered. . . . It's a frightful situation."

"Yes—quite," agreed Vance.

"And then there's Madelaine. I could never forgive myself. . . . I say again, it's a frightful situation."

"Nasty mess. Rather. Still, I have a groggy notion," Vance went on, "that you won't be called upon to pay the ransom money at all. . . . And, by the by, Mr. Kenting, you didn't mention the amount that your brother asked for when you last saw him. Tell me: how much did he want to get him out of his imagin'ry difficulties?"

Kenting raised his head sharply and looked at Vance with a shrewdness he had not hitherto displayed during the interview. Withal, he seemed ill at ease and took a few nervous steps back and forth before replying.

"I was hoping you wouldn't ask me that question," he said regretfully. "I avoided it purposely, for I am afraid it might create an erroneous impression."

"How much was it?" snapped Markham. "We must get on with this."

"Well, the truth is," Kenting stammered with evident reluctance, "Kaspar wanted fifty thousand dollars. Sounds incredible, doesn't it?" he added apologetically.

Vance leaned back in the swivel chair and looked unseeingly at one of the old etchings over the desk.

"I imagined that was the figure," he murmured. "Thanks awfully, Mr. Kenting. We sha'n't bother you any more just now, except that I should like to know whether Mrs. Kenting's mother, Mrs. Falloway, still lives here in the Purple House."

Kenting seemed surprised at the question.

"Oh, yes," he said with disgruntled emphasis. "She still occupies the front suite on the third floor with her son, Mrs. Kenting's brother. But the woman is crippled now and can get about only with a cane. She rarely is able to come downstairs, and she almost never goes outdoors."

"What about the son?" asked Vance.

"He's the most incompetent young whippersnapper I've ever known. He always seems to be sickly and has never earned so much as a penny. He's perfectly content to live here with his mother at the expense of the Kenting estate." The man's manner now had something of resentment and venom in it.

"Most unpleasant and annoyin' situation—what?" Vance rose and put out his cigarette. "Does Mrs. Falloway or her son know about what happened here last night?"

"Oh, yes," the man told him. "Both Madelaine and I spoke to them about it this morning, as we saw no point in keeping the matter a secret."

"And we, too, should like to speak to them," said Vance. "Would you be so good as to take us upstairs?"

Kenting seemed greatly relieved.

"I'll be glad to," he said, and started for the door. We followed him upstairs.

Mrs. Falloway was a woman between sixty and sixty-five years old. She was of heavy build and seemed to possess a corresponding aggressiveness. Her skin was somewhat wrinkled, but her thick hair was almost black, despite her years. There was an unmistakable masculinity about her, and her hands were large and bony, like those of a man. She had an intelligent and canny expression, and her features were large and striking. Withal, there was a wistful feminine look in her eyes. She impressed me as a woman with an iron will,

but also with an innate sense of loyalty and sympathy.

When we entered her room that morning Mrs. Falloway was sitting placidly in a wicker armchair in front of the large bay window. She wore an antiquated black alpaca dress which fell in voluminous folds about her and completely hid her feet. An old-fashioned hand-crocheted afghan was thrown over her shoulders. On the floor beside her chair lay a long heavy Malakka cane with a shepherd's-crook gold handle.

At an old and somewhat dilapidated walnut secretary sat a thin, sickly youth, with straight dark hair which fell forward over his forehead, and large, prominent features. There was no mistaking mother and son. The pale youth held a magnifying glass in one hand and was moving it back and forth over a page of exhibits in a stamp album which was propped up at an angle facing the light.

"These gentlemen wish to speak to you, Mrs. Falloway," Kenyon Kenting said in an unfriendly tone. (It was obvious that an antagonism of some kind existed between the woman and this man on whose bounty she depended.) "I won't remain," Kenting added. "I think I'd better join Madelaine." He went to the door and opened it. "I'll be downstairs if you should need me." This last remark was addressed to Vance.

When he had gone, Vance took a few steps toward the woman with an air of solicitation.

"Perhaps you remember me, Mrs. Falloway—" he began.

"Oh, very well, Mr. Vance. It is very pleasant to see you again. Do sit down in that armchair there, and try to imagine that this meager room is a Louis-Seize salon." There was a note of apology in her voice, accompanied by an unmistakable undertone of rancor.

Vance bowed formally.

"Any room you grace, Mrs. Falloway," he said, "becomes the most charming of salons." He did not accept her invitation to sit down, however, but remained standing deferentially.

"What do you make of this situation?" she went on. "And do you really think anything has happened to my son-in-law?" Her voice was hard and low-pitched.

"I really cannot say just yet," Vance answered. "We were hopin' you might be able to help us." He casually presented the others of us, and the woman acknowledged the introductions with dignified graciousness.

"This is my son, Fraim," she said, waving with a bony hand toward the anæmic young man at the secretary.

Fraim Falloway rose awkwardly and inclined his head without a word; then he sank back listlessly into his chair.

"Philatelist?" asked Vance, studying the youth.

"I collect American stamps." There was no enthusiasm in the lethargic voice, and Vance did not pursue the subject.

"Did you hear anything in the house early this morning?" Vance went on. "That is, did you hear Mr. Kaspar Kenting come in—or any kind of a noise between three and six o'clock?"

Fraim Falloway shook his head without any show of interest.

"I didn't hear anything," he said. "I was asleep."

Vance turned to the mother.

"Did you hear anything, Mrs. Falloway?"

"I heard Kaspar come in—he woke me up banging the front door shut." She spoke with bitterness. "But that's nothing new. I went to sleep again, however, and didn't know anything had happened until Madelaine and Mr. Kenyon Kenting informed me of it this morning, after my breakfast."

"Could you suggest any reason," asked Vance, "why any one should wish to kidnap Kaspar Kenting?"

The woman uttered a harsh, mirthless chuckle.

"No. But I can give you many reasons why any one should *not* wish to kidnap him," she returned with a hard, intolerant look. "He is not an admirable character," she went on, "nor a pleasant person to have around. And I regret the day my daughter married him. However," she added—and it seemed to me grudgingly—"I wouldn't wish to see any harm come to the scamp."

"And why not, mater?" asked Fraim Falloway with a whine. "You know perfectly well he has made us all miserable, including Sis. Personally, I think it's good riddance." The last words were barely audible.

"Don't be vindictive, son," the woman reproved him with a sudden softening in her tone, as the youth turned back to his stamps.

Vance sighed as if this interchange between mother and son bored him.

"Then you are not able, Mrs. Falloway, to suggest any reason for Mr. Kenting's sudden disappearance, or tell us anything that might be at all helpful?"

"No. I know nothing, and have nothing to tell you." Mrs. Falloway closed her lips with an audible sound.

"In that case," Vance returned politely, "I think we had better be going downstairs."

The woman picked up her cane and struggled to her feet, despite Vance's protestations.

"I wish I could help you," she said with sudden kindness. "But I am so well isolated these days with my infirmity. Walking, you know, is quite a painful process for me. I'm afraid I'm growing old."

She limped beside us slowly to the door, her son, who had risen, holding her tightly by one arm and casting reproachful glances at us.

In the hall Vance waited till the door was shut.

"An amusing old girl," he remarked. "Her mind is as young and shrewd as it ever was. . . . Unpleasant young citizen, Fraim. He's as ill as the old lady, but he doesn't know it. Endocrine imbalance," Vance continued as we went downstairs. "Needs medical attention. I wonder when he had a basal metabolism taken last. I'd say his chart would read in the minus thirties. May be thyroid. But it's more than possible, y' know, he needs the suprarenal hormone."

Markham snorted.

"He simply looks like a weakling to me."

"Oh, yes. Doubtless. As you say, devoid of stamina. And full of resentment against his fellow-men and especially against his brother-in-law. At any rate, an unpleasant character, Markham."

"A queer and unwholesome case," Markham commented, half to himself, and then lapsed into thoughtful silence as he descended the

stairs with Vance. When we had reached the lower hall Vance went immediately toward the drawing-room and stepped inside.

Mrs. Kenting, who seemed perturbed and ill at ease, sat rigidly upright on the small sofa where we had first seen her. Her brother-in-law sat beside her, looking at her with a solicitous, comforting air. Fleel was leaning back in an easy chair near the desk, smoking a cigar and endeavoring to maintain a judicious and unconcerned mien.

Vance glanced about him casually and, drawing up a small, straight-backed chair beside the sofa, sat down and addressed himself to the obviously unhappy woman.

"I know you told us, Mrs. Kenting," he began, "that you could not describe the men who called on your husband several nights ago. I wish, however, you would make an effort to give us at least a general description of them."

"It's strange that you should ask me that," the woman said. "I was just speaking to Kenyon about them and trying to recall what they looked like. The fact is, Mr. Vance, I paid little attention to them, but I know that one of them was a large man and seemed to me to have a very thick neck. And, as I recall, there was a lot of grey in his hair; and he may have had a clipped mustache—I really don't remember: it's all very vague. That was the man who came twice. . . ."

"Your description, madam," remarked Vance, nodding his head, "corresponds to the appearance of a certain gentleman I have in mind; and if it is the same person, your impression regarding the clipped mustache is quite correct—"

"Oh, who was he, Mr. Vance?" The woman leaned forward eagerly with a show of nervous animation. "Do you think you know who is responsible for this terrible thing?"

Vance shook his head and smiled sadly.

"No," he said, "I'm deuced sorry I cannot offer any hope in that particular quarter. If this man who called on your husband is the one I think it is, he is merely a good-natured book-maker who is at times aroused to futile anger when his clients fail to pay their debts. I'm quite sure, don't y' know, that if he should pop in here again at the present moment, you would find him inclined to exert his efforts in your behalf. I fear that we must dismiss him as a possibility. . . . But, by the by, Mrs. Kenting," Vance continued quickly, "can you tell me anything definite about the second man that called on your husband?"

The woman shook her head vaguely.

"Almost nothing, Mr. Vance," she returned. "I'm very sorry, but I caught only a glimpse of him. However, I recall that he was much shorter than the first man, and very dark. And my impression is that he was very well dressed. I remember thinking at the time that he seemed far less dangerous than his companion. But I do know that, in the fleeting glimpses I had of both the men, they struck me as being undesirable and untrustworthy characters. And I admit I worried about them on Kaspar's account. . . . Oh, I do wish I could tell you more, but I can't."

Vance thanked her with a slight bow.

"I can understand just how you felt, and how you feel now," he said in a kindly tone. "But I hardly think that either of these two objectionable visitors are in any way connected with your husband's disappearance. If they had really contemplated anything, I seriously doubt that they would have come here to their proposed victim's home and run the risk of being identified later. The second man—whom you describe as short, dark, and dapper—was probably a gambling-house keeper who had an account against your husband for overenthusiastic wagering. I can easily understand how he might be acquainted with the book-making gentleman who makes his livelihood through the cupidity of persons who persist in the belief that past-performance figures are an indication of how any horse will run at a given time."

As Vance spoke he rose from his chair and turned to Fleel, who had been listening intently to Vance's brief interchange with Mrs. Kenting.

"Before we go, sir," Vance said, "we wish to speak with you for a moment in the den. There are one or two points with which I feel you may be able to help us. . . . Do you mind?"

The lawyer rose with alacrity.

"I'll be very glad to do whatever I can to be of assistance," he said. "But I'm of the opinion I can tell you nothing more than you already know."

## 7. THE BLACK OPALS

(Wednesday, July 20; 1:15 p.m.)

In the den Fleel seated himself with an easy, confident air and waited for Vance or Markham to speak. His manner was businesslike and competent, despite a certain lack of energy. I had a feeling he could, if he wished, supply us with more accurate and reasoned information than any of the members of the family. But Vance did not question him to any great extent. He seemed uninterested in any phase of the case on which the lawyer might have had information or suggestions to offer.

"Mr. Kenting tells us," Vance began, "that his brother demanded a large sum of money recently, to meet his debts, and that, when the demand was refused, Kaspar went to you as one of the executors of the estate."

"That is quite correct," Fleel responded, taking the cigar from his mouth and smoothing the wrapper with a moistened forefinger. "I, too, refused the demand; for, to begin with, I did not entirely believe the story Mr. Kaspar Kenting told me. He has cried 'wolf' so often that I have become skeptical, and did nothing about it. Moreover, Mr. Kenyon Kenting and I had consented to give him a large sum of money—ten thousand dollars, to be exact—only a few weeks ago. There were similar difficulties in which he said he had become involved at the time. We did it then, of course, for his wife's sake more than for his own—as, indeed, we had often done it before; but, unfortunately, no benefit ever accrued to her from these advances on her husband's patrimony."

"Did Mr. Kaspar see you personally?" asked Vance.

"No, he did not. He called me on the telephone," Fleel replied. "Frankly, I didn't ask him for any details other than those he volunteered, and I was rather brusque with him. . . . I might say that Kaspar has been a trying problem to the executors of the estate."

"Despite which," continued Vance, "I imagine his brother, as well as you yourself, will do everything possible to get him back, even to meeting the terms of the ransom note. Am I right?"

"I see nothing else to be done," the lawyer said without enthusiasm. "Unless, of course, the situation can be satisfactorily adjusted without payment of the ransom money. Of course we don't know for certain whether or not this is a *bona fide* kidnapping. Kidnapping is a damnable crime. . . ."

"Quite," agreed Vance with a sigh. "It places every one in a most irksome predicament. But, of course, there is nothing to be done until we have some further word from the supposed abductors. . . ."

Vance looked up and added quickly:

"By the by, Mrs. Kenting has informed us that Kaspar spoke to some one on the telephone when he came home in the early hours of this morning, and that he became angry. I wonder if it could have been you he called again?"

"Yes, damn it!" the lawyer returned with stern bitterness. "It was I. He woke me up some time after three, and became very vituperative when I refused to alter my previous decision. In fact, he said that both Kenyon and I would regret our penuriousness in refusing to help him, as he was certain it would result in some mischief, but did not say just what guise it might take. As a matter of fact, he sounded very much upset, and flew off the handle. But, I frankly admit, I didn't take him too seriously, for I had been through the same sort of thing with him before. . . . It seems now," the lawyer added a little uncomfortably, "that he was telling the truth for once—that it wasn't just an idle conjecture; and I am wondering if Kenyon and I shouldn't have investigated the situation before taking a definite stand."

"No, no; I think not," murmured Vance. "I doubt that it would have done any good. I have an idea the situation was not a new development—although there are, to be sure, few enough facts in hand at present on which to base an opinion. I don't like the outlook at all. It has too many conflictin' elements. . . . By the by, Mr. Fleel,"—Vance looked frankly at the man—"just how large a sum did Kaspar Kenting ask you for?"

"Too large an amount even to have been considered," returned the lawyer. "He asked for thirty thousand dollars."

"Thirty thousand," Vance repeated. "That's very interestin'." He rose lazily to his feet and straightened his clothes. "That will be all, I think, for the moment, Mr. Fleel," he said. "And many thanks for the trouble you've taken. There's little left to be done at the moment, aside from the usual routine. We will, of course, guard the matter as best we can. And we will get in touch with you if there is any new development."

Fleel stood up and bowed stiffly.

"You can always reach me through my office during the day, or through my home in the evening." He took an engraved card from his pocket and handed it to Vance. "There are my phone numbers, sir. . . . I think I shall remain a while with Mrs. Kenting and Kenyon." And he went from the den.

Markham, looking serious and puzzled, held Vance back.

"What do you make of that discrepancy in the amount, Vance?" he asked in a gruff, lowered tone.

"My dear Markham!" Vance shook his head solemnly. "There are many things we cannot make anything of at the present moment. One never knows—does one?—at this stage of the game. Perhaps young Kaspar, having failed with his brother, reduced the ante, as it were, in approaching Fleel, thinking he might get better results at the lower figure. Curious though; the amount demanded in the ransom note corresponds to what he told Kenyon he needed. On the other hand—I wonder. . . . However, let's commune with the butler before we toddle on."

Vance went to the door and opened it. Just outside stood Weem, bending slightly forward, as if he had been eavesdropping. Instead of showing any signs of embarrassment, the man looked up truculently and turned away.

"See here, Weem," Vance halted him. "Step inside a moment," he said with an amused smile. "You can hear better; and, anyway, there are one or two questions we'd like to put to you."

The man turned back without a word and entered the den with an air of sulkiness. He looked past us all with his watery eyes and waited.

"Weem, how long have you been the Kenting butler?" asked Vance.

"Going on three years," was the surly response.

"Three years," repeated Vance thoughtfully. "Good. . . . Have you any ideas, Weem, as to what happened here last night?" Vance reached in his pocket for his cigarette case.

"No, sir; none whatever," the butler returned, without looking at any of us. "But nothing would surprise me in this house. There are too many people who'd like to get rid of Mr. Kaspar."

"Are you, by any chance, one of them?" asked Vance lightly, watching the other with faint amusement.

"I'd just as soon never see him again." The answer came readily, in a disgruntled, morose tone.

"And who else do you think feels the same way about Mr. Kaspar Kenting?" Vance went on.

"Mrs. Falloway and young Mr. Falloway have no love for him, sir." There was no change in the man's tone. "And even Mrs. Kenting herself has had more than enough of him, I think. She and Mr. Kenyon are very good friends—and there was never any great love between the two brothers. . . . Mr. Kaspar is a very difficult man to get along with—he is very unreasonable. Other people have some rights, sir; but he doesn't think so. He's the kind of man that strikes his wife when he has too much to drink—"

"I think that will be all," Vance broke in sharply. "You're an unspeakable gossip, Weem." He turned away with a look of keen distaste, and the butler shuffled from the room without any sign of displeasure or offense.

"Come, Markham," said Vance. "Let's get out into the air. I don't like it in this house—I don't at all like it."

"But it strikes me—" began Markham.

"Oh, don't let your conscience bother you," interrupted Vance. "The only course we can possibly take is to wait for the next step on the part of our dire plotters." Although Vance spoke in a bantering tone, it was obvious from the deliberate way he lighted a cigarette that he was deeply troubled. "Something will happen soon, Markham. The next move will be expertly engineered, I'll wager. The case is by no means ended with this concocted kidnappin'. Too many loose ends—oh, far too many." He moved across the room. "Patience, my dear chap." He threw the admonition lightly over his shoulder to Markham. "We're supposed to be bustlin' with various anticipated activities. Some one is hopin' we'll take just the route indicated for us and thus be led entirely off the track. But, I say, let's not be gullible. Patience is our watchword. Patience and placidity. Nonchalance. Let the other johnnies make the next move. Live patiently and learn. Imitate the mountain—Mohammed is trudgin' your way."

Markham stood still in the centre of the room, looking down at the worn early-American art square. He seemed to be pondering something that bothered him.

"See here, Vance," he said after a brief silence, lifting his head and looking squarely at the other. "You speak of 'plotters' and 'johnnies'—both plural. You really think, then, that this damnable situation is the doing of more than one person?"

"Oh, yes—undoubtedly," Vance returned readily. "Far too many diverse activities for just one. A certain co-ordination was needed—and one person cannot be in two different places at the same time, don't y' know. Oh, undoubtedly more than one person. One lured the gentleman away from the house; another—possibly two—took care of the chappie at the place appointed by the first; and I rather think it more than likely there was at least another who arranged the elaborate setting in Kaspar's room—but this is not necess'rily correct, as any one of the three might have returned for the stage setting and been the person that Mrs. Kenting heard in the bedroom."

"I see what you mean." Markham nodded laboriously. "You're thinking of the two men whom McLaughlin saw in the car in the street here this morning."

"Oh, yes. Quite." Vance's response was spoken casually. "They fit into the picture nicely. But neither of them was a small man, and I doubt if either of them was the ladder-climber in the smallish Chinese sandals. Considerable evidence against that conclusion. That is why I say I'm inclined to think that there may have been still another helper who attended to the details of the boudoir setting—makin' four in all."

"But, good heavens!" argued Markham; "if there were several persons involved in the affair, it may be just another gang kidnapping, after all."

"It's always possible, of course, despite the contr'y indications," Vance returned. "However, Markham, although I have said that there were undoubtedly several persons taking part in the execution of the plot, I am thoroughly convinced there is only a single mind at work on the case—the main organizing culprit, so to speak—some one who merely secured the necess'ry help—what the newspapers amusingly designate as a master-mind. And the person who planned and manipulated this whole distressin' affair is some one who is quite intimately *au courant* with the conditions in the Kenting house here. The various episodes have dovetailed together far too neatly to have been managed by an outsider. And really, y' know, I hardly think that the Purple House harbors, or is in any way related to, a professional kidnapper."

Markham shook his head skeptically.

"Granting," he said, "for the sake of hypothesis, that you are correct so far, what could have been the motive for such a dastardly act by any one who was close to Kaspar?"

"Money—unquestionably money," Vance ventured. "The exact amount named in the pretty little kindergarten paste-and-paper note attached to the window-sill. . . . Oh, yes; that was a very significant item. Some one wishes the money immediately. It is urgently needed. I rather think a genuine kidnapper—and especially a gang of kidnappers operating for themselves—would not have been so hasty in stating the exact sum, but would have let that little detail wait until a satisfact'ry contact was established and negotiations were definitely under way. And of course, if it had really been Kaspar who had abducted himself for the sake of the gain, the note could be easily understood; but once we eliminate Kaspar as the author of this crime, then we are confronted with the necessity of evolving an entirely new interpretation of the facts. The crime then becomes one of desperation and immediacy, with the money as an imperative desideratum."

"I am not so sure you are right this time, Vance," said Markham seriously.

Vance sighed.

"Neither am I, Markham old dear." He went to the door and opened it. "Let's move along." And he walked up the hall.

Vance stopped at the drawing-room door, bade the occupants a brief farewell; and a minute later we were descending the outside

steps of the house into the noonday sunshine of the street.

We entered the District Attorney's car and drove toward Central Park. When we had almost reached the corner of Central Park West, Vance leaned forward suddenly and, tapping the chauffeur on the shoulder, requested him to stop at the entrance to the Nottingham Hotel which we were just passing.

"Really, y' know, Markham," he said as he stepped out of the car, "I think it might be just as well if we paid a little visit to the as-yet-unknown Mr. Quaggy. Queer name—what? He was the last person known to have been with young Kaspar. He's a gentleman of means and a gentleman of leisure, as well as a gentleman of nocturnal habits. He may be at home, don't y' know. . . . But I think we'd better go directly to his apartment without apprising him of the visit by being announced." He turned to Heath. "I am sure you can manage that, Sergeant,—unless you forgot to bring your pretty gilt badge with you this morning."

Heath snorted.

"Sure, we'll go right to his rooms, if that's what you want, Mr. Vance. Don't you worry about that. This ain't the first time I've had to handle these babies in a hotel."

Heath was as good as his word. We had no difficulty in obtaining the number of Quaggy's apartment and being taken up in the elevator without an announcement.

In answer to our ringing, the door was opened by a generously proportioned colored woman, in a Hoover apron and an old stocking tied round her head.

"We want to see Mr. Quaggy." Heath's manner was as intimidating as it was curt.

The negress looked frightened.

"I don't think Mr. Quaggy—" she began in a tremulous voice.

"Never mind what you think, Aunt Jemima." Heath cut her short. "Is your boss here, or isn't he?" He flashed his badge. "We're from the police."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir. He's here." The woman was completely cowed by this time. "He's in the sittin'-room, over yonder."

The Sergeant brushed past her to the archway at the end of the foyer, toward which she waved her arm. Markham, Vance and I followed him.

The room into which we stepped was comfortably and expensively furnished, differing little from the conventional exclusive hotel-apartment living-room. There was a mahogany cellarette near a built-in modern fireplace, comfortable overstuffed chairs covered with brocaded satin that was almost colorless, a baby grand piano in one corner, two parchment-shaded table-lamps with green pottery bases, and a small glass-doored Tudor bookcase filled with colorful assorted volumes. At the front end of the room were two windows facing on the street, hung with heavy velour drapes and topped with scrolled-metal cornices.

As we entered, a haggard, dissipated-looking man of about forty rose from a low lounging chair in one corner of the room. He seemed both surprised and resentful at our intrusion. He was an attractive man, with finely chiseled features, but not a man whom one could call handsome. He was unmistakably the gambler type—that is, the type one sees habitually at gaming houses and the race-track. There was weariness and pallor in his face that morning, and his eyelids were œdematous and drawn down at the corners, like those of a man suffering with Bright's disease. He was still in evening clothes, and his linen was the worse for wear. He wore patent leather pumps which showed distinct traces of dried mud. Before he could speak Vance addressed him courteously.

"Forgive our unceremonious entry. You're Mr. Porter Quaggy, I believe?" The man's eyes became cold.

"What if I am?" he demanded. "I don't understand why you—"

"You will in a moment, sir," Vance broke in ingratiatingly. And he introduced himself, as well as Markham and Heath and me. "We have just come from the Kentings' down the street," he went on. "A calamity took place there early this morning, and we understand from Mrs. Kaspar Kenting that Mr. Kenting was with you last night."

Quaggy's eyes narrowed to mere slits. "Has anything happened to Kaspar?" he asked. He turned to the cellarette and poured himself a generous drink of whiskey. He gulped it down and repeated his question.

"We'll get to that later," Vance replied. "Tell me, what time did you and Mr. Kenting get home last night?"

"Who said I was with him when he came home?" The man was obviously on his guard.

"Mrs. Kenting informed us that you and her husband went together to the opening of a casino in Jersey last night, and that Mr. Kenting returned somewhere around three o'clock in the morning. Is that correct?"

The man hesitated.

"Even if it is true, what of it?" he asked after a moment.

"Nothing—really nothing of any importance," murmured Vance. "Just lookin' for information. I note you're still bedecked in your evenin' togs. And your pumps are a bit muddy. It hasn't rained since yesterday, don't y' know. Offhand, I'd say you'd been sittin' up all night."

"Isn't that my privilege?" grumbled the other.

"I think you'd better do some straight talking, Mr. Quaggy," put in Markham angrily. "We're investigating a crime, and we haven't time to waste. You'll save yourself a lot of trouble, too. Unless, of course, you're afraid of implicating yourself. In that event, I'll allow you time to communicate with your attorney."

"Attorney hell!" snapped Quaggy. "I don't need any lawyers. I've nothing to be afraid of, and I'll speak for myself. . . . Yes, I went with Kaspar last night to the new casino in Paterson, and we got back, as Mrs. Kenting says, around three o'clock—"

"Did you go to the Kenting house with Mr. Kenting?" asked Vance.

"No; our cab came down Central Park West, and I got out here. I wish now I had gone with him. He asked me to—said he was worried as the devil about something, and wanted to put me up for the night. I thought he was stewed, and didn't pay any attention to him. But after he had gone on, I got to thinking about what he'd said—he's always getting into trouble of one kind or another—and I walked down there about an hour later. But everything seemed all right. There was a light in Kaspar's room, and I merely figured he hadn't gone to bed yet. So I decided not to disturb him."

Vance nodded understandingly.

"Did you, by any chance, step into the side yard?"

"Just inside the gate," the other admitted.

"Was the side window of his room open? And was the blind up?"

"The window might have been open or shut, but the blind was down. I'm sure of that because the light was coming from around the edges."

"Did you see a ladder anywhere in the court?"

"A ladder? No, there was no ladder. What would a ladder be doing there?"

"Did you remain there long, Mr. Quaggy?"

"No. I came back here and had a drink."

"But you didn't go to bed, I notice."

"It's every man's privilege to sit up if he wants to, isn't it?" Quaggy asked coldly. "The truth is, I began to worry about Kaspar. He was in a hell of a mood last night—all steamed up. I never saw him just that way before. To tell you the truth, I half expected something to happen to him. That's why I went down to the house."

"Was it only Mr. Kaspar Kenting that you were thinking about?" Vance inquired with a shrewd, fixed look. "I understand you're a close friend of the family and are very highly regarded by Mrs. Kenting."

"Glad to know it," muttered the man, meeting Vance's gaze squarely. "Madelaine is a very fine woman, and I should hate to see anything happen to her."

"Thanks awfully for the information," murmured Vance. "I think I see your point of view perfectly. Well, your premonitions were quite accurate. Something did happen to the young gentleman, and Mrs. Kenting is frightfully distressed."

"Is he all right?" asked Quaggy quickly.

"We're not sure yet. The fact is, Mr. Quaggy, your companion of yestereve has disappeared—superficial indications pointin' to abduction."

"The hell you say!" The man showed remarkable control and spoke without change of expression.

"Oh, yes—quite," Vance said disinterestedly.

Quaggy went to the cellarette again and poured himself another drink of whiskey. He offered the bottle to us all in general, and getting no response from us, replaced it on the stand.

"When did this happen?" he asked between swallows of the whiskey.

"Oh, early this morning some time," Vance informed him. "That's why we're here. Thought maybe you could give us an idea or two."

Quaggy finished the remainder of his glass of whiskey.

"Sorry, I can't help you," he said as he put down the glass. "I've told you everything I know."

"That's frightfully good of you," said Vance indifferently. "We may want to talk to you later, however."

"That's all right with me." The man turned, without looking up from the liquor stand. "Ask me whatever you want whenever you damn please. But it won't get you anywhere, for I've already told you all I know."

"Perhaps you'll recall an additional item or two when you are rested."

"If you mean when I'm sober, why don't you say so?" Quaggy asked with annoyance.

"No, no, Mr. Quaggy. Oh, no. I think you're far too shrewd and cautious a man to permit yourself the questionable luxury of inebriety. Clear head always essential, don't y' know. Helps no end in figuring percentages quickly."

Vance was at the archway now, and I was just behind him. Markham and Heath had already preceded us. Vance paused for a moment and looked down at a small conventional desk which stood near the entrance. Quickly he adjusted his monocle and scrutinized the desk. On it lay a crumpled piece of tissue paper in the centre of which reposed two perfectly matched dark stones, with a remarkable play of color in them—a pair of black opals!

When we were back in the car and headed downtown, Markham, after a minute or two spent in getting his cigar going, said:

"Too many factors seem to counteract your original theory, Vance. If this affair was plotted so carefully to be carried out at a certain time, how do you account for the fact that Kaspar seemed to have a definite premonition of something dire and unforeseen happening to him?"

"Premonition?" Vance smiled slightly. "I'm afraid you're waxing esoteric, old dear. After Hannix's threat and after, perhaps, a bit of pressure thrown in by the other gentleman to whom he owed money, Kaspar was naturally in a sensitive and worried state of mind. He took their blustering, but harmless, talk too seriously. Suffered from fright and craved the comfort of company. Probably why he went to the casino—trying to put his despondency out of mind. With the threats of the two creditors uppermost in his consciousness, he used them as an argument with both his brother and Fleel. And his invitin' Quaggy home with him was merely part of this perturbation. Simple. Very simple."

"You're still stubborn enough to believe it had nothing to do with the facts of the case?" asked Markham irritably.

"Oh, yes, yes—quite," Vance replied cheerfully. "I can't see that his psychic warnings had anything whatsoever to do with what actually befell him later. . . . By the by, Markham,"—Vance changed the subject—"there were two rather amazin' black opals on the desk in Quaggy's apartment. Noticed them as I was going out."

"What's that!" Markham turned in surprise. Then a look of understanding came into his eyes. "You think they came from the Kenting collection?"

"It's possible." Vance nodded slowly. "The collection was quite deficient in black opals when I gazed upon it. The few remainin' specimens were quite inferior. No self-respectin' connoisseur would have admitted them to his collection unless he already had more valuable ones to offset them. Those that Quaggy had were undoubtedly a pair of the finest specimens from New South Wales."

"That puts a different complexion on things," said Markham grudgingly. "How do you think Quaggy got hold of them?"

Vance shrugged.

"Ah! Who knows? Pertinent question. We might ask the gentleman sometime. . . ." We continued downtown in silence.

## 8. ULTIMATUM

(Thursday, July 21; 10 a.m.)

The next morning, shortly before ten o'clock, Markham telephoned Vance at his apartment, and I answered.

"Tell Vance," came the District Attorney's peremptory voice, "I think he'd better come down to my office at once. Fleel is here, and I'll keep him engaged till Vance arrives."

I repeated the message to Vance while I still held the receiver to my ear, and he nodded his head in agreement.

A few minutes later, as we were about to leave the house, he became unduly serious.

"Van, it may have happened already," he murmured, "though I really didn't expect it so soon. Thought we'd have at least a day or two before the next move was made. However, we shall soon know."

We arrived at Markham's office a half-hour later. Vance did not go to the secretary in the reception-room of the District Attorney's suite in the old Criminal Courts Building, but through the private side door which led from the corridor into Markham's spacious sanctum.

Markham was seated at his desk, looking decidedly troubled; and in a large upholstered chair before him sat Fleel.

After casual greetings Markham announced: "The instructions promised in the ransom note have been received. A note came in Mr. Fleel's mail this morning, and he brought it directly to me. I hardly know what to make of it, or how to advise him. But you seemed to have ideas about the case which you would not divulge. And I think, therefore, you ought to see this note immediately, as it is obvious something must be done about it at once." He picked up the small sheet of paper before him and held it out to Vance. It was a piece of ruled note-paper, folded twice. The quality was of a very cheap, coarse nature, such as comes in thick tablets which can be bought for a trifle at any stationer's. The writing on it was in pencil, in an obviously disguised handwriting. Half of the letters were printed, and whether it was the composition of an illiterate person, or purposely designed to give the impression of ignorance on the writer's part, I could not tell as I looked at it over Vance's shoulder.

"I say, let's see the envelope," Vance requested. "That's rather important, don't y' know."

Markham shot him a shrewd look and handed him a stamped envelope, of no better quality than the paper, which had been slit neatly across the top. The postmark showed that the note had passed through the post-office the previous afternoon at five o'clock from the Westchester Station.

"And where might the Westchester Station be?" asked Vance, sinking lazily into a chair and taking out a cigarette.

"I had it looked up as soon as Mr. Fleel showed me the note," responded Markham. "It's in the upper Bronx."

"Interestin'," murmured Vance. "'East Side, West Side, All Around the Town,' so to speak. . . . And what are the bound'ries of the district it serves?"

Markham glanced down at the yellow pad on his desk.

"It takes in a section of nine or ten square miles on the upper east side of the Bronx, between the Hutchinson and Bronx Rivers and a zigzag line on the west boundary.<sup>[17]</sup> A lot of it is pretty desolate territory, and can probably be eliminated without consideration. As a matter of fact, it's the toughest district in New York in which to trace any one by a postmark."

Vance nodded casually and, opening the note, adjusted his monocle and read the pencil-scrawled communication carefully. It ran:

Sir: I no you and famly have money and unless 50 thousand \$ is placed in hole of oke tree 200 foot west of Southeast corner of old resivore in central park thursday at leven oclock at nite we will kill Casper Kenton. This is finel. If you tell police deel is off and we will no it. We are watching every move you make.

The ominous message was signed with interlocking squares made with brush strokes, like those we had already seen on the ransom note found pinned to the window-sill of the Kenting house.

"No more original than the first communication," commented Vance dryly. "And it strikes me, offhand, that the person who worded this threatening epistle is not as unschooled as he would have us believe. . . ."

He looked up at the lawyer, who was watching him intently.

"Just what are your ideas on the situation, Mr. Fleel?" he asked.

"Personally," the man said, "I am willing to leave the whole matter to Mr. Markham here, and his advisors. I—I don't know exactly what to say—I'd rather not offer any suggestions. The ransom demands can't possibly be met out of the estate, as what funds were entrusted to me are largely in long-term bonds. However, I feel sure that Mr. Kenyon Kenting will be able to get the necessary amount together and take care of the situation—if that is his wish. The decision, naturally, must be left entirely up to him."

"Does he know of this note?" asked Vance.

Fleel shook his head in negation.

"Not yet," he said, "unless he, too, received a copy. I brought this one immediately to Mr. Markham. But my opinion is that Kenyon should know about it, and it was my intention to go to the Kenting house from here and inform Kenyon of this new development. He is not at his office this morning, and I imagine he is spending the day with Mrs. Kenting. I'll do nothing, however, without the consent of Mr. Markham." He looked toward the District Attorney as if he expected an answer to his remark.

Markham had risen, and now moved toward one of the windows which looked out into Franklin Street and over the grey walls of the Tombs. His hands were clasped behind him, and an unlighted cigar hung listlessly from his lips. It was Markham's characteristic attitude when he was making an important decision. After a while he turned, came back to the desk, and reseated himself.

"Mr. Fleel," he said slowly, "I think you should go to Kenyon Kenting at once, and tell him the exact circumstances." There was a hesitant note in his words, as if he had reached a decision but was uncertain as to the feasibility of its logical application.



"I'm glad you feel that way, Mr. Markham," the lawyer said, "for I certainly believe that he is entitled to know. After all, if a decision is to be made regarding the money, he must be the one to make it." He rose as he spoke, taking his hat from the floor beside him. With ponderous steps he moved toward the door.

"I quite agree with you both," murmured Vance, who was drawing vigorously on his cigarette and looking straight before him into space. "Only, I would ask you, Mr. Fleel, to remain at the Kenting house until Mr. Markham and I arrive there. We will be joining you very soon."

"I'll wait," mumbled Fleel as he passed through the swinging leather door out to the reception-room.

Vance settled back in his chair, stretched out his long legs, and gazed dreamily through the window. Markham watched him expectantly for some time without speaking. At last it seemed that he could bear the silence no longer, and he asked anxiously:

"Well, Vance, what do you think?"

"So many things," Vance told him, "that I couldn't begin to enumerate them. All probably frivolous and worthless."

"Well, to be more specific," Markham went on, endeavoring to control his rising anger, "what do you think of that note you have there?"

"Quite authentic—oh, quite," Vance returned without hesitation. "As I said, the money is passionately desired. Hasty business is afoot. A bit too precipitate for my liking, however. But there's no overlooking the earnestness of the request. I've a feelin' something must be done without loss of time."

"The instructions seem somewhat vague."

"No. Oh, no, Markham. On the contr'y. Quite explicit. I know the tree well. Romantic lovers leave *billets-doux* there. No difficulties in that quarter. Quiet spot. All approaches visible. As good a crossroads as any for the transaction of dirty work. However, it could be adequately covered by the police. I wonder. . . ."

Markham was silent for a long time, smoking intently, his brow deeply corrugated.

"This situation upsets me," he rumbled at length. "The newspapers were full of it this morning, as you may have noticed. The police are being condemned for refusing information to the federal boys. Maybe it would have been best if I had washed my hands of it all in the first place. I don't like it—it's poison. And there's nothing to go on. I was trusting, as usual, to your impressions."

"Let us not repine, Markham old dear," Vance encouraged him. "It was only yesterday the bally thing happened."

"But I must get some action," Markham asserted, striking his clenched fist on the desk. "This new note changes the whole complexion of things."

"Tut, tut." Vance's admonition was almost frivolous. "Really, y' know, it changes nothing. *It was precisely what I was waitin' for.*"

"Well," snapped Markham, "now that you have it, what do you intend to do?"

Vance looked at the District Attorney in mock surprise.

"Why, I intend to go to the Purple House," he said calmly. "I'm not psychic, but something tells me we shall find a hand pointin' to our future activities when we arrive there."

"Well, if that's your idea," demanded Markham, "why didn't you go with Fleel?"

"Merely wished to give him sufficient time to break the news to the others and to discuss the matter with brother Kenyon." Vance expelled a series of smoke rings toward the chandelier. "Nothing like letting every one know the details of the case. We'll get forrader that way."

Markham half closed his eyes and regarded Vance appraisingly.

"You think, perhaps," he asked, "that Kenyon Kenting is going to try to raise the money and meet the demands of that outrageous note?"

"It's quite possible, don't y' know. And I rather think he'll want the police to give him a free hand. Anyway, it's time we were toddlin' out and ascertainin'." Vance struggled to his feet and adjusted his Bangkok hat carefully. "Could you bear to come along, Markham?"

Markham pressed a buzzer under the ledge of his desk and gave various instructions to the secretary who answered his call.

"This thing is too important," he said as he turned back to Vance. "I'm joining you." He glanced at his watch. "My car is downstairs."

And we went out through the private office and judges' chambers and descended in the special elevator.

## 9. DECISIONS ARE REACHED

(Thursday, July 21; 11:15 a.m.)

At the Kenting residence we found Kenyon Kenting, Fleel, young Falloway, and Porter Quaggy assembled in the drawing-room. They all seemed solemn and tense, and greeted us with grave restraint that suited the occasion.

"Did you bring the note with you, gentlemen?" Kenting asked immediately, with frightened eagerness. "Fleel told me just what's in it, but I'd like to see the message itself."

Vance nodded and took the note from his pocket, placing it on the small desk near him.

"It's the usual thing," he said. "I doubt if you'll find any more in it than Mr. Fleel has reported to you."

Kenting, without a word, bustled across the room, took the folded piece of paper from its envelope, and read it carefully as he smoothed it out on the green blotting pad.

"What do you think should be done about it?" Markham asked him. "Personally, I'm not inclined to have you meet that demand just yet."

Kenting shook his head in perturbed silence. At last he said:

"I'd always feel guilty and selfish if I did anything else. If I didn't comply with this request and anything should really happen to Kaspar—"

He left the sentence unfinished as he turned and rested against the edge of the desk, looking dolefully down at the floor.

"But I've no idea exactly how I'm going to raise that much money—and at such short notice. It'll pretty well break me, even if I can manage to get it together."

"I can help contribute to the fund," offered Quaggy, in a hard tone, looking up from his chair in the shadows of the room.

"And I'd like to do something, too," put in Fleel, "but, as you know, my personal funds are pretty well depleted at this time. As a trustee of the Kenting estate I couldn't use that money for such a purpose without a court order. And I couldn't get one in such a limited time."

Fraim Falloway stood back against the wall, listening intently. A half-smoked cigarette drooped limply between his thick, colorless lips.

"Why don't you let it go?" he suggested, with malicious querulousness. "Kaspar's not worth that much money to any one, if you ask me. And how do you know you're going to save his life, anyway?"

"Shut up, Fraim!" snapped Kenting. "Your opinion hasn't been asked for."

Young Falloway shrugged indifferently and said nothing. The ashes from his cigarette fell over his shiny black suit, but he did not take the trouble to brush them off.

"I say, Mr. Fleel," put in Vance, "just what would be the financial standing of Mrs. Kenting in the hypothetical case that Kaspar Kenting should die? Would she benefit by his demise—that is, to whom would Kaspar Kenting's share in the estate go?"

"To his wife," answered Fleel. "It was so stipulated in Karl Kenting's will, although he did not know Mrs. Kenting at the time, as Kaspar was not yet married. But the will clearly states that his share of the inheritance should go to his wife if he were married and she survived him."

"Sure," said Fraim Falloway sulkily, "my sister gets everything, and there are no strings attached to it. Kaspar has never done the right thing by Sis, anyway, and it's about time she was coming in for something. That's why I say it's rank nonsense to give up all this money to get Kaspar back. Nobody here thinks he's worth fifty cents, if they'll be frank."

"A sweet and lovable point of view," murmured Vance. "I suppose your sister is very lenient with you whenever possible?"

It was Kenyon Kenting who answered.

"That's it exactly, Mr. Vance. She's the kind that would sacrifice everything for her brother and her mother. That's natural, perhaps. But, after all, Kaspar is my brother, and I think something ought to be done about it, even on the mere chance it may save him, if it *does* take practically every cent I've got in the world. But I'm willing to go through with it, if you gentlemen and the police will agree to keep entirely out of it, until I have found out what I can do without any official assistance which might frighten off the kidnappers."

He looked at Markham apologetically and then added:

"You see, I discussed the point with Mr. Fleel just before you gentlemen arrived. We are agreed that the police should allow me a clear field in handling this matter in exact accordance with the instructions in the note; for if it is true, don't you see, that the kidnappers are watching my moves, and if they so much as suspect that the police are waiting for them, they may not act at all, and Kaspar would still remain in jeopardy."

Markham nodded thoughtfully.

"I can understand your attitude in the matter, Mr. Kenting," he said reassuringly. "And therefore,"—he made a suave gesture—"the decision on that point must rest solely with you. The police will turn their backs, as it were, for the time being, if that is what you wish."

Fleel nodded his approval of Markham's words.

"If Kenyon is financially able to go through with it," he said, "I feel that that course is the wisest one to follow. Even if it means shutting our eyes momentarily to the legal issues of the situation, he may have a better chance of having his brother safely returned. And that, after all, I am sure you will all agree, is the prime consideration in the present instance."

Vance had, to all appearances, been ignoring this brief discussion, but I knew, from the slow and deliberate movement of his hand as he smoked, that he was absorbing with interest every word spoken. At this point he rose to his feet and entered the conversation with a curious finality.

"I think," he began, "both of you gentlemen are in error, and I am definitely opposed to the withdrawal of the authorities, even

temporarily, at this time in such a vital situation. It would amount to the compounding of a felony. Moreover, the reference in the note regarding the police is, I believe, merely an attempt at intimidation. I can see no valid reason why the police should not be permitted a certain discreet activity in the matter." His voice was firm and bitter and carried a stinging rebuke to both Kenting and Fleel.

Markham remained silent when Vance had finished, for I am convinced he felt, as I did, that Vance's remarks were based on a subtle and definite motivation. They had their effect on Kenting as well, for it was obvious that he was definitely wavering. And even Fleel seemed to be considering the point anew.

"You may be right, Mr. Vance," Kenting admitted finally in a hesitant tone. "On second thought, I am inclined to follow your suggestion."

"You're all stupid," mumbled Falloway. Then he leaned forward. His eyes opened wide, his jowls sagged and he burst forth hysterically: "It's Kaspar, Kaspar, *Kaspar!* He's no good anyway, and he's the only one that gets a break around here. Nobody thinks of any one else but Kaspar. . . ." His voice was high-pitched and ended in a scream.

"Shut up, you ninny," ordered Kenting. "What are you doing down here, anyway? Go on up to your room."

Falloway sneered without replying, walked across the room, and threw himself into a large upholstered chair by the window.

"Well, what's the decision, gentlemen?" asked Markham, in a calm, quiet tone. "Are we to go ahead on the basis of your paying the ransom alone, or shall I turn the case over to the Police Department to handle as they see fit?"

Kenting stood up and took a deep breath.

"I think I'll go down to my office now," he said wearily, "and try to raise the cash." Then he added to Markham, "And I think the police had better go ahead with the case." He turned quickly to Fleel with an interrogative look.

"I'm sorry I can't advise you, Kenyon," the lawyer said in answer to Kenting's unstated question. "It's a damned difficult problem on which to offer positive advice. But if you decide to take this step, I think I should leave the details in the hands of Mr. Markham. If I can be of any help—"

"Oh, don't worry, Fleel, I'll get in touch with you." Kenting turned to the dark corner of the room. "And thank you, Quaggy, for your kindness; but I think I can handle the situation without your assistance, though we all appreciate your generous offer."

Markham was evidently becoming impatient.

"I will be at my office," he said, "until five o'clock this afternoon. I'll expect you to communicate with me before that time, Mr. Kenting."

"Oh, I will—without fail," returned Kenting, with a mirthless laugh. "I'll be there in person, if I can possibly manage it." With a listless wave of the hand, he went from the room and out the front door.

Fleel followed a few moments later, but Fraim Falloway still sat brooding sneeringly by the window.

Quaggy rose from his chair and confronted Markham.

"I think I'll remain a while," he said, "and speak to Mrs. Kenting."

"Oh, by all means," agreed Vance. "I'm sure the young woman needs cheering up." He went to the desk, refolded the note carefully, and, placing it in its envelope, slipped it into an inside pocket. Then he motioned to Markham, and we went out into the sultry summer noon.

When we were back at the District Attorney's office, Markham sent immediately for Heath. As soon as the Sergeant arrived from Centre Street, a short time later, the situation was outlined to him, and he was shown the letter which Fleel had received. He read the note hastily and looked up.

"If you ask me, I wouldn't give those babies a nickel," he commented gruffly. "But if this fellow Kenyon Kenting insists, I suppose we'll have to let him do it. Too much responsibility in tryin' to stop him."

"Exactly," assented Markham emphatically. "Do you know where this particular tree is in Central Park, Sergeant?"

"Hah!" Heath said explosively. "I've seen it so often, I'm sick of lookin' at it. But it's not a bad location, at that. It's near the traffic lanes, and you can see in all directions from there."

"Could you and the boys cover it," asked Markham, "in case Mr. Kenting does go through with this and we decide it would be best to have the spot under surveillance?"

"Leave that to me, Chief," the Sergeant returned confidently. "There's lots of ways of doing it. Searchlights from the houses along Fifth Avenue could light up the place like daytime when we're ready. And some of the boys hiding in taxicabs, or even up the tree itself, could catch the baby who takes the money and tie him up in bow-knots."

"On the other hand, Sergeant," Markham demurred, "it might be better to let the ransom money go, so we can get young Kenting back—that is, if the abductors are playing straight."

"Playing straight!" Heath repeated with contempt. "Say, Chief, did you ever know any of these palookas to be on the level? I says, let's catch the guy who comes after the money, and we'll give him the works at Headquarters and turn him inside out. There won't be nothing we won't know when the boys get through shellackin' him. Then we can save the money and get this no-good Kaspar back for 'em, and round up the sweet little darlings who done it—all at the same time."

Vance was smiling musingly during this optimistic prophecy of future events. In the pause that followed Heath's last words he spoke.

"Really, y' know, Sergeant, I think you're going to be disappointed. This case isn't as simple as you and Mr. Markham think. . . ." The Sergeant started to protest, but Vance continued. "Oh, yes. Quite. You may round up somebody, but I doubt if you will ever be able to connect your victim with the kidnapping. Somehow, don't y' know, I can't take this illiterate note too seriously. I have an idea it is designed to throw us off the track. Still, the experiment may be interestin'. Fact is, I'd be overjoyed to participate in it myself."

Heath looked at Vance humorously.

"You like to climb trees, maybe, Mr. Vance?" he asked.

"I adore it, Sergeant," Vance told him. "But I simply must change my clothes."

Heath chuckled and then became more serious.

"That's all right with me, Mr. Vance," he said. "There'll be plenty of time for that."

(I knew that the Sergeant wished Vance to take this strategic position in the tree, for despite Vance's constant good-natured spoofing

and his undisguised contempt for Heath's routine procedure, the Sergeant had a great admiration and fondness for, not to say a profound faith in, the debonair man before him.)

"That's bully, Sergeant," commented Vance. "What would you suggest as an appropriate costume?"

"Try rompers!" retorted Heath. "But make 'em a dark color." With a snort he turned to Markham. "When will we know about the final decision, Chief?"

"Kenting is going to communicate with me sometime before I leave the office today."

"Swell," said Heath heartily. "That'll give us plenty of time to make our arrangements."

It was four o'clock that afternoon when Kenyon Kenting arrived. Vance, eager to be on hand for anything new that might develop, had waited in Markham's office, and I stayed with him. Kenting had a large bundle of \$100 bills with him, and threw it down on Markham's desk with a disgruntled air of finality.

"There's the money, Mr. Markham," he said. "Fifty thousand good American dollars. It has completely impoverished me. It took everything I owned. . . . How do you suggest we go about it?"

Markham took the money and placed it in one of the drawers of his steel filing cabinet.

"I'll give the matter careful consideration," he answered. "And I'll get in touch with you later."

"I'm willing to leave everything to you," Kenting said with relief.

There was little more talk of any importance, and finally Kenting left the office with Markham's promise to communicate with him within two or three hours.

Heath, who had gone out earlier in the afternoon, came in shortly, and the matter was discussed pro and con. The plan eventually agreed on was that Heath should have his searchlights focused on the tree and ready to be flashed on at a given signal; and that three or four men of the Homicide Bureau should be on the ground and available at a moment's notice. Vance and I, fully armed, were to perch in the upper branches of the tree.

Vance remained silent during the discussion, but at length he said in his lazy drawl:

"I think your plans are admirable, Sergeant, but I really see no necessity of actually plantin' the money. Any package of the same size would answer the purpose just as well, don't y' know. And notify Flee: I think he would be the best man to place the package in the tree for us."

Heath nodded.

"That's the idea, sir. Exactly what I was thinking. . . . And now I think I'd better be running along—or toddlin', as you would say—and get busy."

## 10. THE TREE IN THE PARK

(Thursday, July 21; 9:45 p.m.)

Vance and Markham and I had dinner at the Stuyvesant Club that night. I had accompanied Vance home where he changed to a rough tweed suit. He had had little to say after we had left Markham's office at five o'clock. All the details for the night's project had been arranged.

Vance was in a peculiar mood. I felt he ought to be taking the matter more seriously, but he appeared only a little puzzled, as if the situation was not clear in his mind. He did not exhibit the slightest apprehension, however, although as we were about to leave the apartment he handed me a .45-automatic. When I put it in my outside coat pocket, where it would be handy, he shook his head whimsically and smiled.

"No call for so much precaution, Van. Put it in your trousers pocket and forget it. As a matter of fact, I'm not even sure it's loaded. I'm taking one myself, but only to humor the Sergeant. I haven't the groggiest notion what's goin' to happen, but I can assure you there will be no necessity for a display of fireworks. The doughty Sergeant's pre-arranged melodrama is bally nonsense."

I protested that kidnappers were dangerous people, and that ransom notes with orders of the kind that Fleel had brought to the District Attorney's office were not to be taken too lightly.

Vance smiled cryptically.

"Oh, I'm not takin' it lightly," he said. "But I'm quite sure that note need not be taken at its face value. And sittin' on the limb of a tree indefinitely is not what I should call a jolly evening's sport. . . . However," he added, "we may learn something enlightenin', even if we don't have the opportunity to embrace the person accountable for Kaspar's disappearance."

He slipped the gun in his pocket, buttoned the flap, and arranged his clothes more comfortably. Then he donned a soft, black Homburg hat and went to the door.

"Allons-y!"

At eight o'clock we found Markham waiting at the Stuyvesant Club. He seemed perturbed and nervous, and Vance attempted to cheer him. In the dining-room Vance had some difficulties with his order. He asked for the most exotic dishes, none of which was available, and finally compromised on *tournedos de bœuf* and *pommes de terre soufflées*. He had a long discussion with the *sommelier* regarding the wine, and he lingered over his *crêpes suzettes* after having explained elaborately to the waiter just how he wished them made. During the meal he was in a gay humor and refused to react to Markham's sombre mood. As a matter of fact, his conversation was limited almost entirely to the types and qualities of the two-year-old horses that year had produced and of their chances in the Hopeful Stakes.

We had finished our dinner and were having our coffee in the lounge, shortly before ten o'clock, when Sergeant Heath joined us and reported the arrangements he had made.

"Well, everything's been fixed, Chief," he announced proudly. "I got four powerful searchlights in the apartment house on Fifth Avenue, just opposite the tree. They'll all go on when I give the signal."

"What signal, Sergeant?" asked Markham anxiously.

"That was easy, Chief," Heath explained with satisfaction. "I had a red electric flood-light put on a traffic-light post on the north-bound road near the tree, and when I switch that on, with a traveling switch I'll have in my pocket, that will be the signal."

"What else, Sergeant?"

"Well, sir, I got three guys in taxicabs stationed along Fifth Avenue, all dressed up like chauffeurs, and they'll swing into the park at the same time the searchlights go on. I got a couple of taxicabs at every entrance on the east side of the park that'll plug up the place good and tight; and I also got a bunch of innocent-looking family cars running along the east and west roads every two or three minutes. On top of that, you can't stop people strolling in the park—there's always a bunch of lovers moving around in the evening—but this time it ain't gonna be only lovers on the path by that tree—there's gonna be some tough babies too. We'll stroll back and forth down the east lane ourselves where we can see the tree; and Mr. Vance and Mr. Van Dine will be up in the branches—which are pretty thick at this time of year, and will make good cover. . . . I don't see how the guys can get away from us, unless they're mighty slick." He chuckled and turned to Vance. "I don't think there'll be much for you two to do, sir, except lookin' on from a ringside seat."

"I'm sure we won't be annoyed," answered Vance good-naturedly. "You're so thorough, Sergeant—and so trustin'."

"What about the package?" Markham asked of Heath.

"Don't worry about that, sir. I got that all fixed too." The Sergeant's voice, though serious and earnest, exuded pride. "I had a talk with Fleel, like Mr. Vance suggested, and he's gonna put it in the tree a little while before eleven. And it's a swell package. Exactly the size and weight of that bunch of greenbacks Kenting brought to your office this afternoon."

"What about Kenting himself?"

"He's meeting us at half-past ten, and so is Fleel, in the superintendent's room at the new yellow brick apartment house on Fifth Avenue. I gave 'em both the number, and you can bet your sweet life they'll be there. . . . Don't you think Mr. Vance and Mr. Van Dine had better be gettin' themselves fixed in the tree pretty *pronto*?"

"Oh, quite, Sergeant. Bully idea. I think we'll be staggerin' along now." Vance rose and stretched himself in mock weariness. "Good luck, and cheerio."

It seemed to me that he was still treating the matter like an unnecessary farce.

Vance dismissed our taxicab at the corner of 83rd Street and Fifth Avenue, and we continued northward on foot to the pedestrians' entrance to the park. As we walked along without undue haste, a chauffeur from a near-by taxi jumped to the sidewalk with alacrity and, overtaking us, stepped leisurely in front of us across our path. I immediately recognized Snitkin in the old tan duster and chauffeur's cap. He apparently took no notice of us but must have recognized Vance, for he turned back, and when I looked over my

shoulder a moment later, he had returned to the cab and taken his place again at the wheel.

It was a warm, sultry night, and I confess I felt a certain tinge of excitement as we walked slowly down the winding flagged pathway southward. There were several couples seated in the dark benches along the pathway, and an occasional shambling pedestrian. I looked at all of them closely, trying to determine their status, and wondering if they were sinister figures who might have some connection with the kidnapping. Vance paid no attention to them. His eyebrows were lifted cynically, and his surroundings seemed not to interest him at all.

"What a silly adventure," he murmured as he took my arm and led me due west into a narrow footpath toward a clump of oak trees, silhouetted against the silvered waters of the reservoir beyond. "Still, who can prophesy? One can never tell what may happen in this fickle world. One never knows, y' know. Maybe when you get atop your favorite limb in the tree you'd better shift your automatic. And I think I'll unbutton the flap on my hip pocket."

This was the first indication Vance had given that he attached any importance to the matter.

Far across the park the gaunt structures on Central Park West loomed against the dark blue western sky, and the lights in the windows suddenly seemed unusually friendly to me.

Vance led the way across a wide stretch of lawn to a large oak tree whose size set it apart from the others. It stood in comparative darkness, at least fifty feet from the nearest dimly flickering electric light.

"Well, here we are, Van," he announced in a low voice. "Now for the fun—if you regard emulating the sparrow as fun. . . . I'll go up first. Find yourself a limb where you won't be exposed, but where you can see pretty well all around you through the leaves."

He paused a moment, and then reaching upward to one of the lower branches of the tree, he pulled himself up easily. I saw him stand up on the branch, reach over his head to the next one, and draw himself up again. In a moment he had disappeared among the black foliage.

I followed at once, although I had not the skill he displayed—in fact, I had to sit down astride the lower limb for a moment or two before I could work myself upward into the outspreading branches. It was very dark, and I had difficulty keeping a sure foothold while I gave my attention to climbing higher. At last I found a fork-shaped limb on which I could establish myself with more or less comfort, and from which I could see, through various narrow openings in the leaves, in nearly all directions. After a few moments I heard Vance's voice at my left—he was evidently on the other side of the broad trunk.

"Well, well," he drawled. "What an experience! I thought my boyhood days were over. And there's not an apple on the tree. No, not so much as a cherry. A pillow would be most comfortin'."

We had been sitting in silence in our precarious seclusion for about ten minutes when a corpulent figure, which I recognized as Fleel, came into sight on the pathway to the left. He stood irresolutely opposite the tree for several moments and looked about him. Then he strolled along the footpath, across the greensward, and approached the tree. If any one had been watching, Fleel must certainly have been observed, for he chose a moment when there was no other person visible within a considerable radius of him.

He paused beneath where I sat twelve or fourteen feet above him, and ran his hand around the trunk of the tree until he found the large irregular hole on the east side; then he took a package from under his coat. The package was about ten inches long and four inches square, and he inserted it slowly and carefully into the hole. Backing away, he ostentatiously relighted his cigar, tossed the burnt match-end aside, and walked slowly toward the west, to another pathway at least a hundred yards away.

At that moment I happened to glance toward the narrow path by which we had entered the park and, by the light from a passing car, I suddenly noticed a shabbily dressed man leaning lazily against a bench in the shadows and evidently watching Fleel as he moved away in the distance. After a few moments I saw the same man step out from the darkness, stretch his arms, and move along the pathway to the north.

"My word!" muttered Vance in the darkness, in a low, guarded tone, "the assiduous Fleel has been observed—which is probably what the Sergeant wished. If everything moves according to schedule we shouldn't have to cling here precariously for more than fifteen minutes longer. I do hope the abductor or his agent is a prompt chappie. I'm gettin' jolly well worn out."

It was, in fact, less than ten minutes later that I saw a figure moving toward us from the north. No one had passed along that little-known, illy-lighted pathway since we had taken our places in the tree. At each succeeding light I picked out an additional detail of the approaching figure: a long dark cape which seemed to trail on the ground; a curious toque-shaped, dark hat, with a turned-down visor extending far over the eyes; and a slim walking-stick.

I felt an involuntary tightening of my muscles: I was not only expectant, but half frightened. Holding tightly with my left hand to the branch on which I was sitting, I reached into my coat pocket and fingered the butt of the automatic, to make sure that it was handy.

"How positively thrillin'!" I heard Vance whisper, though his voice did not sound in the least excited. "This may be the culprit we're waitin' for. But what in the world will we do with him when we catch him? If only he wouldn't walk so deuced slowly."

As a matter of fact, the dark-caped figure was moving at a most deliberate gait, pausing frequently to look right and left, as if sizing up the situation in all directions. It was impossible to tell whether the figure was stout or thin, because of the flowing cape. It was a sinister-looking form, moving along in the semidarkness, and cast a grotesque shadow on the path as it proceeded toward us. Its gait was so dilatory and cautious that a chill ran over me as I watched—it was like a mysterious nemesis, imperceptibly but inevitably creeping up on us.

"A purely fictional character," murmured Vance. "Only Eugène Sue could have thought of it. I do hope this tree is its destination. That would be most fittin'—eh, what?"

The shapeless form was now opposite us and, halting ominously, looked in our direction. Then it peered forward up the narrow winding path and backward along the route it had come. After a few moments the black form turned and approached the cluster of oak trees. Its progress over the lawn was even slower than on the cement walk. It seemed an interminable time before the dim shape reached the tree in which Vance and I were perched, and I could feel cold chills running up and down my spine. The figure was there beneath the branches, and stood several feet from the trunk, turning and gazing in all directions.

Then, as if with a burst of vigor, the cloaked form stepped toward the natural cache on the east side of the trunk and, fumbling round a moment or two, withdrew the package that Fleel had placed there a quarter of an hour earlier.

I glanced apprehensively at the red flood-light on the lamppost Heath had described to us, and saw it flash on and off like a grotesquely winking monster. Suddenly there were wide shafts of white light from the direction of Fifth Avenue splitting the gloom; and the whole tree and its immediate environs were flooded with brilliant illumination. For a moment I was blinded by the glare, but I could hear a bustle of activity all about us. Then came Vance's startled and awestruck voice somewhere at my left.

"Oh, my word!" he exclaimed over and over again; and there was the sound of his scrambling down the tree. At length I saw him swing from the lower limb and drop gracefully to the ground, like a well balanced pole-vaulter.

Everything seemed to happen simultaneously. Markham and Fleel and Kenyon Kenting came rushing across the eastern lawn, preceded by Heath and Sullivan.<sup>[18]</sup> The two detectives were the first to reach the spot, and they grasped the black-clad figure just as it straightened up to move away from the tree. Each man had an arm tight in his clasp, and escape was impossible.

"Pretty nice work," Heath sang out with satisfaction, just as I reached the ground and took a tighter hold on my automatic. Vance brushed by me from around the tree and stood directly in front of Heath.

"My dear fellow—oh, my dear fellow!" he said with quick sternness. "Don't be too precipitate."

As he spoke, two taxicabs swung crazily along the pedestrian walk on the left with a continuous shrill blowing of horns. They came to a jerky stop with a tremendous clatter and squeaking of brakes. Then the two chauffeurs leaped out of the cabs and came rushing to the scene with sub-machine guns poised ominously before them.

Heath and Sullivan looked at Vance in angry amazement.

"Step back, Sergeant," Vance commanded. "You're far too rough. I'll handle this situation." Something in his voice overrode Heath's zeal—there was no ignoring the authority his words carried. Both Heath and Sullivan released their hold on the silent figure between them and took a backward step, bumping unseeingly into the startled group formed by Markham, Fleel and Kenting behind them.

The apprehended culprit did not move, except to reach up and push back the visor of the toque cap, revealing the face in the glare of the searchlights.

There before us, leaning weakly and shakily on a straight snakewood stick, the package of false bank notes still clutched tightly in the left hand, was the benign, yet cynical, Mrs. Andrews Falloway. Her face showed no trace of fear or of agitation. In fact, there was an air of calm satisfaction in her somewhat triumphant gaze.

In her deep, cultured voice she said, as if exchanging pleasantries with some one at an afternoon tea:

"How are you, Mr. Vance?" A slight smile played over her features.

"I am quite well, thank you, Mrs. Falloway," Vance returned suavely, with a courteous bow; "although I must admit the rough limb which I chose in the dark was a bit sharp and uncomfortable."

"Truly I am desolated, Mr. Vance." The woman was still smiling.

Just then a slender form skulked swiftly across the lawn from the near-by path and, without a word, joined the group directly behind the woman. It was Fraim Falloway. His expression was both puzzled and downcast. Vance threw him a quick glance, but took no more notice of him. His mother must have seen him out of the corner of her eye, but she showed no indication that she was aware of her son's presence.

"You're out late tonight, Mrs. Falloway," Vance was saying graciously. "Did you enjoy your evening stroll?"

"I at least found it very profitable," the woman answered with a hardening voice. As she spoke she held out the package. "Here's the bundle—containing money, I believe—which I found in the hole of the tree. You know," she added lightly, "I'm getting rather old for lovers' trysts. Don't you think so?"

Vance took the package and threw it to Heath who caught it with automatic dexterity. The Sergeant, as well as the rest of the group, was looking on in stupefied astonishment at the strange and unexpected little drama.

"I am sure you will never be too old for lovers' trysts," murmured Vance gallantly.

"You're an outrageous flatterer, Mr. Vance," smiled the woman. "Tell me, what do you really think of me after this little—what shall we call it?—escapade tonight?"

Vance looked at her, and his light cynical expression quickly changed to one of solemnity.

"I think you're a very loyal mother," he said in a low voice, his eyes fixed on the woman. Quickly his mood changed again. "But, really, y' know, it's dampish, and far too late for you to walk home." Then he looked at the gaping Heath. "Sergeant, can either of your pseudo-chauffeurs drive his taxi with a modicum of safety?"

"Sure they can," stammered Heath. "Snitkin was a private chauffeur for years before he took up police work." (I now noticed that one of the two men who had dashed across the lawn with the sub-machine guns, which they had now lowered in utter astonishment, was the same driver who had crossed in front of us as we entered the park.)

"That's bully—what?" said Vance. He moved to Mrs. Falloway's side and offered her his arm. "May I have the pleasure of taking you home?"

The woman took his arm without hesitation.

"You're very chivalrous, Mr. Vance, and I would appreciate the courtesy."

Vance started across the lawn with the woman.

"Come, Snitkin," he called peremptorily, and the detective walked swiftly to his cab and opened the door. A moment later they were headed toward the main traffic artery which leads to Central Park West.



## 11. ANOTHER EMPTY ROOM

(Thursday, July 21; 11:10 p.m.)

It was but a short time before the rest of us started for the Kenting house. As soon as Snitkin had driven off with Vance and Mrs. Falloway, Heath began to dash around excitedly, giving innumerable brusque orders to Burke,<sup>[19]</sup> who came ambling toward us across the narrow path from the east. When he had made all his arrangements, he walked to the wide lane where the second taxicab still stood. This cab, I noticed, was manned by the diminutive Guilfoyle,<sup>[20]</sup> one of the two "chauffeurs" who came to the tree with sub-machine guns, ready for action.

"I guess we'd better follow Mr. Vance," Heath growled. "There's something mighty phony about this whole business."

Markham, Fleel and young Falloway got into the back seat of the cab; Kenting and I took our places on the two small folding seats forward in the tonneau; and the Sergeant crowded into the front of the cab with Guilfoyle. When the doors were shut Guilfoyle drove off rapidly toward the main roadway on the west side of the park. Nothing was said on that short ride. Every one, it seemed, was too dumbfounded to make any comment on the unexpected outcome of the night's adventure.

Markham sat stiffly upright, looking out of the window, a dark frown on his face. Fleel leaned back more comfortably against the cushions in silence, staring straight ahead but apparently seeing nothing. Fraim Falloway crouched morosely in the corner of the seat, with his hat pulled far down over his eyes, his face a puzzled mask; and when I offered him a cigarette he seemed utterly oblivious to my gesture. Once or twice on the way to his home he uttered a cackling, breathless chuckle, as if at some thought that had flashed through his mind. Kenyon Kenting, sitting at my left, seemed weary and distressed, and bent forward with his elbows on his knees, his head bowed in his hands.

Through the plate-glass panel in front of me, I could see the Sergeant bobbing up and down with the motion of the cab, and shifting his cigar angrily from one side of his mouth to the other. Occasionally he turned to Guilfoyle, and I could see his lips move, but I could hear nothing over the hum of the motor; then he would resume his dour and bitter silence. It was obvious he was deeply disappointed and believed all his plans had gone awry for some reason he could not figure out.

After all, the whole incident that night had been unexpected and amazing. I tried to reason out what had happened, but could not fit any of the known factors together, and finally gave the matter up. The climax of the episode was the last thing I could possibly have dreamed of, and I am sure the others felt the same way about it. If no one had come to the tree for the package of supposed bank notes, it would have been easily understandable, but the fact that a crippled old woman had turned out to be the collector of the money was as astonishing as it was incredible. And, to add to every one's perplexity, there was Vance's attitude toward her—which was perhaps the most astounding thing of all.

Where had been the person who sent the note? And then I suddenly remembered the shabby man who had been leaning against the bench on the pathway, watching Fleel. Could this have been the person?—had he seen us at the tree and known that the spot was under observation?—had he lost his courage and gone off without attempting to secure the package of bills?—or was my imagination keyed up to a pitch where I was ready to suspect every stray figure? The problem was far too confusing, and I could not arrive at even a tentative solution.

When we pulled up in front of the Kenting house, which suddenly seemed black and sinister in the semi-dark, we all quickly jumped to the sidewalk and hastened in a body to the front door. Only Guilfoyle did not move; he relaxed a little in his narrow seat and remained there, his hands still at the wheel.

Weem, in a dark pongee dressing-robe, opened the door for us and made a superfluous gesture toward the drawing-room. Through the wide-open sliding doors we could see Vance and Mrs. Falloway seated. Vance, without rising, greeted us whimsically as we entered.

"Mrs. Falloway," he explained to us, "wished to remain here a short while to rest before going upstairs. Beastly ascent, y' know."

"I really feel exhausted," the woman supplemented in her low, cultured voice, looking at Markham and ignoring the rest of us. "I simply had to rest a while before climbing those long flights of stairs. I do wish old Karl Kenting hadn't put such unnecessarily high ceilings in this old house, or else that he had added a lift. It's very tiring, you know, to walk from one floor to another. And I'm so fatigued just now, after my long walk in the park." She smiled cryptically and adjusted the pillow behind her back.

At that moment there was a ring at the front door, and Heath went out quickly to answer it. As he swung the ponderous door back, I could easily see, from where I stood, the figure of Porter Quaggy outside.

"What do you want?" Heath demanded bluntly, barring the way with his thick body.

"I don't want anything," Quaggy returned in a cold, unfriendly voice; "—if that answer will benefit you in any way—except to ask how Mrs. Kenting is and if you know anything more about Kaspar. I saw you drive past my hotel just now and get off here. . . . Do you want to tell me, or don't you?"

"Let the johnnie come in, Sergeant," Vance called out in a low, commanding voice. "I'll tell him what he wants to know. And I also desire to ask him a question or two."

"All right," Heath grumbled in a modified tone to the man waiting on the threshold. "Come on in and get an earful."

Quaggy stepped inside briskly and joined us in the drawing-room. He glanced round the room with narrowed eyes and then asked of no one in particular:

"Well, what happened tonight?"

"Nothing—really nothing," Vance answered casually, without looking up. "Positively nothing. Quite a fizzle, don't y' know. Very sad. . . . But I am rather glad you decided to pay us this impromptu visit, Mr. Quaggy. Would you mind telling us where you were tonight?"

The man's eyelids drooped still lower, till they were almost entirely shut, and he looked down at Vance for several moments with a



passive and expressionless face.

"I was at home," he said finally, in an arctic, aggressive tone, "fretting about Kaspar." Then he suddenly shot forth, "Where were you?"

Vance smiled and sighed.

"Not that it should concern you in the slightest, sir," he said in his most dulcet voice, "but—since you ask—I was climbing a tree. Silly pastime—what?"

Quaggy swung about to Kenting.

"You raised the money, Kenyon, and complied with the instructions in the follow-up note?" he asked.

Kenting inclined his head: he was still solemn and perturbed.

"Yes," he said in a low voice, "but it did no good."

"A swell bunch of cheap dicks," Quaggy sneered, flashing Heath a contemptuous glance. "Didn't any one show up to collect?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Quaggy." It was Vance who answered. "Some one called for the money at the appointed hour, and actually took it."

"And I suppose he got away from the police—as usual. Is that it?" Quaggy had turned again and was contemplating Vance's bland features.

"Oh, no. No. We saw to that." Vance took a long puff on his cigarette. "The culprit is here with us in this room."

Quaggy straightened with a start.

"The fact is," went on Vance, "I escorted the guilty person home myself. It was Mrs. Falloway."

Quaggy's expression did not change—he was as unemotional and noncommittal as a veteran poker player; but I had a feeling the news had shocked him considerably. Before the man had time to say anything Vance continued lackadaisically.

"By the by, Mr. Quaggy, are you particularly interested in black opals? I noticed a jolly good pair of them on your desk yesterday."

Quaggy hesitated for several moments.

"And if I am, what then?" His lips barely moved as he spoke, and there was no change in the intonation of his voice.

"Queer, don't y' know," Vance went on, "that there are no representative black opals in Karl Kenting's collection. Blank spaces in the case where they should be. I can't imagine, really, how an expert collector of semiprecious stones should have overlooked so important an item as the rarer black opal."

"I get the implication. Anything else?" Quaggy was standing relaxed but motionless in front of Vance. Slowly he moved one foot forward, as if shifting the burden of his weight from an overtired leg. By an almost imperceptible movement his foot came to within a few inches of Vance's shoe.

"Really, y' know," Vance said with a cold smile, lifting his eyes to the man, "I shouldn't try that if I were you—unless, of course, you wish to have me break your leg and dislocate your hip. I'm quite familiar with the trick. Picked it up in Japan."

Quaggy abruptly withdrew his foot, but said nothing.

"I found a balas-ruby in Kaspar Kenting's dinner jacket yesterday morning," Vance proceeded calmly. "A balas-ruby is also missing from the collection across the hall. Interestin' mathematical item—eh?"

"What the hell's interesting about it?" retorted the other with a sneer.

Vance looked at him mildly.

"I was only wonderin'," he said, "if there might be some connection between that imitation ruby and the black opals in your apartment. . . . By the by, do you care to mention where you obtained such valuable gem specimens?"

Quaggy made a noise in his throat which sounded to me like a contemptuous laugh, but the expression on his face did not change. He did not answer, and Vance turned to the District Attorney.

"I think, in view of the gentleman's attitude, Markham, and the fact that he is the last person known to have been with the missing Kaspar, it would be advisable to hold him as a material witness."

Quaggy drew himself erect with a jerk.

"I came by those opals legitimately," he said quickly. "I bought them from Kaspar last night, as he said he needed some immediate cash for the evening."

"You knew, perhaps, that the stones were part of the Kenting collection?" asked Vance coldly.

"I didn't inquire where they came from," the man returned sullenly. "I naturally trusted him."

"Naturally," murmured Vance.

Mrs. Falloway struggled to her feet, leaning heavily on her stick.

"I've suspected for a long time," she said, "that Kaspar had been resorting to that collection of gems for gambling money. I've come down occasionally and gone over the exhibits, and it seemed to me each time there were a few more missing. . . . But I'm very tired, and I'm sufficiently rested now to return to my room. . . ."

"But, Mrs. Falloway," blurted Kenting—I had noticed that he had been staring at the woman incredulously ever since we had returned to the house, and he could not, apparently, restrain his curiosity any longer; "I—I don't understand your being in the park tonight. Why—why—?"

The woman gave him a withering look.

"Mr. Vance understands," she answered curtly. "That, I think, is quite sufficient." Her gaze shifted from Kenting and she seemed to take us all in with a gracious glance. "Good night, gentlemen. . . ."

She started unsteadily toward the door, and Vance sprang to her side.

"Permit me, madam, to accompany you. It's a long climb to your room."

The woman bowed a courteous acknowledgment and, for the second time that evening, took his arm. Fraim Falloway did not rise to assist his mother; he seemed oblivious to everything that was going on. Markham, with a significant look at the Sergeant, left his chair and took the woman's free arm. Heath moved closer to Quaggy who remained standing. Mrs. Falloway, with her two escorts, went slowly from the drawing-room, and I followed them.

It was with considerable effort that the woman mounted the stairs. She found it necessary to pause momentarily at each step, and

when we reached her room she sank into the large wicker armchair with the air of a person wholly exhausted.

Vance took her stick and placed it on the floor beside the chair. Then he said in a kindly voice:

"I should like to ask one or two questions, if you are not too weary."

The woman nodded and smiled faintly.

"A question or two won't do any harm, Mr. Vance," she said. "Please go ahead."

"Why did you make the tremendous effort," Vance began, "of walking in the park tonight?"

"Why, to get all that money, of course," the old woman answered in mock surprise. "Anyway, I didn't attempt to walk all the way: I took a cab to within a few hundred feet of the tree. Think how rich I would have been had I not been caught in the disgraceful act. And," she added with a sigh, "you have spoiled everything for me."

"I'm frightfully sorry," said Vance in a bantering manner. "But really, there wasn't a dollar in that package." He paused and looked down earnestly at the woman. "Tell me, Mrs. Falloway, how you knew your son intended to go to the tree for that ransom package."

For a moment Mrs. Falloway's face was a mask. Then she said in a deep, clear voice:

"It is very difficult to fool a mother, Mr. Vance. Fraim knew of the ransom note and the instructions in it. He knew also that Kenyon would raise the money somehow. The boy came upstairs and told me about it after you had left the house this afternoon. Then, when he came to my room a little before ten o'clock tonight, after having spent the evening with his sister and Kenyon, and said he was going out, I knew what was in his mind—although he very often does go out late of an evening. He invented an important engagement—I always know when Fraim isn't telling the truth, although he doesn't realize that I do. I knew well enough where he was going and what he was going for. I could read it in his eyes. And I—I wished to save him from that infamy."[\[21\]](#)

Vance was silent for a moment as he regarded the weary old woman with pity and admiration, and Markham nodded sympathetically.

"But Fraim is a good boy at heart—please believe that," the woman added. "He merely lacks something—strength of body and spirit, perhaps."

Vance bowed.

"Quite. He's not well, Mrs. Falloway. He needs medical attention. Have you ever had a basal metabolism test made on him?"

The woman shook her head.

"A blood sugar?" proceeded Vance.

"No." Mrs. Falloway's voice was barely audible.

"A blood count?"

Again the woman shook her head.

"A Wassermann?"

"The truth is, Mr. Vance," the woman said, "he has never been examined." Then she asked quickly: "What do you think it is?"

"I wouldn't dare to venture an opinion, don't y' know," Vance returned, "though I'd say there was an endocrine insufficiency somewhere—an inadequacy of some internal secretion, a definite and prolonged hormone disturbance. It may be thyroid, parathyroid, or pituitary, or adrenal. Or maybe neurocirculatory asthenia. It is deplorable how little science knows as yet about the ductless glands. A great work, however, is being done along those lines, and progress is constantly being made. I think you should have your son checked up. It may be something that can be remedied."

He scribbled something on a page from a small note-book and, tearing it out, handed it to Mrs. Falloway.

"Here is the name and address of one of the country's greatest endocrinologists. Look him up, for your son's sake."

The woman took the slip of paper, folded it, and put it in one of the large pockets of her skirt.

"You are very good—and very understanding, Mr. Vance," she said. "The moment I saw you in the park tonight, I knew you would understand. A mother's love—"

"Yes, yes—of course," murmured Vance. "And now I think we'll return to the drawing-room. And may you have a well-earned night's rest."

The woman looked at him gratefully and held out her hand. He took it and, bowing, raised it to his lips.

"My eternal admiration, madam," he said.

When we re-entered the drawing-room we found the group just as we had left it. Fleel and Kenyon Kenting still sat stiffly in their chairs near the front window, like awed wooden figures. Quaggy stood smoking thoughtfully before the chair where Vance had sat; and Heath, his sturdy legs spread, was at his side, glowering at him morosely. On the sofa, his head drooping forward, his mouth slightly open, and his arms hanging listlessly, lounged Fraim Falloway. He did not even look up as we entered; and the thought flashed through my mind that he might not be a glandular case at all, but that he was merely suffering from the early stages of encephalitis lethargica.

Vance glanced about him sharply and then strolled to his chair. Reseating himself with unconcern, he lighted a fresh cigarette. Markham and I remained standing in the doorway.

"There are one or two matters—" drawled Vance and stopped abruptly. Then he said: "But I think Mrs. Kenting should be here with us for this discussion. After all, it is her husband who has disappeared, and her suggestions might be dashed helpful."

Kenyon Kenting stood up, nodding his head vigorously in approval.

"I think you're right, Mr. Vance," he said, going toward the door. "I'll get Madelaine myself."

"I trust it is not too late to disturb her," said Vance.

"Oh, no, no," Kenting assured him. "She almost never retires so early. She has not been able to sleep well for a long time, and reads far into the night. And tonight I was with her till after half-past nine, and she was terribly keyed up; I know she wouldn't think of retiring till she heard the outcome of our plans tonight."

He bustled from the room as he finished speaking, and we heard him going up the stairs. A few moments later we could hear his sharp, repeated knocking on a door. Then there was a long silence, and the sound of a door being opened hurriedly. Vance leaned forward in his chair and seemed to be waiting expectantly.

A few minutes later Kenting came rushing down the stairs. He stopped in the doorway, glaring at us with wide-open eyes. He looked

breathless and horror-stricken as he leaned for support against the door-frame.

"She's not there!" he exclaimed in an awed voice. He took a deep breath. "I knocked on her door several times, but I got no answer—and a chill went through me. I tried the door, but it was locked. So I went through Kaspar's room, into Madelaine's. The lights are all on, but she isn't there. . . ."

He sucked in his breath again excitedly and stammered as if with tremendous effort:

"The window—over the yard—is wide open, and—and the ladder is standing against it!"

## 12. EMERALD PERFUME

(Thursday, July 21; 11:30 p.m.)

Kenyon Kenting's announcement that his sister-in-law was gone from her room and that the portentous ladder was standing below the open window had an instantaneous effect upon the gathering in the drawing-room. Markham and I had stepped into the room, and instinctively both of us turned to Heath who was, after all, technically in charge of the routine end of the Kenting kidnapping case. The wordless feud which had been going on between Heath and Porter Quaggy was immediately forgotten, and Heath was now directing his fierce glance to Kenting as he stood dejectedly in the doorway.

Quaggy's cigarette fell from his lips to the rug, where he stepped on it with automatic quickness, without even looking down.

"Good God, Kenyon!" he exclaimed, half under his breath. The man seemed deeply moved.

Fleel rose to his feet and, as he jerked down his waistcoat with both hands, appeared dazed and inarticulate. Even Fraim Falloway raised himself suddenly out of his stupor and, glowering at Kenting, began babbling hysterically.

"The hell you say! The hell you say!" he cried out in a high-pitched voice. "That's some more of Kaspar's dirty work. He's playing a game to get money, I tell you. I don't believe he was kidnapped at all—"

The Sergeant swung about and grabbed the youth roughly by the shoulder.

"Pipe down, young fella," he ordered. "Makin' fool statements like that ain't gonna help anything."

Falloway subsided and made a nervous search through his pockets till he found a crumpled cigarette.

I myself was shocked and dumbfounded by this startling turn of events. As a matter of fact, I hadn't yet recovered from the strange adventure in the park, and I was totally unprepared for this new blow.

Only Vance seemed unruffled and composed. He always had astounding control of his nerves, and it was difficult to judge just what was his reaction to the news of Mrs. Kenting's disappearance.

Markham, I noticed, was watching Vance closely, and as Vance slowly crushed out his cigarette and got indolently to his feet, Markham blurted out angrily:

"This doesn't seem to surprise you, Vance. You're taking it too damned calmly to suit me. Had you any idea of this—this new outrage when you suggested that Mrs. Kenting be called?"

"Oh, I rather expected something of the kind, but, frankly, I didn't think it would happen so soon."

"If you expected this thing," Markham snapped, "why didn't you let me know, so that we could do something about it?"

"My dear Markham!" Vance spoke with pacifying coolness. "There was nothing any one could do. The predicament was far from simple; and it's still a difficult one."

Heath had gone to the telephone, and I could hear him, with one ear, as it were, calling the Homicide Bureau and giving officious instructions. Then he slammed down the receiver and stalked toward the stairs.

"I want to look at that room," he announced. "Two of the boys from the Bureau are coming up right away. This is a hell of a night. . . ." His voice trailed off as he went up the steps two at a time. Vance and Markham and I had left the drawing-room and were immediately behind him.

Heath first tried the door-knob of Mrs. Kenting's room, but, as Kenting had informed us, the door was locked. He went up the hall to Kaspar Kenting's room. The door here was standing ajar, and at the far end of the room we could see into Mrs. Kenting's brightly lighted boudoir. Stepping through the first chamber, we entered the lighted bedroom. As Kenting had said, the window facing on the court was wide open, and not only was the Venetian blind raised to the top, but the heavy drapes were drawn apart. Cautiously avoiding any contact with the window-sill, Heath leaned out at the window, and then turned quickly back.

"The ladder's there, all right," he asserted. "The same like it was at the other window yesterday."

Vance was apparently not listening. He had adjusted his monocle and was looking round the room without any apparent show of interest. Leisurely he walked to the dressing-table opposite the window and looked down at it for a moment. A round cut-glass powder jar stood uncovered at one side; the tinted glass top was resting on its side several inches away. A large powder puff lay on the floor beneath the table. Vance reached down, picked it up, fitted it back into the jar, and replaced the cover.

Then he lifted up a small perfume atomizer which was resting perilously near the edge of the dressing-table, and pressed the bulb slightly. He sniffed at the spray, and set the bottle down at the rear of the table, on the crystal tray where it evidently belonged.

"Courtet's emerald," he murmured. "I'm sure this was not the lady's personal preference in perfumes. Blondes know better, don't y' know. Emerald is suitable only for brunettes, especially those with olive complexions and abundant hair. . . . Very interestin'."

Heath was eyeing Vance with obvious annoyance. He could not understand Vance's actions. But he said nothing and merely watched impatiently.

Vance then went to the door and inspected it briefly.

"The night latch isn't on," he murmured, as if to himself. "And the turn-bolt hasn't been thrown. Door locked with a key. And no key in the keyhole."

"What are you getting at, Vance?" demanded Markham. "What if there is no key there? The door could have been locked and the key removed."

"Quite so—theoretically," returned Vance. "But rather an unusual procedure just the same—eh, what? When one locks oneself in a bedroom with a key, one usually leaves the key in the lock. Just what would be the object in removing it? Dashed if I know. . . . It could be, however. . . ."

He went across the room and into the bathroom. This room too was brightly lit. He glanced at the long metal cord hanging from the electric fixture, and with his hand tested the weight of the painted glass cylindrical ornament attached to the end of the chain. He released it and watched it swing back and forth. He looked into the tumbler which stood on the wide rim of the washbowl and, setting

it down again, examined the washbowl itself, and around the edges. He then bent over the soap dish. Markham, standing in the bathroom doorway, followed his movements with a puzzled frown.

"What in the name of God—" he began irritably.

"Tut, tut, my dear fellow," Vance interrupted, turning to him with a contemplative look. "I was merely attemptin' to ascertain at just what time the lady departed. . . . I would surmise, don't y' know, that it was round ten o'clock this evening."

Markham still looked perplexed.

"How do you figure that out?" he asked skeptically.

"Indications may be entirely misleadin'." Vance sighed slightly. "Nothing certain, nothing accurate in this world. One may only venture an opinion. I'm no oracle, Delphic or otherwise. Merely strugglin' toward the light." He pointed with his cigarette to the pull-chain of the electric fixture overhead. It was still swinging back and forth like a pendulum, but with a slight rotary motion, and its to-and-fro movement had not perceptibly abated.

"When I came into the bathroom," Vance explained, "yon polished brass chain was at rest—oh, quite—and I opined that its movement, with that heavy and abominable solid glass cylinder to control it, would discernibly continue, once it was pulled and released, for at least an hour. And it's just half-past eleven now. . . . Moreover, the glass here is quite dry, showing that it has not been used for an hour or two. Also, there's not a drop of water, either in the washbowl or on the edge; and a certain number of drops and a little dampness always remain after the washbowl has been used. And, by the by, the rubber stopper is dry. That process, I believe, would take in the neighborhood of an hour and a half. Even the small amount of lather left on the cake of soap is dry and crumbly, which would point to the fact that it had not been used for at least an hour or so."

He took several puffs on his cigarette.

"And I cannot imagine Mrs. Kenting, with her habit of remaining up late, performing her nightly toilet as early as these matters would indicate. And yet the light was on in the bathroom, and there is a certain amount of evidence that she had been powdering her nose and spraying herself with perfume some time during the evening. Moreover, my dear Markham, there are indications of haste in the performance of these feminine rites, for she did not put the perfume atomizer back where it belongs, nor did she stop to retrieve the powder puff from where it had fallen on the floor."

Markham nodded glumly.

"I begin to see what you are trying to get at, Vance," he mumbled.

"And all these little details, taken in connection with the open latch and the unthrown bolt and the missing key in the hall door, lead me—rather vaguely and shakily, I admit—to the theory that she had a rendezvous elsewhere, for which she was a wee bit late, at some time around the far-from-witching hour of ten o'clock."

Markham thought a moment. Then he said slowly:

"But that's only a theory, Vance. It might have been at any time earlier in the evening after the dusk was sufficiently advanced to make artificial light necessary."

"Quite true," agreed Vance, "on the mere visible evidence hereabouts. But don't you recall that Kenting informed us only a few minutes ago that he was here at the house with Mrs. Kaspar Kenting until half-past nine this evening? And have you forgot already, my dear Markham, that Mrs. Falloway mentioned that young Fraim had been with his sister until a short time before he had his important engagement at ten o'clock?—which may have accounted for the lady's flustered state in preparing herself for the rendezvous, provided the assignation was made for ten o'clock. You see how nicely it all dovetails."

Markham nodded comprehendingly.

"All right," he said. "But what follows from all that?"

Without answering the question, Vance turned to Heath.

"What time, Sergeant," he asked, "did you notify Fleel and Kenyon Kenting about the arrangements for tonight?"

"Oh,—I should say—" Heath thought a moment. "Round six o'clock. Maybe a little after."

"And where did you find these gentlemen?"

"Well, I called Fleel at his home and he wasn't there yet. But I left word for him and he called me back in a little while. But I didn't think to ask him where he was. And Kenting was here."

Vance smoked a moment and said nothing, but he seemed satisfied with the answer. He glanced about him and again addressed Heath.

"I'm afraid, Sergeant, your finger-print men and your photographers and your busy boys from the Homicide Bureau are going to draw a blank here. But I'm sure you'd be horribly disappointed if they didn't clutter this room up with insufflators and tripods and what not."

"I still want to know," persisted Markham, "what all this time-table hocus-pocus means."

Vance looked at him with unwonted seriousness.

"It means deviltry, Markham." His voice was unusually low and resonant. "It means something damnable. I don't like this case.—I don't at all like it. It infuriates me because it leaves us so helpless. Again, I fear, we must wait."

"But we can't just sit back," said Markham in a dispirited voice. "Isn't there some step you can suggest?"

"Well, yes. But it won't help much. I propose that first we ask one or two questions of the gentlemen downstairs. And then I propose that we go into the yard and take a look at the ladder." Vance turned to Heath. "Have you your flashlight, Sergeant?"

"Sure I have," the other answered.

"And after that," Vance went on, resuming his reply to Markham, "I propose that we go home and bide our time. The Sergeant will carry on with his prescribed but futile activities while we slumber."

Heath grunted and started toward Kaspar Kenting's room, headed for the hallway.

When we reached the drawing-room we found all four of its occupants anxious and alert. Even Fraim Falloway seemed excited and expectant. They were all standing in a small group, talking to each other in short jerky sentences the gist of which I did not catch, for the conversation stopped abruptly, and they turned to us eagerly the moment we entered the room.

"Have you learned anything?" asked Fraim Falloway, in a semi-hysterical falsetto.

"We're not through looking round yet," Vance returned placatingly. "We hope to know something definite very soon. Just now, however, I wish to ask each of you gentlemen a question."

He did not seem particularly concerned and sat down as he spoke, crossing his knees leisurely. When he had selected a cigarette from his platinum-and-jet case he turned suddenly to the lawyer.

"What is your favorite perfume, Mr. Fleel?" he asked unexpectedly.

The man stared at him in blank astonishment, and I am sure that had he been in a courtroom, he would have appealed instantly to the judge with the usual incompetent-irrelevant-and-immaterial objection. However, he managed a condescending smile and replied:

"I have no favorite perfume—I know nothing about such things. It's true, I send bottles of perfume to my women clients at Christmas, instead of the conventional flower-baskets, but I always leave the selection to my secretary."

"Do you regard Mrs. Kenting as one of your women clients?" Vance continued.

"Naturally," answered the lawyer.

"By the by, Mr. Fleel, is your secret'ry blond or brunette?"

The man seemed more disconcerted than ever, but answered immediately.

"I don't know. I suppose you'd call her brunette. Her hair certainly doesn't look anything like Jean Harlow's or like Peggy Hopkins Joyce's—if that's what you mean."

"Many thanks," said Vance curtly, and shifted his gaze to Fraim Falloway who stood a few feet away, gaping before him with unseeing eyes.

"What is *your* favorite scent, Mr. Falloway?" Vance asked, watching the youth closely and appraisingly.

"I—I don't know," Falloway stammered. "I'm not familiar with such feminine matters. But I think emerald is wonderful—so mysterious—so exotic—so subtle." He raised his eyes almost rapturously, like a young poet reciting his own verses.

"You're quite right," murmured Vance; and then he focused his gaze on Kenyon Kenting.

"All perfumes smell alike to me," was the man's annoyed assertion before Vance could frame the question again. "I can't tell one from another—except gardenia. Whenever I give any woman perfume, I give her gardenia."

A faint smile appeared at the corners of Vance's mouth.

"Really, y' know," he said, "I shouldn't do it, if I were you."

As he spoke he turned his head to Porter Quaggy.

"And how about you, Mr. Quaggy?" he asked lightly. "If you were giving a lady perfume, what scent would you select?"

Quaggy gave a mirthless chuckle.

"I haven't yet been guilty of such foolishness," he replied. "I stick to flowers. They're easier. But if I were compelled to present a fair creature with perfume, I'd first find out what she liked."

"Quite a sensible point of view," murmured Vance, rising as if with great effort and turning. "And now, I say, Sergeant, let's have a curs'ry look at that ladder."

As we walked down the front steps I saw Guilfoyle still sitting at the wheel of his cab, with the motor humming gently.

Heath flashed on his powerful pocket light, and for the second time we went through the street gate leading into the yard, and approached the ladder leaning against the side of the house.

The short grass was entirely dry, and the ground had completely hardened since the rain two nights ago. Vance again bent over at the foot of the ladder while Heath held the flashlight.

"There's no need to fear my spoiling your adored footprints tonight, Sergeant,—the ground is much too hard. Not even Sweet Alice Cherry[22] could have made an impression on this sod." Vance straightened up after a moment and moved the ladder slightly to the right, as he had done the previous morning. "And don't get jittery about finger-prints, Sergeant," he went on. "I'm quite convinced you'll find none. This ladder, I opine, is merely a stage-prop, as it were; and the person who set it here was clever enough to have used gloves."

He bent over again and inspected the lawn, but rose almost immediately.

"Not the slightest depression—only a few blades of grass crushed. . . . I say, *sergente mio*, it's your turn to step on the ladder—I'm frightfully tired."

Heath immediately clambered up five or six rungs and then descended; and Vance again moved the ladder a few inches. Both he and Heath now knelt down and scrutinized the ground.

"Observe," said Vance as he rose to his feet, "that the uprights make a slight depression in the soil, even with the weight of only one person pressing upon the ladder. . . . Let's go inside again and dispense our adieux."

On re-entering the house Vance immediately joined Kenting at the entrance to the drawing-room and announced to him, as well as to the others inside, that we were going, and that the house would be taken over very shortly by the police. There was a general silent acquiescence to his announcement.

"I might as well be going along myself," said Kenting despondently. "There is obviously nothing I can do here. But I hope you gentlemen will let me know the moment you learn anything. I'll be at home all night, and in my office tomorrow."

"Oh, quite," returned Vance, without looking at the man. "Go home, by all means. This has been a trying night, and you can help us better tomorrow if you are able to get any rest now."

The man seemed grateful: it was obvious he was much discouraged by the shock he had just received. Taking his hat from the hall bench, he hurried out the front door.

Quaggy's eyes followed the departing man. Then he rose and began pacing up and down the drawing-room.

"I guess I'll be getting along too," he said finally, with a note of interrogation in his voice. "I may go, I suppose?" There was a suggestion of sneering belligerence in his tone.

"That's quite all right," Vance told him pleasantly. "You probably need a bit of extra sleep, don't y' know, after your recent all-night vigil."

"Thanks," muttered Quaggy sarcastically, keeping his eyes down. And he too left the house.

When the front door had closed after him, Fleel looked up rather apologetically.

"I trust you gentlemen will not misunderstand my seeming right-about-face this morning regarding the assistance of the Police Department. The fact is, I was entirely sincere in telling you in the District Attorney's office that I was inclined to leave everything in your hands regarding the payment of the fifty thousand dollars. But on my way to the house here to see Kenting, I weighed the matter more carefully, and when I saw how eager Kenting was to follow the thing through alone, I decided it might be better, after all, to agree with him regarding the elimination of the police tonight. I see now that I was mistaken, and that my first instinct was correct. I feel, after what happened in the park tonight—"

"Pray don't worry on that score, Mr. Fleel," Vance returned negligently. "We quite understand your advisory attitude in the matter. Difficult position—eh, what? After all, one can only make guesses, subject to change."

Fleel was now on his feet, looking down meditatively at his half-smoked cigar.

"Yes," he muttered; "it is, as you say, a most difficult situation. . . ." He glanced up swiftly. "What do you make of this second terrible episode tonight?"

"Really, y' know,"—Vance was covertly watching the man—"it is far too early to arrive at any definite conclusions. Perhaps tomorrow. . . ." His voice faded away.

Fleel shook himself slightly, as with an involuntary tremor.

"I feel that we have not reached the end of this atrocious business yet. There appears to be a malicious desperation back of these happenings. . . . I wish I had never been brought into the case—I'm actually beginning to harbor fears for my own safety."

"We appreciate just how you feel," Vance returned.

Fleel straightened up with an effort and moved forward resolutely.

"I think I too will be going." He spoke in a weary tone, and I noticed that his hand trembled slightly as he picked up his hat and adjusted it.

"Cheerio," said Vance as the lawyer turned at the front door and bowed stiffly to us.

Meanwhile Fram Falloway had risen from his place on the davenport. He now moved silently past us, with a drawn look on his face, and trudged heavily up the stairs.

Falloway had barely time to reach the first landing when the telephone resting on a small wobbly stand in the hall began ringing. Weem suddenly appeared from the dimness of the rear hall and picked up the receiver with a blunt "hello." He listened for a moment; then laying down the receiver, turned sullenly in our direction.

"It's a call for Sergeant Heath," he announced, as if his privacy had been needlessly invaded.

The Sergeant went quickly to the telephone and put the receiver to his ear.

"Well, what is it?" he started belligerently. ". . . Sure it's the Sarge—shoot! . . . Well, for the love of—Hold it a minute." He clapped his hand over the mouthpiece and swung about quickly.

"Where'll we be in half an hour, Chief?"

"We'll be at Mr. Vance's apartment," Markham answered after one glance at Heath's expression.

"Oh, my word!" sighed Vance. "I had hoped to be reposing. . . ."

The Sergeant turned back to the instrument.

"Listen, you," he fairly bawled; "we'll be at Mr. Vance's apartment in East 38th Street. Know where it is? . . . That's right—and make it snappy." He banged down the receiver.

"Important, is it, Sergeant?" asked Markham.

"I'll say it is." Heath stepped quickly away from the telephone table. "Let's get going, sir. I'll tell you about it on the way down. Snitkin's meeting us at Mr. Vance's apartment. And Sullivan and Hennessey will be here any minute to take over."

The butler was still in the hall, half standing and half leaning against one of the large newel posts at the foot of the stairs, and Heath now addressed him peremptorily.

"Some of my men will be here pretty soon, Weem. And then you can go to bed. This house is in the hands of the police from now on—understand?"

The butler nodded his head dourly, and shuffled away toward the rear of the house.

"Just a moment, Weem," called Vance.

The man turned and approached us again, sulky and antagonistic.

"Weem, did you or your wife hear any one go out or enter this house around ten o'clock tonight?" Vance asked.

"No, I didn't hear anything. Neither did Gertrude. Mrs. Kenting told both of us that we wouldn't be needed and could do as we pleased after dinner. We had a long day and were tired, and we were both asleep from nine o'clock till you and Mrs. Falloway rang and I had to let you in. After the others came I got dressed and came down to see if there was anything I could do."

"Most admirable of you, Weem," Vance commended him, turning to the front door. "That's all I wanted to ask just now."

### 13. THE GREEN COUPÉ

(Thursday, July 21; midnight.)

Just as Markham and Heath and I turned to follow Vance, there came, from somewhere outside, a startling and ominous rattle that sounded like the staccato and rapid sputtering of a machine-gun. So keyed up were my nerves that the reports went through me with a sickening horror, almost as if it had been the bullets themselves.

"God Almighty!" came the explosive exclamation of the Sergeant, who was at my side; and he stopped abruptly, as if he, too, had been struck by a bombardment of bullets. Then he suddenly sprang forward past Vance and, jerking the front door open, hurried out into the warm summer night without a word to any one. The rest of us followed close behind him. The Sergeant had halted at the edge of the stone pathway to the sidewalk and was looking confusedly up and down the street, uncertain which way to turn. Guilfoyle had jumped down from his seat in the cab as we came out of the vestibule, and was gesticulating excitedly in front of Heath.

"The shots came from up that way," he told Heath, waving his arm toward Central Park West. "What do you want me to do, Sarge?"

"Stay here and keep your eyes open," Heath ordered in clipped accents, "until Sullivan and Hennessey arrive. . . . And," he added as he started off toward the park, "stick around after that, in case of any emergency."

"I'm wise," Guilfoyle called after him.

Guilfoyle saluted half-heartedly, as Markham and Vance appeared on the sidewalk, and again he waved his arm to indicate, I presume, which way Heath had gone. He leaned reluctantly against his cab as we followed the Sergeant up the street.

"No," murmured Vance as we hurried along, "not a pleasant case. . . . And if my intuition is correct, these shots are another manifestation of its complexity."

Heath was now breaking into a run ahead of us; and Markham and I had difficulty keeping pace with Vance as he, too, lengthened his stride.

Just this side of the Nottingham Hotel at the corner, a small group of excited men were gathered under the bright light of the lamppost set between two trees along the curb. As Heath came abreast of the cluster of onlookers we could hear his gruff voice ordering them to disperse, and one by one they reluctantly moved off. Some continued on whatever business they had been about, while others remained to look on from the opposite side of the street. In the few moments it took us to reach the lamppost, the Sergeant had succeeded in clearing the scene.

There, leaning in a crouching attitude against the iron lamppost, was Fleel. His face was deathly pale. I have yet to see so unmistakable a picture of collapse from fright as he presented. His nerves were completely shattered. He was as pitiful a figure as I have ever looked at, huddled beneath the unflattering glare of the large electric light overhead, as he leaned weakly for support against the lamppost. In front of the lawyer stood Quaggy, looking at him with a curious hard-faced serenity.

Heath was staring at Fleel with a startled, inquisitive look in his eyes; but before he could speak to Fleel, Vance took the man under the arms and, knocking his feet from under him, set him down gently on the narrow strip of lawn which bordered the sidewalk, with his back against the lamppost.

"Breathe deeply," Vance advised the lawyer, when he had settled him on the ground. "And pull yourself together. Then see if you can tell us what happened."

Fleel looked up, his chest rising and falling as he sucked in the stagnant air of that humid July night. Slowly he struggled to his feet again and leaned heavily against the post, his eyes fixed before him.

Quaggy put a hand on the man's shoulder, as if to steady him, and shook him gently as he did so.

Fleel managed a sickly grimace intended for a smile, and turned his head weakly back and forth, blinking his eyes as if to clear his vision.

"That was a close call," he muttered. "They almost got me."

"Who almost got you, Mr. Fleel?" asked Vance.

"Why—why—" the man stammered, and paused for breath. "The men in the car, of course. I—didn't see—who they were—"

"Try to tell us, Mr. Fleel," came Vance's steadying voice, "just what happened."

Fleel took another deep breath and, with an obvious effort, straightened up a little more.

"Didn't you see it all?" he asked, his voice high and unnatural. "I was on my way to the corner, to get a taxicab, when a car drove up from behind me. I naturally paid no attention to it until it suddenly swerved toward the curb and stopped with a screeching of brakes, just as I reached this street light. As I turned round to see what it was, a small machine-gun was thrust over the ledge of the open window of the car and the firing began. I instinctively grasped this iron post and crouched down. After a number of shots the car jerked forward. I admit I was too frightened to notice which way it turned."

"But at least you were not hit, Mr. Fleel."

The man moved his hands over his body.

"No, thank Heaven for that," he muttered.

"And," Vance continued, "the car couldn't have been over ten feet away from you. A very poor shot, I should say. You were lucky, sir, this time." He spun round quickly to Quaggy, who had taken a step or two backward from the frightened man. "I don't quite understand your being here, Mr. Quaggy. Surely, you've had more than ample time to ensconce yourself safely in your boudoir."

Quaggy stepped forward resentfully.

"I was in my apartment. As you can see,"—he pointed indignantly to his two open front windows in the near-by hotel—"my lights are on. When I got to my rooms I didn't go directly to bed—I hope it wasn't a crime. I went to the front window and stood there for a few minutes, trying to get a breath of fresh air. Then I caught sight of Mr. Fleel coming up the street—he had apparently just left the Kenting house—and behind him came a car. Not that I paid any particular attention to it, but I did notice it. Only, when it turned in to



the curb and stopped directly opposite Mr. Fleel as he reached the light post my curiosity was naturally aroused. And when I heard the machine-gun and saw the spits of fire coming through the window, and also saw Mr. Fleel grasp the lamppost and sink down, I thought he had been shot. I naturally dashed down—so here I am. . . . Anything illegal in that procedure?" he asked with cold sarcasm.

"No—oh, no," smiled Vance. "Quite normal. Far more normal, in fact, than if you had gone immediately to bed without a bit of airin' by the open window." He glanced at Quaggy with an enigmatical smile. "By the by," he went on, "did you, by any chance, note what type of car it was that attacked Mr. Fleel?"

"No, I didn't get a very good look at it," Quaggy returned in a chilly tone. "At first I didn't pay much attention to it, as I said; and when the shooting began I was too excited to get any vivid impression. But I think it was a coupé of some kind—not a very large car, and certainly not a new model."

"And the color?" prompted Vance.

"It was a dingy, nondescript color." Quaggy narrowed his eyes, as if trying to recall a definite picture. "It might have been a faded green—it was hard to be certain from the window. In fact, I think it *was* green."

Heath was watching Quaggy shrewdly.

"Yeah?" he said skeptically. "Which way did it go?"

Quaggy turned to the Sergeant.

"I really didn't notice," he replied none too cordially. "I caught only a glimpse of it as it started toward the park."

"A fine bunch of spectators," Heath snorted. "I'll see about that car myself." And he started running toward Central Park West.

As he neared the corner, a burly figure in uniform turned suddenly into 86th Street from the south, and almost collided with the Sergeant. By the bright corner light I could see that the newcomer was McLaughlin, the night officer on duty in that section, who had reported to us the morning of Kaspar Kenting's disappearance. He drew up quickly and saluted with a jerk.

"What was it, Sergeant?" His breathless, excited query carried down to us. "I heard the shots, and been trying to locate 'em. Did they come outa this street?"

"You're damn tootin', McLaughlin," replied Heath, and, grasping the officer by the arm, he swung him about, and the two started off again.

"Did you see any car come out of this street, into Central Park West?" demanded Heath.

I could not now hear what the officer answered, but when the two had reached the curb at the corner McLaughlin was waving his arm uptown, and I assumed that he was pointing in the direction that the green coupé had taken.

Heath looked up and down the avenue for a moment, no doubt trying to find a car he could requisition for the chase; but there was apparently none in sight, and he started diagonally across the street uptown, with McLaughlin at his heels. In the middle of the crossing the Sergeant turned his head and called out over his shoulder to us:

"Wait here at the corner for me." Then he and McLaughlin disappeared past the building on the north corner of Central Park West.

"My word, such energy!" sighed Vance when Heath and the officer were out of sight. "The coupé could be at 110th Street by this time—and thus the mad search would end. Heath is all action and no mentation. Sad, sad. . . . Vital ingredient of the police routine, I imagine—eh, what, Markham?"

Markham was in a solemn mood, and took no offense at Vance's levity.

"There's a taxicab stand just a block up on Central Park West," he explained patiently. "The Sergeant is probably headed for that in order to commandeer a cab for the chase."

"Marvellous," murmured Vance. "But I imagine even the green coupé could outrun a nocturnal taxi-cab if they both started from scratch."

"Not if the Sergeant were to puncture one of its rear tires with a bullet or two," retorted Markham angrily.

"I doubt if the Sergeant will have the opportunity, by this time." Vance smiled despondently. Then he turned to Fleel. "Feeling better?" he asked pleasantly.

"I'm all right now," the lawyer returned, taking a wobbly step or two forward and biting the end from a cigar he took from his pocket.

"That's bully," Vance said consolingly. "Do you want an escort home?"

"No, thanks," said Fleel, in a voice that was still dazed. "I'll make it all right." And when he had his cigar going he turned shakily toward Central Park West. "I'll pick up a taxicab." He held out his hand to Quaggy, who took it with surprising cordiality. "Many thanks, Mr. Quaggy," he said weakly and, I thought, a little shamefacedly. Then he bowed somewhat stiffly and haughtily to us and moved away out of the ring of light.

"Queer episode," commented Vance, as if to himself. "Fits in rather nicely, though. Lucky for your lawyer friend, Markham, that the gentleman in the green coupé wasn't a better shot. . . . Ah, well, we might as well toddle to the corner and await the energetic Sergeant. Really, y' know, Markham, there's no use gazing at the lamppost any longer."

Markham silently followed Vance toward the park.

Quaggy turned too and walked with us the short distance to the entrance of his apartment-hotel, where he took leave of us. At the great iron-grilled door he turned and said tauntingly: "Many thanks for not arresting me."

"Oh, that's quite all right, Mr. Quaggy," Vance returned, halting momentarily and smiling. "The case isn't over yet, don't y' know. . . . Cheerio."

At the corner Vance very deliberately lighted a cigarette and seated himself indolently on the wide stone balustrade extending along the east wall of the Nottingham Hotel.

"I'm not bloodthirsty at all, Markham," he said, looking quizzically at the District Attorney; "but I rather wish the gentleman with the machine-gun had potted Mr. Fleel. And he was at such short range. I've never wielded a machine-gun myself, but I'm quite sure I could have done better than that. . . . And the poor Sergeant, dashing madly around at this hour. My heart goes out to him. The whole explanation of this evening's little *contretemps* lies elsewhere than with the mysterious green coupé."

Markham was annoyed. He was standing at the curb, straining his eyes up the avenue to the north. "Sometimes, Vance," he said,

without taking his eyes from the wide macadamized roadway, "you infuriate me with your babble. A lot of good it would have done us to have Fleel shot a few feet away from myself and the police."

Vance joined Markham at the edge of the sidewalk and followed his intense gaze northward to the quiet blocks in the distance.

"Lovely night," murmured Vance tantalizingly. "So quiet and lonely. But much too warm."

"I'll warrant the Sergeant and McLaughlin overhaul that car somewhere." Markham was apparently following his own trend of thought.

"Oh, I dare say," sighed Vance. "But I doubt if it will get us forrader. One can't send a green coupé to the electric chair. Silly notion—what?"

There were several moments of silence, and then a taxicab came at a perilous rate out of the transverse in the park, swung south, and drew up directly in front of us.

Simultaneously with the car's abrupt stop the door swung open, and Heath and McLaughlin stepped down.

"We got the car all right," announced Heath triumphantly. "The same dirty-green coupé McLaughlin here saw outside the Kenting house Wednesday morning."

The officer nodded his head enthusiastically.

"It's the same, all right," he asserted. "I'd swear to it. Jeez, what a break!"

"Where did you find it, Sergeant?" asked Markham. (Vance was unimpressed and was blowing smoke-rings playfully into the still summer air.)

"Right up there in the transverse leading through the park." The Sergeant waved his arm with an impatient backward flourish, and barely missed striking McLaughlin who stood beside him. "It was half-way up on the curb. Abandoned. After the guys in it ditched the car they musta come out and hopped a taxicab up the street, because shortly after the green coupé turned into the transverse two guys walked out and, according to the driver here, took the cab in front of his."

Without waiting for a reply from either Markham or Vance, Heath swung about and beckoned imperiously to the chauffeur of the cab from which he had just alighted. A short rotund man of perhaps thirty, with a flat cap and a duster too long for him, struggled out of the front seat and joined us.

"Look here, you," bawled Heath, "do you know the name of the man who was running the cab ahead of you on the stand tonight who took the two guys what come out of the transverse?"

"Sure I know him," returned the chauffeur. "He's a buddy of mine."

"Know where he lives?"

"Sure I know where he lives. Up on Kelly Street, in the Bronx. He's got a wife and three kids."

"The hell with his family!" snapped Heath. "Get hold of that baby as soon as you can, and tell him to beat it down to the Homicide Bureau *pronto*. I wanta know where he took those two guys that came out of the transverse."

"I can tell ya that right now, officer," came the chauffeur's respectful answer. "I was standin' talkin' to Abe when the fares came over from the park. I opened the door for 'em myself. An' they told Abe to drive like hell to the uptown station of the Lexington Avenue subway at 86th Street."

"Ah!" It was Vance who spoke. "That's very interestin'. Uptown—eh, what?"

"Anyway, I wanta see this buddy of yours," Heath went on to the chauffeur, ignoring Vance's interpolated comment. "Get me, fella?"

"Sure I getcha, officer," the chauffeur returned subserviently. "Abe ought to be back on the stand in half an hour."

"That's O.-K.," growled Heath, turning to Markham. "Gosh, Chief, I gotta get to a telephone quick and get the boys lookin' for these guys."

"Why rush the matter, Sergeant?" Vance spoke casually. "We really ought not to keep Snitkin waiting too long at the apartment, don't y' know. I say, let's take this taxi and we'll be home in a few minutes. You can then use my phone to your heart's content. And this gentleman here"—indicating the chauffeur—"can return at once to his stand and await the arrival of his friend, Mr. Abraham."

Heath hesitated, and Markham nodded after a quick look at Vance.

"I think that will be the best course, Sergeant," the District Attorney said, and opened the door of the taxicab.

We all got inside, leaving McLaughlin standing on the curb, and Heath gave Vance's address to the driver. As we pulled away, Heath put his head out of the window.

"Report that empty car," he called out to McLaughlin. "And then keep your eye on it till the boys come up for it. Also watch for Abie till this fellow gets back—then get to the Kenting house and stand by with Guilfoyle."

## 14. KASPAR IS FOUND

(Friday, July 22; 12:30 a.m.)

As we drove rapidly down Central Park West, Markham nervously lighted a cigar and asked Heath, who was sitting on the seat in front of him:

"Well, what about that telephone call you got at the Kenting house, Sergeant?"

Heath turned his head and spoke out of the corner of his mouth.

"Kaspar Kenting's body has been found in the East River, around 150th Street. The report came in right after Snitkin got back to Headquarters. He's got all the details. . . . I thought I'd better not say anything about it up at the Kentings' place with that snoopy butler hanging around."

Markham did not speak for a few seconds. Then he asked:

"Is that all you know, Sergeant?"

"My God, Chief!" Heath exclaimed. "Ain't that enough?" And he settled down in the narrow, cramped quarters of his seat.

Again there was silence in the cab. Though I could not see Markham's face, I could well imagine his mixed reactions to this disturbing piece of news.

"Then you were right, Vance," he commented at length, in a strained, barely audible tone.

"The East River—eh?" Vance spoke quietly and without emotion. "Yes, it could easily be. Very distressin'. . . ." He said no more; nor was there any further talk until we reached Vance's apartment.

Snitkin was already waiting in the upper hallway, just outside the library. Heath merely grunted to him as he brushed by and picked up the telephone. He talked for five minutes or more, making innumerable reports relating to the night's happenings and giving various instructions. When he had the routine police ball rolling he beckoned to Snitkin, and entered the library where Vance, Markham, and I were waiting.

"Go ahead, Snitkin," ordered Heath, before the man was barely in the room. "Tell us what you know."

"Oh, I say, Sergeant," put in Vance, "let Snitkin have a bit of this brandy first." And he poured a copious drink of his rare *Napoléon* into a whiskey glass on the end of the library table. "The gruesome particulars will keep a moment."

Snitkin hesitated and glanced sheepishly at the District Attorney. Markham merely nodded his head, and the detective gulped down the cognac. "Much obliged, Mr. Vance," he said. "And here's all I know about it."—It is interesting to note that Snitkin addressed himself to Vance and not to either Markham or Heath, although Vance had no official standing in the Police Department.—"There's a small inlet up there in the river, which isn't over three feet deep, and the fellow on the beat—Nelson, I think it was—saw this baby lying on the bank, with his legs sticking out of the water, along about nine o'clock tonight. So he called in and reported it right away, and they sent over a buggy from the local station. The Medical Examiner of the Bronx gave the body the once-over, and it seems the fellow didn't even die from drowning. He was already dead when he was dumped into the water. His head was bashed in with—"

"With the usual blunt instrument," broke in Vance, finishing the sentence. "That's what the medicos always call it when they are not sure just how a johnnie was laid low by violence."

"That's right, Mr. Vance," resumed Snitkin with a grin. "The fellow's head was bashed in with a blunt instrument—that's just what the report said. . . . Well, the doc guessed the guy had been dead twelve hours maybe. There's no telling how long he'd been lying there in the inlet. It's not a place that's likely to be seen by anybody, and it was only by accident that Nelson ran across the body."

"What about identification?" asked Heath officiously.

"Oh, there was plenty identification, Sarge," Snitkin answered. "The guy not only fit the description like a glove, but his clothes and his pockets was full of identification. Looked almost like whoever threw him there wanted him to be identified quick. He had his name on a label on the inside of his coat pocket, and another one under the strap of his vest, and still another one sewed into the watch pocket of his pants. And that ain't all: his name was written on the inside of his shoes—though I don't get that exactly. . . ."

"That's quite correct, Snitkin," remarked Vance. "It's the practice of all custom boot-makers. And the three labels in his clothes merely mean that they were made to order by a custom tailor. Quite custom'ry and understandable."

"Anyhow," Snitkin went on, "I'm simply tellin' you how we know the body is Kenting's. There was a wallet with initials in his inside coat pocket, with a couple of letters addressed to him, and a bunch of callin' cards. . . ."

"I do wish you'd call them visitin' cards," murmured Vance.

"Hell, I'll call 'em anything you want," grinned Snitkin. "Anyhow, they was there. And there was a fancy pocket comb with his initials on it—"

"A pocket comb—eh?" Vance nodded with satisfaction. "Very interestin', Markham. When a gentleman carries a pocket comb—not a particularly popular practice these days, since beards went out of fashion—he would certainly not add a toilet comb to his equipment. . . . Forgive the interruption, Snitkin. Go ahead."

"Well, there was monograms on damn-near everything else he had in his pockets, like his cigarette case and lighter and knife and key-ring and handkerchiefs; and there was even monograms on his underwear. According to the boys at the local station, he was either the Kaspar Kenting we're looking for, or he wasn't nobody. And that was a pretty complete description of him we sent out this morning to all the local precincts."

"No pajamas and no toothbrush in his pocket, Snitkin?" Vance asked.

"Pajamas—a toothbrush?" Snitkin was as much surprised as he was puzzled. "Nothing was said about 'em, Mr. Vance, so I guess they wasn't there. Are they needed for identification?"

"Oh, no—no," Vance returned quickly. "Just a bit of curiosity on my part. Oh, I don't question the identification for a moment, Snitkin. It needs far less proof than you've given us."

"Who gave you all this dope, Snitkin?" asked the Sergeant in a somewhat mollified tone.

"The desk sergeant uptown," Snitkin told him. "He telephoned the Bureau as soon as he got the report from the doc. I had just come in, and took the call myself. Then I phoned you."

Heath nodded as if satisfied.

"That's all right, Snitkin. You'd better go home now and hit the hay,—you been wearin' out your dogs all day. But get down to the Bureau early tomorrow—I'll be needin' you. I'll see about getting some members of the family for official identification of the body in the morning—probably the fellow's brother will be enough. This is a hell of a case."

"But ain't you gonna tear off some rest yourself, Sergeant?" Snitkin asked solicitously.

"I'm a *young* fellow," retorted Heath with good-natured contempt. "I can take it. You old guys need a lot of beauty sleep."

Snitkin grinned again and looked at the Sergeant admiringly.

"Have another little spot, Snitkin, before you go," suggested Vance. And, without waiting for a response, he refilled the whiskey glass.

As before, Snitkin hesitated.

"You know, I'm not officially on duty now, Chief," he said, looking toward Markham almost cooly.

Markham did not glance up—he seemed depressed and worried.

"Go ahead," he barked, but not without a certain kindness. "And don't talk so much. We all need a little support right now."

Snitkin picked up the whiskey glass and emptied it with alacrity. As he set the glass down he drew his coat sleeve across his mouth.

"Chief, you're a swell—" he began. But Heath cut him short.

"Get the hell out of here," he bawled at his subordinate. The Sergeant knew only too well Markham's aversion for any compliments and the curious reticence of the District Attorney's nature. [\[23\]](#)

Snitkin went out—somewhat meekly and wonderingly, but, withal, gratefully—and ten minutes later Heath followed. When we were alone Markham asked:

"What do you think of it, Vance?"

"Thinkin' is an awful bore, Markham," Vance answered with irritating nonchalance. "And it's growing frightfully late, especially considerin' how early I dragged myself into consciousness this morning."

"Never mind all that," Markham spoke with exasperation. "How did you know Kaspar Kenting was dead when I spoke to you on the stairway yesterday morning?"

"You flatter me," said Vance. "I didn't really know. I merely surmised it—basin' my conclusion on the indications."

"So that's your mood," snorted Markham hopelessly. "I'm telling you, you outrageous fop, that this is a damned serious situation—what happened to Fleel tonight ought to prove that."

Vance smoked a moment in silence, and his brow clouded: his whole expression, in fact, changed.

"I know only too well, Markham, how serious the situation is," he said in a grave and curiously subdued voice. "But there's really nothing we can do. We must wait—please believe me. Our hands and feet are tied." He looked at Markham and continued with unwonted earnestness. "The most serious part of the whole affair is that this is not a kidnapping case at all, in the conventional sense. It goes deeper than that. It's cold-blooded, diabolical murder. But I can't quite see my way yet to proving it. I'm far more worried than you, Markham. The whole thing is unspeakably horrible. There are subtle and abnormal elements mixed up in the situation. It's an abominable affair, but as we sit here tonight, I want to tell you that I don't know—I don't know. . . . I'm afraid to make a move until we learn more."

I had rarely heard Vance speak in this tone, and a curious sensation of fear, so potent as to be almost a physical reaction, ran through me.

I am certain that Vance's words had a similar effect on Markham, who made no comment: he sat silent for several minutes. Then he took his leave, without again referring to the case. Vance bade him good night absent-mindedly and remained in his chair, gazing before him into the empty grate.

I myself went immediately to bed and—I am a little loath to admit it—slept fairly well: I was somewhat exhausted, and a physical relaxation had come over me, despite my mental tension. But had I known what terrible and heart-paralyzing events the following day held in store, I doubt if I could have slept a wink that night.

## 15. ALEXANDRITE AND AMETHYST

(Friday, July 22; 8:40 a.m.)

I shall never forget the following day. It will ever remain in my memory as one of the great horrors of my life. It was the day when Vance and Heath and I came nearer to death than ever before or since. I still remember the scene in the private office of the now closed Kinkaid Casino;<sup>[24]</sup> and the report of Vance's hideous death in the course of the Garden murder case will never be erased from my mind. But as I look back upon these and other frightful episodes which froze my blood and filled my heart with cold fear, not one of them looms as appalling as do the events of that memorable Friday in the blistering heat of this particular summer.

It was, in a way, the outcome of Vance's own decision. He deliberately sought it as the result of some strange and unusual emotional reaction. He staked his own life in the attempt to prevent something which he considered diabolical. Vance was a man whose cold mental processes generally governed his every action; but in this emergency he impulsively followed his instincts. I frankly admit that it was, to me, a new phase of the man's many-sided character—a phase with which I was unfamiliar, and which I would not have believed was actually part of his make-up.

The day began conventionally enough, except that Vance rose at eight. I did not know how much sleep he actually got after Markham departed the night before. I know only that I myself woke up for a brief interval, hours after I had retired, and could hear his footsteps as if he were pacing up and down in the library. But when I joined him for breakfast at half-past eight that morning, there was no indication either in his eyes or in his manner—which was as nonchalant and disinterested as ever—that he had been deprived of his rest.

He was dressed in a dark grey herring-bone suit, a pair of soft black leather oxfords, and a dark green cravat with white polka-dots. He greeted me with his customarily cynical but pleasant ease. But he made no comment to explain his early (for him) rising. He seemed altogether natural and unconcerned about the happenings of the day before. When he had finished his Turkish coffee and lighted a second *Régie* he settled back in his chair and spoke, quite casually, about the Kenting case.

"An amazin' and complicated affair—eh, what, Van? There are far too many facets to it—same like those stones in old Karl Kenting's collection—to leave one entirely comfortable. Dashed elusive—and deuced tangled. I naturally have certain suspicions, but I am by no means sure of my ground. I don't like those missin' gems—they tie up too consistently with the rest of the incidents. I don't like that unused ladder—so subtly and uselessly moved from one window to another. I don't like that abortive attempt on Feel's life last night, or Quaggy's fortuitous appearance on the scene—Feel was undoubtedly in a jittery state when we found him and actually incredulous at finding himself still alive. And I don't at all like the general situation in that old high-ceilinged purple house—it's not a wholesome place and has too many sinister possibilities. . . . There has already been one murder that we know of, and there may be another which we haven't yet heard about."

He looked up with a troubled glance and drew in a deep breath.

"No—oh, no; it's not a nice case," he went on as if to himself. "But what are we to do about it? Today may bring an answer. Haste on our part might spoil everything. But haste—oh, tremendous haste—is now of the utmost importance to the killer. That is why I think something will happen before very long. I'm hopin', Van. I'm also countin' on the anxiety of the person who has plotted and carried out this beastly affair to this point. . . ."

He smoked a while in silence. I offered no comment or opinion, for I knew he had been thinking aloud rather than addressing me personally. When the lighted tip of his cigarette had almost reached the platinum rim of his slender ivory holder he got up slowly, moved to the front window, and stood gazing out at the sunlit street. Despite the sunshine, a humid mist fell over the city and presaged a stagnant, airless day. When Vance turned back to me he seemed to have made a decision.

"I think we'll take a spin down to Markham's office, Van," he said. "There's nothing to do here, and there may be some news which Markham naively regards as too trivial to telephone me about. But it's the little obscure things that are goin' to solve this case."<sup>[25]</sup>

Vance walked energetically across the room and, ringing for Currie, ordered his car.

Vance drove swiftly down Madison Avenue in a curiously abstracted mood. We arrived at Markham's office a few minutes before ten o'clock.

"Glad you came, Vance," was Markham's greeting. "I was about to call you on the phone."

"Ah!" Vance sat down lazily. "Any tidin's, glad or otherwise?"

"I'm afraid not," Markham returned dispiritedly, "although things have been going ahead. A great deal of the necessary police work has been done, but we haven't come upon any promising lead as yet."

"Oh, yes. Of course." Vance smiled mildly. "Jolly old Police Department simply must imitate the whirling dervish before they feel entitled to settle down to the serious business in hand. I suppose you mean finger-prints, photographs, and the futile search for possible lookers-on, and the grilling—as you call it—of perfectly innocent and harmless people, and a careful search of the spot where Kaspar was found, as well as a thorough overhauling of the abandoned car."

Markham responded with a contemptuous snort.

"Those things simply have to be done. Very often they lead us to vital facts in the case. All criminals are not super-geniuses—they make mistakes occasionally."

"Oh, to be sure," Vance sighed. "Concatenation of circumstances impossible of duplication. Reconstruction from two points of view—and so on *ad infinitum*. I think I know all the catch phrases by this time. . . . However, proceed to unburden thyself."

"Well," said Markham in a hard, practical voice, ignoring Vance's frivolous interlude, "Kenyon Kenting was taken to the uptown morgue this morning and he identified his brother's body beyond a doubt. And I saw no need to put any other members of the family through the harrowing experience."

"Most considerate of you," murmured Vance—and it was difficult to know whether his remark was intended to convey a tinge of sarcasm or was merely a conventional retort. In any event, Markham's statement left him utterly indifferent.

"Mrs. Kenting's room," continued Markham, "as well as the window-sill and the ladder, was gone over thoroughly for finger-prints —"

"And none was found, of course, except the Sergeant's and mine."

"You're right," conceded Markham. "The person, or persons, must have worn gloves."

"Assumin' there was a person—or persons."

"All right, all right." Markham was beginning to be annoyed. "You're so damned cryptic about everything, and so reticent, that I have no way of knowing what prompted that last remark of yours. But, whatever you think, there must have been some one somewhere, or Mrs. Kenting could not have disappeared as she did."

"Quite true," returned Vance. "We can quite safely eliminate a *capella* accidents or amnesia or such things, in view of all the circumstances. I suppose all the hospitals have been checked as part of the pirouetting activities of Centre Street's master minds?"

"Naturally. And we drew a blank at every step. But if we failed in that respect we have, at least, disposed of the possibility."

"Amazin' progress," commented Vance. "There'll be finger-prints somewhere, so don't be downcast, old dear. But the signs-manual will be found, if at all, somewhere far removed from the Kenting house. Personally, I'd say you wouldn't find them till you have located the car in which Mrs. Kenting was probably driven away last night."

"What do you mean—what car?" demanded Markham.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Vance laconically. "But I hardly think the lady walked out of sight. . . . And, by the by, Markham, speakin' of cars, what enormous array of information did you marshal about the green coupé that the energetic Sergeant found so conveniently waiting for him in the transverse? . . . Doubtless stolen—eh, what?"

Markham nodded glumly.

"Yes, Vance, that's just it. Belongs to a perfectly respectable spinster on upper West End Avenue. And a careful search of the car itself produced only the fact that there was a small sub-machine gun thrown into the tool chest under the seat."

"And the license plates?" asked Vance casually.

"Oh, those were stolen too." Markham spoke disgustedly.

"Plates didn't belong to the car, eh?" Vance smoked meditatively without stirring. "Very interestin'. Stolen car and stolen license plates. A car that doesn't belong to the fleeing occupants, and plates that don't belong to the car—well, well. Implies two cars, don't you know. Maybe it was the second car in which Mrs. Kenting was spirited away. Merely hazardin' a guess, don't y' know." He now uncrossed his knees and drew himself up slightly in his chair. "I rather imagine the dirty-green coupé was following Fleel around last night when Mrs. Kenting sallied forth to her assignation, and it was left to the other car to take care of the lady, as it were. Fairly well equipped gang."

"I don't follow you, Vance," Markham returned; "although I have a vague notion of the theory you're working out. But many other things might have happened last night."

"Oh, quite," agreed Vance. "As I said, I was merely hazardin' a guess. . . . What about Abe, the buddy of the chauffeur who drove us home last night? I suppose Heath or some of the Torquemadas in Centre Street put the poor devil through the requisite torture?"

"You read too many trashy books, Vance." Markham was indignant. "Heath talked to the driver of the number one cab at Headquarters within an hour of the time he left here last night. He merely corroborated what our chauffeur told us—namely, that he dropped the two men who came out of the transverse at the uptown entrance of the Lexington Avenue subway. Incidentally, they didn't wait for change but hurried down the stairs—they were probably just in time to catch the last express."

Vance again sighed lightly. "Most helpful. . . . Any other coruscatin' discoveries?"

"I spoke to the doctor who went over Kaspar's body," Markham went on. "And there's little or nothing to add to Snitkin's report of last night. The exact location of the spot where he was found was determined, and the ground was gone over carefully. But there were no footprints or suggestive indications of any kind. McLaughlin heard and saw nothing last night around the Kenting house; Weem and the cook both stick to the story that they were asleep during that whole time; and two taxicab drivers who were at the Columbus Avenue corner did not remember seeing Mrs. Kenting, whom they know by sight, come down that way."

"Well, your information seems to be typically thorough and typically useless," said Vance. "Did any one do a bit of checkin' up to ascertain whether there were any unaccounted-for semiprecious stones round town?"

Markham gave him a look of mild surprise and mock pity.

"Good heavens, no! What have your semiprecious stones to do with a case of kidnapping?"

"My dear Markham!" protested Vance. "I have told you—and I thought, in my naive way, that it had even been demonstrated to you—that this is *not* a case of kidnapping. Won't you even permit a subtle killer to set the stage for himself—to indulge in a bit of spectacular *décor*; so to speak? That collection of old Karl Kenting's gems has a dashed lot to do with the case. . . ."

"Well, suppose those pieces of colored glass do have something to do with the disappearances, what of it?" Markham interrupted aggressively. "I'm not worried as much about such vague factors in the case as I am about that attack on Fleel."

"Oh, that," Vance shrugged. "A mere bit of technique. And the operator of the sub-machine gun was kind enough to miss his target. As I told Fleel, he was very lucky."

"But whether Fleel survived or not," muttered Markham, "it was a dastardly affair."

"I quite agree with you there, Markham," said Vance approvingly.

At this moment Markham's secretary, coming swiftly through the swinging leather door, interrupted the conversation.

"Chief," he announced, "there's a young fellow outside who's terribly excited and insists on seeing you at once. Says it's about the Kenting case. Gives his name as Falloway."

"Oh, send him in, by all means," said Vance, before Markham had time to answer.

The secretary looked interrogatingly at the District Attorney. Markham hesitated only a moment and then nodded. A few moments later Fraim Falloway was shown into the office. He came into the room with a frightened air, and bade Markham good morning. His

eyes seemed larger and his face paler than when I had last seen him.

"Tell us what's on your mind, Mr. Falloway." Vance spoke softly.

The youth turned and noticed him for the first time.

"I'll tell you, all right," he said in quick, tremulous accents. "That—that beautiful alexandrite stone is gone from the collection. I'm sure it's been stolen."

"Stolen?" Vance looked at the youth closely. "Why do you say stolen?"

"I—I don't know," was the flustered reply. "All I know is that it is gone—how else could it have disappeared unless it was stolen? It was there two days ago."

Even I remembered the stone—an unusually large and beautifully cut octagonal stone of perhaps forty carats, which was in a place of honor, in the most conspicuous case, surrounded by other specimens of chrysoberyl. I had taken particular notice of it the morning of Kaspar Kenting's disappearance when Vance and I had looked over the various glass cases before ascending the stairs to Kaspar's room.

"I don't know anything about those stones in the collection," Falloway went on excitedly, "but I do know about this magnificent alexandrite. It always fascinated me—it was the only gem in the collection I cared anything about. It was a wonderful and beautiful thing. I used to go into the room often just to look at that stone. I could lose myself before it for an hour at a time. In the daytime it was the most marvellous green, like dark jade, with only touches of red in it; but at night, in the artificial light, it changed its color completely and became a thrilling red, like wine."

As Markham threw him a look of incredulity, Falloway hastened on.

"Oh, it was no miracle.—I looked it up in a book; I read about it. It had some strange and mystic quality which made it absorb and refract and reflect the light upon it in different ways. But I haven't feasted my eyes on it for two days—we've all been so upset—until last night—but that was in the yellow artificial light—and it was a beautiful red then."

Falloway paused and then hurried on ecstatically.

"But I like it most in the daylight when it turns green and mysterious—that's when it recalls to me Swinburne's great poem, *The Triumph of Time*: 'I will go back to the great sweet mother, mother and lover of men, the sea.'—Oh, I hope you see what I mean. . . ." He looked at each of us in turn. "So this morning—a little while ago—I went downstairs to look at it: I needed something—something . . . But it wasn't green at all. It was still red, almost purple. And after I had looked at it a while in amazement, I realized that even the cutting was different. It was the same size and shape—but that was all. Oh, I know every facet of that alexandrite. It was not the same stone. It had been taken away and another stone left in its place! . . ."

He fumbled nervously in his outside pocket and finally drew out a large deep-colored gem, which can best be described as deep red but with a very decided purple cast. He held it out to Vance on the palm of his shaking hand.

"That's what was left in the place of my beloved alexandrite!"

Vance took the stone and looked at it a moment. Still holding the gem he let his hand fall to his lap, and looked up at Falloway with a comprehending nod.

"Yes, I see what you mean—quite," he said. "As good a substitution as possible. This is merely amethyst. Of comparatively little value. Similar to alexandrite, however, and often mistaken for it by amateurs. Any one would trade an amethyst for an alexandrite, the price of which has recently begun to soar. Can you say with any accuracy when the exchange was made?"

Falloway shook his head vaguely and sat down heavily.

"No," he said phlegmatically. "As I told you, I haven't seen it in daylight for two days, and last night I looked at it for just a second and didn't realize that it wasn't the alexandrite. I discovered the truth this morning. The exchange might have been made at any time since I last saw the real stone in daylight."

Vance again looked at the stone and handed it back to Falloway.

"Return it to the case as soon as you reach home. And say nothing about it to any one till I speak to you again." He turned to the District Attorney. "Y' know, Markham, fine alexandrite is a very rare and valuable variety of chrysoberyl. It was discovered less than a hundred years ago, in the Urals, and it was named after the czarevitch who later became the conservative and reformatory Alexander II, Czar of Russia, for it first came to light on his birthday. As Mr. Falloway rightly says, it is a curious dichroic gem. The light of the spectrum is reflected, absorbed and refracted in such a way that in the daylight it is quite green, and in artificial light, especially gas-light, it is a pronounced deep and scintillating red, slightly on the blue, or short wavelength end of the spectrum. A fine specimen of alexandrite the size of that stone would now be worth a small fortune. Such a specimen is the dream of every collector. I saw the stone when I glanced through the cases Wednesday morning and marvelled at old Karl's good luck. The other indifferent items in the collection were anything but consistent with that alexandrite; and when I spoke to Kenyon Kenting that morning, I entirely omitted any mention of that particular stone, for it takes more than one exceptional piece of chrysoberyl, no matter how beautiful, to constitute a well-rounded collection."

Vance paused a moment with a reflective look, and then continued.

"Amethyst, a variety of quartz, which likewise comes from Russia, although somewhat similar in shade to alexandrite, does not have that peculiar dichroic characteristic. Amethyst, d' ye see, has a structural dissimilarity from alexandrite. At times we find in the crystals a right-angular formation to the edge of the prism, shaped in sectoral triangles. This accounts for its bicolored—the so-called white and purple tints, making it resemble two separate, fused stones. The fractural ripples and the feather-like effects—so apparent in amethyst—result from this peculiar laterality of structure. On the other hand, Markham, alexandrite—"

"Thanks for the lecture, but forgive me if I am not interested." Markham was irritated. "What I'd like to know is whether you see anything significant in the disappearance of the alexandrite and the substitution of the amethyst."

"Oh, yes—decidedly. You'd be amazed if you knew how highly significant it is." He turned quickly to Fraim Falloway, who had been listening with an eagerness of interest I had not seen him display at any previous time. "I think, Mr. Falloway, you would better return to your home at once and do exactly as I told you. We are grateful no end for your coming here and telling us about the missin' stone."

Falloway rose heavily.

"I'll put the stone back in place right away."

"Oh, by the by, Mr. Falloway." Vance drew himself up sharply. "If, as you have intimated, your favorite cutting of alexandrite was stolen, could you suggest the possible thief? Could it, for instance, have been any one you know?"

"You mean some one in the house?—or Mr. Quaggy or Mr. Fleel?" retorted Falloway with a show of indignation. "What would they want with my alexandrite?" He shook his head shrewdly. "But I have an idea who did take it."

"Ah!"

"Yes! I know more than you think I do." Falloway made a pitiful effort to thrust forward his narrow chest. "It was Kaspar—that's who it was!"

Vance nodded indulgently.

"But Kaspar is dead. His body was found last night."

"A damned good riddance!" Vance's announcement left Falloway unruffled. "I was hoping he wouldn't come back."

"He won't," interjected Markham laconically, staring at the youth with unmistakable disgust.

I doubt if Falloway even heard the District Attorney's remark: his attention was concentrated on Vance.

"But do you think you can ever find my beautiful alexandrite?" he asked. He seemed to regard the disappearance of the alexandrite as a personal loss.

"Oh, yes—I'm quite sanguine we shall recover it," Vance assured him.

The youth, greatly relieved, went toward the door with heavy, dragging feet.

Markham's secretary came again through the leather door, just before Falloway reached it, and announced Kenyon Kenting.

"Send him in," said Markham.

Kenting and Falloway passed each other on the threshold. I was forcibly struck by the wordless exchange of hostility which passed between the elder and the younger man. Kenting bowed stiffly and muttered a word of greeting as he passed the other, with a stiff, elderly dignity in his manner. But Falloway did not respond as he went through to the outer office.



## 16. "THIS YEAR OF OUR LORD"

(Friday, July 22; 11 a.m.)

As Kenting stepped into the office it was obvious that he was in a perturbed state of mind. He nodded to Vance and to me, and, going to Markham's desk, dejectedly placed an envelope before the District Attorney.

"That came in the second mail this morning, to my office," Kenting said, controlling his excitement with considerable effort. "It's another one of those damn notes."

Markham had already picked up the envelope and was carefully extracting the folded sheet of paper from inside.

"And Fleel," added Kenting, "got a similar one in the same mail—at his office. He phoned me about it, just as I was leaving to come here. He sounded very much upset and asked me if I also had received a note from the kidnappers. I told him I had, and I read it to him over the phone. I added I was bringing it immediately to you; and Fleel said he would meet me here shortly and bring his own note with him. He hasn't, by any chance, come already?"

"Not yet," Markham answered, glancing up from the note. His face was unusually grave, and there was a deep, hopeless frown round his eyes. When he had finished his perusal of the note he picked up the envelope and handed them both to Vance.

"I suppose you'll want to see these, Vance," the District Attorney muttered distractedly.

"Oh, quite—by all means."

Vance, with his monocle already adjusted, took the note and the envelope with suppressed eagerness, glancing first at the envelope and then at the single sheet of paper. I had risen and was standing behind him, leaning over his chair.

The paper on which the note was written in lead pencil was exactly like that of the first note Fleel had received in the mail the day before. The disguised, deliberately clumsy chirography was also similar, but there was a distinct difference in the way it was worded. The spelling was correct, and the sentences grammatically constructed. Nor was there any pretense here in the means of expression. It was as if whoever wrote it had purposely abandoned such tactics so that there might be no mistake or misunderstanding of any kind regarding the import of the message. Vance merely read it through once—he did not seem greatly interested in it. But it was obvious that something about it annoyed and puzzled him.

The note read:

You did not obey instructions. You called in the police. We saw everything. That is why we took his wife. If you fail us again, the same thing will happen to her that happened to him. This is your last warning. Have the \$50,000 ready at five o'clock today (Friday). You will get instructions at that time. And if you notify the police this time it is no dice. We mean business. Beware!

For signature there was the interlocking-squares symbol that had come to have such a sinister portent for us all.

"Very interestin' and illuminatin'," murmured Vance, as he carefully refolded the note, replaced it in the envelope, and tossed it back on Markham's desk. "The money is quite obviously wanted immediately. But I am not at all convinced that it was only the presence of the police that turned last night's episode in the park into a fiasco. However . . ."

"What shall I do—what shall I do?" Kenting asked, glancing distractedly from Vance to the District Attorney and back again.

"Really, y' know," said Vance in a kindly tone, "you can't do anything at present. You must wait for the forthcoming instructions. And then there's Mr. Fleel's *billet-doux* which we hope to see anon."

"I know, I know," mumbled Kenting hopelessly. "But it would be horrible if anything should happen to Madeline."

Vance was silent a moment, and his eyes clouded. He showed more concern than he had since he had entered the Kenting case.

"One never knows, of course," he murmured. "But we can hope for the best. I realize that this waiting is abominable. But we are at a loss at present even as to where to begin. . . . By the by, Mr. Kenting, I don't suppose you heard the shots that were fired at Mr. Fleel shortly after you left your brother's house last night?"

"No, I didn't." Kenting seemed greatly perturbed. "I was frightfully shocked on hearing about it this morning. When I left you last night I was lucky enough to catch a taxicab just as I reached the corner, and I went directly home. How long after I left the house did Fleel go?"

"Just a few minutes," Vance returned. "But no doubt you had time to have got a taxi and have been well on your way."

Kenting considered the matter for a minute; then he looked up sharply with a frightened expression.

"Perhaps—perhaps—" he began in an awed voice which seemed to tremble with a sudden and uncontrollable emotion. "Perhaps those shots were intended for me! . . ."

"Oh, no, no—nothing like that," Vance assured him. "I'm quite sure the shots were not intended for you, sir. The fact is, I am not convinced that the shots were intended even for Mr. Fleel."

"What's that you say!" Kenting sat up quickly. "What do you mean by that? . . ."

Before Vance could answer, a buzzer sounded on Markham's desk. As the District Attorney pressed a key on the intercommunicating call-box a voice from the outer office announced that Fleel had just arrived. Markham had barely given instructions that Fleel be sent in when the lawyer came impatiently through the swinging door and joined us. He, too, looked pale and drawn and showed unmistakable traces of lack of rest,—he appeared to have lost much of his earlier self-confidence. He greeted all of us formally with the exception of Kenyon Kenting, with whom he shook hands with a silent, expressive grasp.

"A difficult situation," he said with a formal effort at condolence. "My deepest sympathy goes to you, Kenyon."

Kenting shrugged despondently.

"You yourself had a pretty close call last night."

"Oh, well," the other muttered, "at least I'm safe and sound enough now. But I can't understand that attack. Can't imagine who would

want to shoot me, or what good it would do any one. It's the most incredible thing."

Kenting threw a sharp look at Vance, but Vance was busying himself with a fresh cigarette and seemed oblivious to the conventional interchange between the two men.

Feele moved toward the District Attorney's desk.

"I brought the note I received in the mail this morning," he said, fumbling in his pocket. "There's no reason whatever why I should be getting anything like this—unless the kidnappers imagine that I control all the Kenting money and have it on deposit. . . . You can understand that I am greatly disturbed by this communication, and I thought it would be best to show it to you without delay, at the same time explaining to you that there's absolutely nothing I can do in the matter."

"There's no need for an explanation," said Markham abruptly. "We are wholly cognizant of that phase of the situation. Let's see the note."

Feele had drawn an envelope from his inside coat pocket and held it out to Markham. As he did so his eyes fell on the note that Kenting had brought and which lay on the District Attorney's desk.

"Do you mind if I take a look at this?" he asked.

"Go right ahead," answered Markham as he opened the envelope Feele had given him.

The note that Feele turned over to Markham was not as long as the one received by Kenting. It was, however, written on the same kind of paper; and it was written in pencil and in the same handwriting.

The few brief sentences struck me as highly ominous:

You have double-crossed us. You have control of the money. Get busy. And don't try any more foolishness again. You are a good lawyer and can handle everything if you want to. And you had better want to. We expect to see you according to instructions in our letter to Kenting today in this year of our Lord, 1936, or else it will be too bad.[\[26\]](#)

The interlocking, ink-brushed squares completed the message.

When Markham had finished reading it and handed it to Vance, Vance went through it quickly but carefully and, sliding it into the envelope, laid it on Markham's desk beside the note which Kenting had brought in, and which Feele had read and replaced without comment.

"I can say to you, Mr. Feele," Vance told him, "only what I have already said to Mr. Kenting—that there is nothing to be done at the present moment. A rational decision is quite impossible just now. You must wait for the next communication—by whatever method it may come—before you can decide on a course of action."

He rose and confronted the two unstrung men.

"There is much to be done yet," he said. "And we are most sympathetic and eager to be helpful. Please believe that we are doing everything possible. I would advise that you both remain in your offices until you have heard something further. We will certainly communicate with you later, and we appreciate the cooperation you are giving us. . . . By the by,"—he spoke somewhat offhand to Kenting—"has your money been returned to you?"

"Yes, yes, Vance." It was Markham's impatient voice that answered. "Mr. Kenting received the money the first thing this morning. Two of the men in the Detective Division across the hall delivered it to him."

Kenting nodded in confirmation of the District Attorney's statement.

"Most efficient," sighed Vance. "After all, y' know, Markham, Mr. Kenting couldn't give the money out unless he had it again in his possession. . . . Most grateful for the information."

Vance addressed Feele and Kenting again.

"We will, of course, expect to hear immediately when you receive any further communication, or if any new angle develops." His tone was one of polite dismissal.

"Don't worry on that score, Mr. Vance." Kenting was reaching for his hat. "As soon as either one of us gets the instructions promised in my note, you'll hear all about it."

A few moments later he and Feele left the office together.

As the door closed behind them Vance swung swiftly about and went to Markham's desk.

"That note to Feele!" he exclaimed. "I don't like it, Markham. I don't at all like it. It is the most curious concoction. I must see it again."

As he spoke he picked up the note once more and, resuming his chair, studied the paper with far more interest and care than he had shown when the lawyer and Kenting had been present.

"You notice, of course, that both notes were cancelled in the same post-office station as was yesterday's communication—the Westchester Station."

"Certainly I noticed it," Markham returned almost angrily. "But what is there significant about the postmark?"

"I don't know, Markham,—I really don't know. It's probably a minor point."

Vance did not look up: he was earnestly engaged with the note. He read it through several times, lingering with a troubled frown at the last two or three lines.

"I cannot understand the reference to 'this year of our Lord.' It doesn't belong here. It's out of key. My eyes go back to it every time I finish reading the note. It bothers me frightfully. Something was in the writer's mind—he had a strange thought at that time. It may be entirely meaningless, or it may have been written down inadvertently, like an instinctive or submerged thought which had struggled through in expression, or it could have been written into the note with some very subtle significance for some one who was expected to see it."

"I noticed that phrase, too," said Markham. "It is curious; but, in my opinion, it means nothing at all."

"I wonder. . . ." Vance raised his hand and brushed it lightly over his forehead. Then he got to his feet. "I'd like to be alone a while with this note. Where can I go—are the judges' chambers unoccupied?"

Markham looked at him in puzzled amazement.

"I don't know." His perturbed, questioning scrutiny of Vance continued. "By the way, Sergeant Heath should be here any minute now."

"Stout fella, Heath," Vance murmured. "I may want to see him. . . . But where can I go?"

"You can go into my private office, you damned prima donna." Markham pointed to a narrow door in the west wall of the room. "You'll be alone in there. Shall I let you know when Heath gets here?"

"No—no." Vance shook his head as he crossed the room. "Just tell him to wait for me." And, carrying the note before him, he opened the side door and went out of the room.

Markham looked after him in bewildered silence. Then he turned half-heartedly to a pile of papers and documents neatly arranged at one side of his desk blotter. He worked for some time on extraneous matters.

It was fully ten minutes before Vance emerged from the private office. In the meantime Heath had arrived and was waiting impatiently in one of the leather lounging chairs near the steel letter files in one corner of the room. When the Sergeant had stepped into the office Markham greeted him with simulated annoyance.

"Our pet orchid is communing with his soul in my private office," he explained. "He said he may want to see you; so you'd better take a chair in the corner and wait to see what his profound contemplation will produce. Meanwhile, you might look at the note Kenting received this morning." Markham handed it to the Sergeant. "Another note, received by Feel, is being submitted to the searching monocle, as it were."

Heath had grinned at Markham's sarcastic, but good-natured, comments and sat down as the District Attorney returned to his work.

When Vance re-entered the room he threw a quick glance in Heath's direction. It was obvious he was in an unusually serious mood and seemed unmindful of his surroundings.

"Cheerio, Sergeant," he greeted Heath as he became fully aware of his presence. "I'm glad you came in. Thanks awfully for waitin', and all that. . . . I'm sure you've already read the note Kenting received. Here's the one Feel brought in."

And he tossed it negligently to me with a nod of his head toward Heath. His eyes, a little strained and with an unwonted intensity in them, were still on Markham as I stepped across the room to Heath with the paper.

Vance now stood in the centre of the room, gazing down at the floor, deep in thought as he smoked. After a moment he raised his head slowly and let his eyes rest meditatively on Markham again.

"It could be—it could be," he murmured. And I felt that he was making an effort to control himself. "I want to see a detailed map of New York right away."

"On that wall—over there." Markham was watching him closely. "In the wooden frame. Just pull it down—it's on a roller."

Vance unrolled the black-and-white chart, with its red lines, and smoothed it against the wall. After a few minutes' search of the intersecting lines he turned back to Markham with a curious look on his face and heaved a sigh of relief.

"Let me see that yellow slip you had yesterday, with the official bound'ries of the Westchester Station post-office district."

Markham, still patiently silent, handed him the paper. Vance took it back to the map with him, glanced from the slip of paper to the chart and back again, and began to trace an imaginary zigzag line with his finger. I heard him enumerating, half to himself: "Pelham, Kingsland, Mace, Gunhill, Bushnell, Hutchinson River . . ."

Then his finger came to a stop, and he turned triumphantly.

"That's it! That's it!" His voice had a peculiar pitch. "I think I have found the meaning of that phrase."

"What in the name of Heaven do you mean?" Markham had half risen from his chair and was leaning forward with his hands on the desk.

"'This year of our Lord,' and the numerals. There's a Lord Street in that outlined section—up near Givans Basin—a section of open spaces and undeveloped highways. And the year 19—" and he gave the other two digits. "That's the house number—they run in the nineteen-hundreds over near the water on Lord Street. And, incidentally, I note that the only logical way to reach there is to take the Lexington Avenue subway uptown."

Markham sank slowly back into his chair without taking his eyes from Vance.

"I see what you mean," he said. "But—" He hesitated a moment. "That's merely a wild guess. A groundless assumption. It's too specious, too vague. It may not be an address at all. . . ." Then he added: "You may merely have stumbled on a coincidence—" He stopped abruptly. "Do you think we ought to send some men out there—on a chance?"

"My word, no!" Vance returned emphatically. "That might wreck everything, providin' we've really got something here. Your myrmidons would be sure to give warning and bungle things; and only a moment would be needed for a strategic move fatal to our plans. This matter must be handled differently."

His face darkened; his eyelids drooped menacingly; and I knew that some new and overpowering emotion had taken hold of him.

"I'm going myself," he said. "It may be a wild-goose chase, but it must be done, don't y' know. We can't leave any possible avenue of approach untried just now. There's something frightful and sinister going on. And I'm not at all certain as to what will be found there. I'm a helpless babe, cryin' for the light."

Markham was impressed and, I believe, a little concerned at his manner.

"I don't like it, Vance. I think you should have protection, in case of an emergency—"

Heath had come forward and stood solemnly at one end of the desk.

"I'm going with you, Mr. Vance," he said, in a voice that was both stolid and final. "I got a feeling you may be needin' me. An' I sorta like the idea of that address you figured out. Anyhow, I'll have something to tell my grandchildren about learnin' how wrong you were."

Vance looked at the man a while seriously, and then slowly nodded.

"That will be quite all right, Sergeant," he said calmly. "I may need your help. And as for finding me wrong: I'm willin', don't y' know—like Barkis. But how are you going to have grandchildren when you're not even a benedick?[27] . . . In the meantime, Sergeant," he went on, dropping his jocular manner, and jotting down something on a small piece of yellow paper he had torn from the

scratch-pad on Markham's desk, "have this carefully attended to—constant observation. You understand?"

Heath took the yellow slip, looked at it in utter amazement, and then stuffed it into his pocket. His eyes were wide and a look of skepticism and incredulity came into them.

"I don't like to say so, Mr. Vance, but I think you're daffy, sir."

"I don't in the least mind, Sergeant." Vance spoke almost affectionately. "But I want you to see to it, nevertheless." And he met the other's gaze coldly and steadily.

Heath moved his head up and down, his lips hanging open in disbelief.

"If you say so, sir," he mumbled. "But I still think—"

"Never mind making the effort, Sergeant." There was an irresistibly imperious note in Vance's tone. "But if you disobey that order—which, incidentally, is the first I've ever given you—I cannot proceed with the case."

Heath tried to grin but failed.

"I'll take care of it," he said. Though he was still awestricken, his tone was subdued. "When do we go?"

"After dark, of course," Vance replied, relaxing perceptibly. "It's misty and somewhat overcast today. . . . Be at my apartment at half-past eight. We'll drive up in my car."

Again the Sergeant moved his head up and down slowly.

"God Almighty!" he said. "I can't believe it: it don't make sense. Anyway," he added, "I'll string along with you, Mr. Vance. I'll be there at eight-thirty—heeled plenty."

"So you really believe I may be right," said Vance with a smile.

"Well, I ain't taking any chances—come what may."

## 17. SHOTS IN THE DARK

(Friday, July 22; noon.)

Vance remained in Markham's office only a short time after his enigmatic talk with Heath. (I did not regard that brief conversation as particularly momentous at the time, but within a few hours I learned that it was actually one of the most important conversations that had ever passed between these two widely disparate, but mutually sympathetic, men.)

Markham attempted repeatedly, with both cajolery and brusqueness, to draw Vance out. The District Attorney wished particularly to hear what significance Vance attached to the missing alexandrite, and what import he had sensed in the two notes which Kenting and Fleel had brought in. Vance, however, was unusually grave and adamant. He would give no excuse for not expressing freely his theory regarding the case; but his manner was such that Markham realized, as did I, that Vance had an excellent reason for temporarily withholding his suspicions from the District Attorney—and, I might add, from me as well.

In the end Markham was highly annoyed and, I think, somewhat resentful.

"I trust you know, Vance," he said in a tone intended to be coldly formal, but which did not entirely disguise his deep-rooted respect for the peculiar methods Vance followed in his investigation of a case, "that, as official head of the Police Department, I can compel Sergeant Heath here to show me that slip of paper you handed him."

"I fully appreciate that fact," Vance replied in a tone equally as frigid as Markham's. "But I also know you will not do it." Only once, during the investigation of the Bishop murder case, had I seen so serious an expression in Vance's eyes. "I know I can trust you to do nothing of the kind, and to forgo your technical rights in this instance." His voice suddenly softened and a look of genuine affection overspread his face as he added: "I want your confidence until tonight—I want you to believe that I have good and specific reasons for my seemingly boorish obstinacy."

Markham kept his eyes on Vance for several moments and then glanced away as he busied himself a little ostentatiously with a cigar.

"You're a damned nuisance," he mumbled, with simulated anger. "I wish I had never seen you."

"Do you flatter yourself, for one minute, Markham," retorted Vance, "that I have particularly enjoyed your acquaintance during the past fifteen years?"

And then Vance did something I had never seen him do before. He took a step toward Markham and held out his hand. Markham turned to him without any show of surprise and grasped his hand with sincere cordiality.

"After all," said Vance lightly, "you're only a District Attorney, don't y' know. I'll make due allowances." And he went from the room without another word, leaving the Sergeant and Markham in the room together.

Vance and I had luncheon at the Caviar Restaurant, and he lingered unconscionably long over his favorite brandy, which they always kept for him and brought out ceremoniously when he appeared at that restaurant. During the meal he spoke but infrequently—and then about subjects far removed from the Kenting case.

We went directly home after he had finished sipping his cognac, and Vance spent the entire afternoon in desultory reading in the library. I went into the room for some papers around four o'clock and noticed that he was engrossed in Erasmus' *Encomium Moriae*.

As I stood for a moment behind him, looking discreetly over his shoulder, he looked up with a serious expression: he had settled into a studious mood.

"After all, Van," he commented, "what would the world be without folly? Nothing matters vitally—does it? Listen to this comfortin' thought:"—he ran his finger along the Erasmus passage before him and translated the words slowly—"So likewise all this life of mortal man, what is it but a certain kind of stage play? . . . Same like Shakespeare wrote in *As You Like It*, which came a century later—what?"

Vance was in a peculiar humor, and I knew he was endeavoring to cover up what was actually in his mind; and for some reason, which I could not understand, I was prompted to quote to him, in answer, the famous line from Horace's *Epistles*: *Nec luisse pudet, sed non incidere ludum*. However, I refrained, and went on about my work as Vance took up his book again.

A little before six o'clock Markham came in unexpectedly.

"Well, Vance," he said banteringly, "I suppose you're still indulging your flair for melodramatic reticence, and are still playing the part of *l'homme de mystère*. However, I'll respect your idiosyncrasies—with tongue in cheek, of course."

"Most generous of you," murmured Vance. "I'm overwhelmed. . . . What do you wish to tell me? I know full well you didn't come all the way to my humble diggin's without some sad message for me."

Markham sobered and sat down near Vance.

"I haven't heard yet from either Fleel or Kenting. . . ." he began.

"I rather expected that bit of news." Vance rose and, ringing for Currie, ordered Dubonnet. Then, as he resumed his seat, he went on. "Really, there's nothing to worry about. They have probably decided to proceed without the bunglin' assistance of the police this time—those last notes were pretty insistent on that point. Kenting undoubtedly has received his instructions. . . . By the by, have you tried to communicate with him?"

Markham nodded gravely.

"I tried to reach him at his office an hour ago, and was told he had gone home. I called him there, but the butler told me he had come in and had just gone out without leaving any instructions except that he would not be home for dinner."

"Not what you'd call a highly cooperative johnnie—what?"

The Dubonnet was served, and Vance sipped the wine placidly.

"Of course, you tried to reach him at the Purple House?"

"Of course I did," Markham answered. "But he wasn't there either and wasn't expected there."

"Very interestin'," murmured Vance. "Elusive chap. Food for thought, Markham. Think it over."

"I also tried to get in touch with Fleel," Markham continued doggedly. "But he, like Kenting it seems, had left his office earlier than usual today; nor was I able to reach him at his home."

"Two missin' men," commented Vance. "Very sad. But no need to be upset. Just a private matter being handled privately, I fear. District Attorney's office and the police not bein' trusted. Not entirely unintelligent." He set down his Dubonnet glass. "But there's business afoot, or else I'm horribly mistaken. And what can you do? The actors in the tragic drama refuse to make an appearance. Most disconcertin', from the official point of view. The only thing left for you is to ring down the curtain temporarily, and bide your time. *C'est la fin de la pauvre Manon*—or words to that effect. Abominable opera. Incidentally, what are your plans for the evening?"

"I have to get dressed and attend a damned silly banquet tonight," grumbled Markham.

"It'll probably do you good," said Vance. "And when you make your speech, you can solemnly assure your bored listeners that the situation is under control, and that developments are expected very soon—or golden words to that effect."

Markham remained a short time longer and then went out. Vance resumed his interrupted reading.

Shortly after seven we had a simple home dinner which Currie served to us in the library, consisting of *gigot*, *rissoulées* potatoes, fresh mint jelly, asparagus *hollandaise*, and *savarins à la Medicis*.

Promptly at half-past eight the Sergeant arrived.

"I still think you're daffy, Mr. Vance," he said good-naturedly, as he took a long drink of Bourbon. "However, everything is being attended to."

"If I'm wrong, Sergeant," said Vance with pretended entreaty, "you must never divulge our little secret. The humiliation would be far too great. And I'm waxin' old and sensitive."

Heath chuckled and poured himself another glass of Bourbon. As he did so Vance went to the centre-table and, opening the drawer, brought out an automatic. He inspected it carefully, made sure the magazine was full, and then slipped it into his pocket.

I had risen and was now standing beside him. I reached out my hand for the other automatic in the drawer—the one I had carried in Central Park the night before—but Vance quickly closed the drawer and, turning to me, shook his head in negation.

"Sorry, Van," he said, "but I think you'd better bide at home tonight. This may be a very dangerous mission—or it may be an erroneous guess on my part. However, I rather anticipate trouble, and you'll be safer in your boudoir. . . ."

I became indignant and insisted that I go with him and share whatever danger the night might hold.

Again Vance shook his head.

"I think not, Van." He spoke in a strangely gentle tone. "No need whatever for you to take the risk. I'll tell you all about it when the Sergeant and I return."

He smiled with finality, but I became more insistent and more indignant, and told him frankly that, whether he gave me the gun or not, I intended to go along with him and Heath.

Vance studied me for several moments.

"All right, Van," he said at length. "But don't forget that I warned you." Without saying any more he swung about to the table, opened the drawer, and brought out the other automatic. "I suggest you keep it in your outside pocket this time," he advised, as he handed me the gun. "It's rather difficult to prophesy, don't y' know—though I'm hopin' you won't need the bally thing." Then, going to the window, he looked out for a moment. "It'll be dark by the time we get there." He turned slowly from the window and crossed the room to ring for Currie.

When the butler came into the room Vance looked at him for a while in silence, with a kindly smile.

"If you don't hear from me by eleven," he said, "go to bed. And *schlafen Sie wohl!* If I am not back in the morning, you will find some interesting legal documents in a blue envelope with your name on it, in the upper right-hand drawer of the secret'ry. And notify Mr. Markham." He turned round to Heath with an air of exaggerated nonchalance. "Come along, Sergeant," he said. "Let's be on our way. Duty calls, as the sayin' goes. *Ich dien*, and all that sort of twaddle."

We went down to the street in silence—Vance's instructions to Currie had struck me as curiously portentous. We got into Vance's car, which was waiting outside, Heath and I in the tonneau and Vance at the wheel.

Vance was an expert driver, and he handled the Hispano-Suiza with a quiet efficiency and care that made the long, low-slung car seem almost something animate. There was never the slightest sound of enmeshing gears, never the slightest jerk, as he stopped and started the car in the flow of traffic.

We drove up Fifth Avenue to its northern end, and there crossed the Harlem River into the Bronx. At the far side of the bridge Vance stopped the car and drew a folded map from his pocket.

"No need to lose ourselves in this maze of crisscrossing avenues," he remarked to us over his shoulder. "Since we know where we're going, we might as well mark the route." He had unfolded the map and was tracing an itinerary at one side of it. "Westchester Avenue will take us at least half of the way to our destination; and then if I can work my way through to Bassett Avenue we should have no further difficulties."

He placed the map on the seat beside him and drove on. At the intersection of East 177th Street he made a sharp turn to the left, and we skirted the grounds of the New York Catholic Protectory. After a few more turns a street sign showed that we were on Bassett Avenue, and Vance continued to the north. At its upper end we found ourselves at a small stretch of water,<sup>[28]</sup> and Vance again stopped the car to consult his map.

"I've gone a little too far," he informed us, as he took the wheel again and turned the car sharply to the left, at right angles with Bassett Avenue. "But I'll go through to the next avenue—Waring, I think it is—turn south there, and park the car just round the corner from Lord Street. The number we're looking for should be there or thereabouts."

It took a few minutes to make the detour, for the roadway was unsuitable for automobile traffic. Vance shut off all his lights as we approached the corner, and we drove the last half block in complete darkness, as the nearest street light was far down Waring Avenue. The gliding Hispano-Suiza made no sound under Vance's efficient handling; even the closing of the doors, as we got out, could not be heard more than a few feet away.

We proceeded on foot into Lord Street, a narrow thoroughfare and sparsely inhabited. Here and there was an old wooden shack,



standing out, in the darkness of the night, as a black patch against the overcast sky.

"It would be on this side of the street," Vance said, in a low, vibrant voice. "This is the even-number side. My guess is it's that next two-story structure, just beyond this vacant lot."

"I think you're right at that," Heath returned, *sotto voce*.

When we stood in front of the small frame dwelling, it seemed particularly black. There was no light showing at any of the windows. Until we accustomed our eyes to the darkness it looked as if the place had no windows at all.

Heath tiptoed up the three sagging wooden steps that led to the narrow front porch and flashed his light close to the door. Crudely painted on the lintel was the number we sought. The Sergeant beckoned to us with a sweeping gesture of his arm, and Vance and I joined him silently before the wooden-panelled front door with its nondescript peeling paint. At one side of the door was an old-fashioned bell-pull with a white knob, and Vance gave it a tentative jerk.

There was a faint tinkle inside, and we stood waiting, filled with misgivings and not knowing what to expect. I saw Heath slip his hand into the pocket where he carried his gun; and I too—by instinct or imitation—dropped my hand into my right outside coat pocket and, grasping my automatic, shifted the safety release.

After a long delay, during which we remained there without a sound, we heard a leisurely shifting of the bolts. The door then opened a few inches, and the pinched yellow face of an undersized Chinaman peered out cautiously at us.

As I stood there, straining my eyes through the partly open door at the yellow face that looked inquisitively out at us, the significance of the imprint of the Chinese sandals at the foot of the ladder, as well as of the Sinological nature of the signatures of the various ransom notes, flashed through my mind. I knew in that brief moment that Vance had interpreted the address correctly, and that we had come to the right house. Although I had not doubted the accuracy of Vance's prognostication, a chill swept over me as I stared at the flat yellow features of the small man on the other side of the door.

Vance immediately wedged his foot in the slight aperture and forced the door inward with his shoulder. Before us, in the dingy light of a gas jet which hung from the ceiling far back in the hall, was a Chinaman, clad in black pajamas and a pair of sandals. He was barely five feet tall.

"What you want?" he asked, in an antagonistic, falsetto voice, backing away quickly against the wall to the right of the door.

"We want to speak to Mrs. Kenting," said Vance, scarcely above a whisper.

"She not here," the Chinaman answered. "Me no know Missy Kenting. Nobody here. You have wrong house. Go away."

Vance had already stepped inside, and in a flash he drew a large handkerchief from his outer breast pocket and crushed it against the Chinaman's mouth, pinioning him against the wall. Then I noticed the reason for Vance's act:—only a foot or so away was an old-fashioned push-bell toward which the Chinaman had been slyly reaching. The man stood back against the wall under Vance's firm pressure, as if he felt that any effort to escape would be futile.

Then, with the most amazing quickness and dexterity, he forced his head upward and leaped on Vance, like a wrestler executing a flying tackle, and twined his legs about Vance's waist, at the same time throwing his arms round Vance's neck. It was an astonishing feat of nimble accuracy.

But, with a movement almost as quick as the Chinaman's, Heath, who was standing close to Vance, brought the butt of his revolver down on the yellow man's head with terrific force. The Chinaman's legs disentangled themselves; his arms relaxed; his head fell back; and he began slipping limply to the floor. Vance caught him and eased him down noiselessly. Leaning over for a moment, he looked at the Chinaman by the flame of his cigarette lighter, and then straightened up.

"He's good for an hour, at least, Sergeant," he said in a hoarse whisper. "My word! You're so brutal. . . . He was trying to reach that bell signal. The others must be upstairs." He moved silently toward the narrow carpeted stairway that led above. "This is a damnable situation. Keep your guns handy, both of you, and don't touch the banister—it may creak."

As we filed noiselessly up the dimly-lit stairs, Vance leading the way, Heath just behind him, and I bringing up the rear, I was assailed by a terrifying premonition of disaster. There was something sinister in the atmosphere of that house; and I imagined that grave danger lurked in the deep shadows above us. I grasped my automatic more firmly, and a sensation of alertness seized me as if my brain had suddenly been swept clear of everything but the apprehension of what might lie ahead. . . .

It seemed an unreasonably long time before we reached the upper landing—a sensation like a crazy hasheesh distortion—and I felt myself struggling to regain a sense of reality.

As Vance stepped into the hallway above, which was narrower and dingier than the one downstairs, he stood tensely still for a moment, looking about him. There was only one small lighted gas jet at the rear of the hall. Luckily, the floor was covered with an old worn runner which deadened our footsteps as we followed Vance up the hall. Suddenly the muffled sound of voices came to us, but we could not distinguish any words. Vance moved stealthily toward the front of the house and stood before the only door on the left of the corridor. A line of faint light outlined the threshold, and it was now evident that the voices came from within that room.

After listening a moment Vance tried the doorknob with extreme care. To our surprise the door was not locked, but swung back easily into a long, narrow, squalid room in the centre of which stood a plain deal table. At one end of the table, by the light of an oil lamp, two illy dressed men sat playing casino, judging by the distribution of the cards.

Though the room was filled with cigarette smoke, I immediately recognized one of the men as the shabby figure I had seen leaning against the bench in Central Park the night before. The lamp furnished the only illumination in the room, and dark grey blankets, hanging in full folds from over the window-frames, let no ray of light escape either at the front or side window.

The two men sprang to their feet instantaneously, turning in our direction.

"Down, Van!" ordered Vance; and his call was submerged under two deafening detonations accompanied by two flashes from a revolver in the hand of the man nearest us. The bullets must have gone over us, for both Heath and I had dropped quickly to the floor at Vance's order. Almost immediately—so quickly as to be practically simultaneous—there came two reports from Vance's automatic, and I saw the man who had shot at us pitch forward. The thud of his body on the floor coincided with the crash of the lamp, knocked over by the second man. The room was plunged in complete darkness.

"Stay down, Van!" came the commanding voice of Vance.

Almost as he spoke there was a staccato exchange of shots. All I could see were the brilliant flashes from the automatics. To this day I cannot determine the number of shots fired that night, for they overlapped each other in such rapid succession that it was impossible to make an accurate count. I lay flat on my stomach across the door-sill, my head spinning dizzily, my muscles paralyzed with fear for Vance.

There was a brief respite of black silence, so poignant as to be almost palpable, and then came the crash of an upset chair and the dull heavy sound of a human body striking the floor. I was afraid to move. Heath's labored breathing made a welcome noise at my side. I could not tell, in the blackness of the room, who had fallen. A terrifying dread assailed me.

Then I heard Vance's voice—the cynical, nonchalant voice I knew so well—and my intensity of fright gave way to a feeling of relief and overpowering weakness. I felt like a drowning man, who, coming up for the third time, suddenly feels strong arms beneath his shoulders.

"Really, y' know," his voice came from somewhere in the darkness, "there should be electric lights in this house. I saw the wires as we entered."

He was fumbling around somewhere above me, and suddenly the Sergeant's flashlight swept over the room. I staggered to my feet and leaned limply against the casing of the door.

"The idiot!" Vance was murmuring. "He kept his lighted cigarette in his mouth, and I was able to follow every move he made. . . . There must be a switch or a fixture somewhere. The lamp and the blankets at the window were only to give the house the appearance of being untenanted."

The ray from Heath's pocket flash moved about the walls and ceiling, but I could see neither him nor Vance. Then the light came to a halt, and Heath's triumphant voice rang out.

"Here it is, sir,—a socket beside the window." And as he spoke a weak, yellowed bulb dimly lit up the room.

Heath was at the front window, his hand still on the switch of a small electric light socket; and Vance stood near-by, to all appearances cool and unconcerned. On the floor lay two motionless bodies.

"Pleasant evening, Sergeant." Vance spoke in his usual steady, whimsical voice. "My sincerest apologies, and all that." Then he caught sight of me, and his face sobered. "Are you all right, Van?" he asked.

I assured him I had escaped the mêlée unscathed, and added that I had not used my automatic because I was afraid I might have hit him in the dark.

"I quite understand," he murmured and, nodding his head, he went quickly to the two prostrate bodies. After a momentary inspection, he stood up and said:

"Quite dead, Sergeant. Really, y' know, I seem to be a fairly accurate shot."

"I'll say!" breathed Heath with admiration. "I wasn't a hell of a lot of help, was I, Mr. Vance?" he added a bit shamefacedly.

"Really nothing for you to do, Sergeant."

Vance looked about him. Through a wide alcove at the far end of the room a white iron bed was clearly visible. This adjoining chamber was like a small bedroom, with only dirty red rep curtains dividing it from the main room. Vance stepped quickly between the curtains, and switched on a light just over the wooden mantel near the bed. At the rear of the room, near the foot of the bed, was a door standing half ajar. Between the mantel and the bed with its uncovered mattress, was a small bureau with a large mirror swung between two supports rising from the bureau itself.

Heath had followed Vance into the room, and I trailed weakly after them. Vance stood before the bureau for a moment or so, looking down at the few cigarette-burnt toilet articles scattered about it. He opened the top drawer and looked into it. Then he opened the second drawer.

"Ah!" he murmured half aloud, and reached inside.

When he withdrew his hand he was holding a neatly rolled pair of thin Shantung-silk pajamas. He inspected them for a moment and smiled slightly.

"The missin' pajamas," he said as if to himself, though both Heath and I heard every word he spoke. "Never been worn. Very interestin'." He unrolled them on the top of the bureau and drew forth a small green-handled toothbrush. "And the missin' toothbrush," he added. He ran his thumb over the bristles. "And quite dry. . . . The pajamas, I opine, were rolled quickly round the toothbrush and the comb, brought here, and thrown into the drawer. The comb, of course, slipped out into the hedge as the Chinaman now prostrate below descended the ladder from Kaspar Kenting's room." He re-rolled the pajamas, placed them back into the drawer, and resumed his inspection of the toilet articles on the bureau top.

Heath and I were both near the archway, our eyes on Vance, when he suddenly called out, "Look out, Sergeant!"

The last word had been only half completed when there came two shots from the rear door. The slim, crouching figure of a man, somewhat scholarly looking and well dressed, had suddenly appeared there.

Vance had swung about simultaneously with his warning to Heath, and there were two more shots in rapid succession, this time from Vance's gun.

I saw the poised revolver of blue steel drop from the raised hand of the man at the rear door: he looked round him, dazed, and both his hands went to his abdomen. He remained upright for a moment; then he doubled up and sank to the floor where he lay in an awkward crumpled heap.

Heath's revolver too dropped from his grip. When the first shot had been fired, he had pivoted round as if some powerful unseen hand had pushed him: he staggered backward a few feet and slid heavily into a chair. Vance looked a moment at the contorted figure of the man on the floor, and then hastened to Heath.

"The baby winged me," Heath said with an effort. "My gun jammed."

Vance gave him a cursory examination and then smiled encouragingly.

"Frightfully sorry, Sergeant,—it was all the fault of my trustin' nature. McLaughlin told us there were only two men in that green car, and I foolishly concluded that two gentlemen and the Chinaman would be all we should have to contend with. I should have been more far-seein'. Most humiliatin'. . . . You'll have a sore arm for a couple of weeks," he added. "Lucky it's only a flesh wound. You'll



probably lose a lot of gore; but really, y' know, you're far too full of blood as it is." And he expertly bound up Heath's right arm, using a handkerchief for a bandage.

The Sergeant struggled to his feet.

"You're treating me like a damn baby." He stepped to the mantel and leaned against it. "There's nothing the matter with me. Where do we go from here?" His face was unusually white, and I could see that the mantel behind him was a most welcome prop.

"Glad I had that mirror in front of me," murmured Vance. "Very useful devices, mirrors."

He had barely finished speaking when we heard a repeated ringing near us.

"By Jove, a telephone!" commented Vance. "Now we'll have to find the instrument."

Heath straightened up.

"The thing's right here on the mantel," he said. "I've been standing in front of it."

Vance made a sudden move forward, but Heath stood in the way.

"You'd better let me answer it, Mr. Vance. You're too refined." He picked up the receiver with his left hand.

"What d' you want?" he asked, in a gruff, officious tone. There was a short pause. "Oh, yeah? O.-K., go ahead." A longer pause followed, as Heath listened. "Don't know nothing about it," he shot back, in a heavy, resentful voice. Then he added: "You got the wrong number." And he slammed down the receiver.

"Who was it, do you know, Sergeant?" Vance spoke quietly as he lighted a cigarette.

Heath turned slowly and looked at Vance. His eyes were narrowed, and there was an expression of awe on his face as he answered.

"Sure I know," he said significantly. He shook his head as if he did not trust himself to speak. "There ain't no mistaking *that* voice."

"Well, who was it, Sergeant?" asked Vance mildly, without looking up from his cigarette.

The Sergeant seemed stronger: he stood away from the mantelpiece, his legs wide apart and firmly planted. Rivulets of blood were running down over his right hand which hung limply at his side.

"It was—" he began, and then he was suddenly aware of my presence in the room. "Mother o' God!" he breathed. "I don't have to tell *you*, Mr. Vance. You knew this morning."

## 18. THE WINDOWLESS ROOM

(Friday, July 22; 10:30 p.m.)

Vance looked at the Sergeant a moment and shook his head.

"Y' know," he said, in a curiously repressed voice, "I was almost hoping I was wrong. I hate to think—" He came suddenly forward to Heath who had fallen back weakly against the mantel and was blindly reaching for the wall, in an effort to hold himself upright. Vance put his arm around Heath and led him to a chair.

"Here, Sergeant," he said in a kindly tone, handing him an etched silver flask, "take a drink of this—and don't be a sissy."

"Go to hell," grumbled Heath, and inverted the flask to his lips. Then he handed it back to Vance. "That's potent juice," he said, standing up and pushing Vance away from him. "Let's get going."

"Right-o, Sergeant. We've only begun." As he spoke he walked toward the rear door and stepped over the dead man, into the next room. Heath and I were at his heels.

The room was in darkness, but with the aid of his flashlight the Sergeant quickly found the electric light. We were in a small box-like room, without windows. Opposite us, against the wall, stood a narrow army cot. Vance rushed forward and leaned over the cot. The motionless form of a woman lay stretched out on it. Despite her disheveled hair and her deathlike pallor, I recognized Madelaine Kenting. Strips of adhesive tape bound her lips together, and both her arms were tied securely with pieces of heavy clothes-line to the iron rods at either side of the cot.

Vance dexterously removed the tape from her mouth, and the woman sucked in a deep breath, as if she had been partly suffocated. There was a low rumbling in her throat, expressive of agony and fear, like that of a person coming out of an anæsthetic after a serious operation.

Vance busied himself with the cruel cords binding her wrists. When he had released them he laid his ear against her heart for a moment, and poured a little of the cognac from his flask between her lips. She swallowed automatically and coughed. Then Vance lifted her in his arms and started from the room.

Just as he reached the door the telephone rang again, and Heath went toward it.

"Don't bother to answer it, Sergeant," said Vance. "It's probably the same person calling back." And he continued on his way, with the woman in his arms.

I preceded him as he carried his inert burden down the dingy stairway.

"We must get her to a hospital at once, Van," he said when we had reached the lower hallway.

I held the front door open for him, my automatic extended before me, ready for instant use, should the occasion arise. Vance went down the shaky steps without a word, just as Heath joined me at the door. The Chinaman still lay where we had left him, on the floor against the wall.

"Drag him up to that pipe in the corner, Mr. Van Dine," the Sergeant told me in a strained voice. "My arm is sorta numb."

For the first time I noticed that a two-inch water pipe, corroding for lack of paint, rose through the front hall, behind the door, a few inches from the wall. I moved the limp form of the Chinaman until his head came in contact with the pipe; and Heath, with one hand, drew out a pair of handcuffs. Clamping one of the manacles on the unconscious man's right wrist, he pulled it around the pipe and with his foot manipulated the Chinaman's left arm upward till he could close the second iron around it. Then he reached into his pocket and drew out a piece of clothes-line which he had obviously brought from the windowless room upstairs.

"Tie his ankles together, will you, Mr. Van Dine?" he said. "I can't quite make it."

I slipped my gun back into my coat pocket and did as Heath directed.

Then we both went out into the murky night, Heath slamming the door behind him. Vance, with his burden, was perhaps a hundred yards ahead of us, and we came up with him just as he reached the car. He placed Mrs. Kenting on the rear seat of the tonneau and arranged the cushions under her head.

"You can both sit in front with me," he suggested over his shoulder, as he took his place at the wheel; and before Heath and I were actually seated he had started the engine, shifted the gear, and got the car in motion with a sudden but smooth roll. He continued straight down Waring Avenue.

As we approached a lone patrolman after two or three blocks, Heath requested that we stop. Vance threw on his brakes, and honked his horn to attract the patrolman's attention.

"Have I got a minute, Mr. Vance?" asked Heath.

"Certainly, Sergeant," Vance told him, as he drew up to the curb beside the officer. "Mrs. Kenting is fairly comfortable and in no immediate danger. A few minutes more or less in arrivin' at a hospital will make no material difference."

Heath spoke to the officer through the open window, identified himself, and then asked the man, "Where's your call-box?"

"On the next corner, Sergeant, at Gunhill Road," answered the officer, saluting.

"All right," returned Heath brusquely. "Hop on the running-board." He leaned back in the seat again and we went on for another block, stopping at the direction of the officer.

The Sergeant slid out of the car, and the patrolman unlocked the box for him. Heath's back was to us, and I could not hear what he was saying over the telephone, but when he turned he addressed the officer peremptorily:

"Get up to Lord Street"—he gave the number, and added: "The second house from the corner of Waring—and stay on duty. Some of the boys from the 47th Precinct station will join you in a few minutes, and a couple of men from the Homicide Bureau will be coming up a little later—as soon as they can get here. I'll be returning myself inside of an hour or so. You'll find three stiffs in the joint and a Chink chained up to a water pipe in the front hall. There'll be an ambulance up before long."

"Right, sir," the officer answered, and started on the run up Waring Avenue.

Heath had climbed into the car as he spoke, and Vance drove off without delay.

"I'm heading for the Doran Hospital, just this side of Bronx Park, Sergeant," Vance said, as we sped along. In about fifteen minutes, ignoring all traffic lights and driving at a rate far exceeding the city speed limit, we drew up in front of the hospital.

Vance jumped from the car, took Mrs. Kenting in his arms again, and carried her up the wide marble steps. He returned to the car in less than ten minutes.

"Everything's all right, Sergeant," he said as he approached the car. "The lady has regained consciousness. Fresh air did it. Her mind is a bit misty. Nothing fundamentally wrong, however."

Heath had stepped out of the car and was standing on the sidewalk.

"So long, Mr. Vance," he said. "I'm getting in that taxi up ahead. I gotta get back to that damn house. I got work to do." He moved away as he spoke.

But Vance rushed forward and took him by the arm.

"Stay right here, Sergeant, and get that arm properly dressed first."

He led Heath back, and accompanied him up the hospital steps.

A few minutes later Vance came out alone.

"The noble Sergeant is all right, Van," he said, as he took his place at the wheel again. "He'll be out before long. But he insists on going back to Lord Street." And Vance started the car once more, and headed downtown.

When we reached Vance's apartment Currie opened the door for us. There was relief written in every line of the old butler's face.

"Good heavens, Currie!" said Vance, as we stepped inside. "I told you, you might tuck yourself in at eleven o'clock if you hadn't heard from me—and here it is nearing midnight, and you're still up."

The old man looked away with embarrassment as he closed the door.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said in a voice which, for all its formality, had an emotional tremolo in it. "I—I couldn't go to bed, sir, until you returned. I understood, sir,—if you will pardon my saying so—your reference to the documents in the drawer of the secretary. And I've taken the liberty this evening of worrying about you. I'm very glad you have come home, sir."

"You're a sentimental old fossil, Currie," Vance complained, handing the butler his hat.

"Mr. Markham is waiting in the library," said Currie, like an old faithful soldier reporting to his superior officer.

"I rather imagined he would be," murmured Vance as he went up the stairs. "Good old Markham. Always fretting about me."

As we entered the library, we found Markham pacing up and down. He stopped suddenly at sight of Vance.

"Well, thank God!" he said. And, though he attempted to sound trivial, his relief was as evident as old Currie's had been. He crossed the room and sank into a chair; and I got the impression, from the way he relaxed, that he had been on his feet for a long time.

"Greetings, old dear," said Vance. "Why this unexpected pleasure of your presence at such an hour?"

"I was merely interested, officially, in what you might have found on Lord Street," returned Markham. "I suppose you found a vast vacant space with a real estate sign saying 'Suitable for factory site.'"

Vance smiled.

"Not exactly that, don't y' know. I had a jolly good time—which will probably make you very angry and envious."

He turned round and came to where I had seated myself. I felt weak and shaky. I was only then beginning to feel the reaction from the excitement of the evening. I realized now that in the brief space of time we had spent on Lord Street, I had become too keyed up physically to apprehend completely the dread possibilities of the situation. In the quiet and safety of familiar surroundings, the flood of reality suddenly overwhelmed me, and it was only with great effort that I managed to maintain a normal attitude.

"Let's have your gun, Van," said Vance, in his cool, steadying voice, holding out his hand. "Glad you didn't have to use it. . . . Horrible mess—what? Sorry I let you come along. But really, y' know, I myself was rather surprised and shocked by the turn of affairs."

A little abashed, I took the unused automatic from my pocket and handed it over to him: it was he who had assumed the entire brunt of the danger, and I had been unable to be of any assistance. He stepped to the centre-table and pulled open the drawer. Then he tossed my automatic into it, laid his own beside it, and, closing the drawer meditatively, rang the bell for Currie.

Markham was watching him closely but restrained his curiosity as the old butler entered with a service of brandy. Currie had sensed Vance's wish and had not waited for an order. When he had set down the tray and left the room, Markham leaned forward in his chair.

"Well, what the hell *did* happen?" he demanded irritably.

Vance sipped his cognac slowly, lighted a *Régie*, took several deep inhalations, and sat down leisurely in his favorite chair.

"I'm frightfully sorry, Markham," he said, "but I fear I have made you a bit of trouble. . . . The fact is," he added carelessly, "I killed three men."

Markham leaped to his feet as if he had been shot upward by the sudden release of a powerful steel spring. He glared at Vance, in doubt whether the other was jesting or in earnest. Simultaneously he exploded:

"What do you mean, Vance?"

Vance drew deeply again on his cigarette before answering. Then he said with a tantalizing smile:

"*J'ai tué trois hommes—Ich habe drei Männer getötet—Ho ucciso tre uomini—He matado tres hombres—Három embert megöltem—Haragti sheloshah anashim.* Meanin', I killed three men."

"Are you serious?" blurted Markham.

"Oh, quite," answered Vance. "Do you think you can save me from the dire consequences? . . . Incidentally, I found Mrs. Kenting. I took her to the Doran Hospital. Not a matter of life and death, but she required immediate and competent attention. Rather upset, I should imagine, by her detention. A bit out of her mind, in fact. Frightful experience she went through. Doin' nicely, however. Under excellent care. Should be quite herself in a few days. Can't co-ordinate just yet. . . . Oh, I say, Markham, do sit down again and take your cognac. You look positively perturbed."

Markham obeyed automatically, like a frightened child submitting to his parent. He swallowed the brandy in one gulp.

"For the love of God, Vance," he pleaded, "drop this silly ring-around-the-rosy stuff and talk to me like a sane human being."

"Sorry, Markham, and all that sort of thing," murmured Vance contritely. And then he told Markham in detail everything that had happened that night. But I thought he too greatly minimized his own part in the tragic drama. When he had finished his recital he asked somewhat coyly:

"Am I a doomed culprit, or were there what you would call extenuatin' circumstances?—I'm horribly weak on the intricacies of the law, don't y' know."

"Damn it! forget everything," said Markham. "If you're really worried, I'll get you a brass medal as big as Columbus Circle."

"My word, what a fate!" sighed Vance.

"Have you any idea who these three men were?" Markham went on, in tense seriousness.

"Not the groggiest notion," admitted Vance sadly. "One of them, Van Dine tells me, was watchin' us from the footpath in the park last night. Two of the three were probably the lads McLaughlin saw in the green coupé outside the Kenting domicile Wednesday morning. The other one I have never had the exquisite pleasure of meetin' before. I'd say, however, he had a gift for tradin' in doubtful securities on the sly: I've seen bucket-shop operators who resembled him. Anyhow, Markham old dear, why fret about it tonight? They were not nice persons, not nice at all. The geniuses at Headquarters will check up on their identities. . . ."

The front door-bell rang, and a minute later Heath entered the library. His ordinarily ruddy face was a little pale and drawn, and his right arm was in a sling. He saluted Markham and turned sheepishly to Vance.

"Your old saw-bones at the hospital told me I had to go home," he complained. "And there's nothing in God's world the matter with me," he added disgustedly. "Imagine him puttin' this arm in a sling!—said I had to take the weight offen it, that it would heal quicker that way. And then had to go and make my other arm sore by stickin' a needle in it! . . . What was the needle for, Mr. Vance?"

"Tetanus antitoxin, Sergeant," Vance told him, smiling. "Simply has to be done, don't y' know, with all gun-shot wounds. Nothing to cause you any discomfort, though. Reaction in a week—that's all."

Heath snorted. "Hell! If my gun hadn't jammed—"

"Yes, that was a bad break, Sergeant," nodded Markham.

"The doc wouldn't even let me go back to the house," grumbled Heath. "Anyway, I got the report from the local station up there. They took the three stiff's over to the morgue. The Chink'll live. Maybe we can—"

"You'll never wangle anything out of him," put in Vance quietly. "Your beloved hose-pipes and water-cures and telephone directories will get you nowhere. I know Chinamen. But Mrs. Kenting will have an interestin' story to tell as soon as she's rational again. . . . Cheer up, Sergeant, and have some more medicine." He poured Heath a liberal drink of his rare brandy.

"I'll be on the job tomorrow all right, Chief," the Sergeant asserted as he put down the glass on a small table at his side. "Just imagine that young whipper-snapper of an intern at the Doran Hospital tryin' to make a Little Lord Fauntleroy outa me! A sling!"

Vance and Markham and Heath discussed the case from various angles for perhaps a half hour longer. Markham was getting impatient.

"I'm going home," he said finally, as he rose. "We'll get this thing straightened out in the morning."

Vance left his chair reluctantly.

"I sincerely hope so, Markham," he said. "It's not at all a particularly nice case, and the sooner you're free of it, the better."

"Is there anything you want me to do, Mr. Vance?" Heath's tone was respectful, but a little weary.

Vance looked at him with commiseration.

"I want you to go home and have a good sleep. . . . And, by the by, Sergeant, how about rounding everybody up and invitin' them to the Purple House tomorrow, around noon?" he asked. "I'm speakin' of Fleel, Kenyon Kenting, and Quaggy. Mrs. Falloway and her son will, I'm sure, be there, in any event."

Heath got to his feet and grinned confidently.

"Don't you worry, Mr. Vance," he said. "I'll have 'em there for you." He went toward the door, then suddenly turned round and held out his left hand to Vance. "Much obliged, sir, for tonight—"

"Oh, please ignore it, my good Sergeant,—it was merely a slight nuisance, after all," returned Vance, though he grasped the Sergeant's hand warmly.

Markham and Heath departed together, and Vance again pressed the bell for Currie.

When the old man had entered the room Vance said:

"I'm turning in, Currie. That will be all for tonight."

The butler bowed, and picked up the tray and the empty cognac glasses.

"Very good, sir. Thank you, sir. Good night, sir."

## 19. THE FINAL SCENE

(Saturday, July 23; 9 a.m.)

Vance was up and dressed in good season the next morning. He seemed fairly cheerful but somewhat distraught. Before he sat down to his typical meager breakfast he went into the anteroom and telephoned to Heath. It was rather a long conversation, but no word of it reached me where I sat at the desk in the library.

As he returned to the room he said to me: "I think, Van, we're in a position now to get somewhere with this case. The poor Sergeant!—he's practically a ravin' maniac this morning, with the reporters houndin' him every minute. The news of last night's altercation did not break soon enough for the morning editions of the papers. But the mere thought of reading of our escapade in the noon editions fills me with horror." He sipped his Turkish coffee. "I had hoped we could clear up the beastly matter before the news venders began giving tongue. The best place to conclude the case is in the Purple House. It's a family gathering-place, as it were. Every one connected with the family, don't y' know, is rather intimately concerned, and hopin' for illumination. . . ."

Late in the forenoon Markham, haggard and drawn, joined us at the apartment. He did not ask Vance any questions, for he knew it would be futile in the mood Vance was in. He did, however, greet him cordially.

"I think you're going to get that medal, whether you like it or not," he said, lighting a cigar and leaning against the mantel. "All three men have been definitely identified, and they have all been on the police books for years. They've been urgently wanted at Headquarters for a long time. Two of them have served terms: one for extortion, and the other for manslaughter. They're Goodley Franks and Austria Rentwick—no, he didn't come from Austria. The third man was none other than our old elusive friend, Gilt-Edge Lamarne, with a dozen aliases—a very shrewd crook. He's been arrested nine times, but we've never been able to make the charges stick. He's kept the local boys, as well as the federal men, awake nights for years. We've had the goods on him for eight months now, but we couldn't find him."

Markham smiled at Vance with solemn satisfaction.

"It was a very fortunate affair last night, from every point of view. Everybody's happy; only, I fear you're about to become a hero and will have ticker-tape rained on you from the windows whenever you go down Broadway."

"Oh, my Markham, my Markham!" wailed Vance. "I won't have it. I'm about to sail to South America, or Alaska, or the Malay Peninsula. . . ." He got to his feet and went to the table where he finished his old port. "Come along, Markham," he said as he put his glass down. "Let's get uptown and conclude this bally case before I sail for foreign parts where ticker-tape is unknown."

He went toward the door, with Markham and me following him.

"You think we can finish the case today?" Markham looked skeptical.

"Oh, quite. It was, in fact, finished long ago." Vance stopped with his hand on the knob and smiled cheerfully. "But, knowin' your passionate adoration for legal evidence, I have waited till now."

Markham studied Vance for a moment, and said nothing. In silence we went out and descended the stairs to the street.

We arrived at the Kenting residence, Vance driving us there in his car, fifteen minutes before noon. Weem took our hats and made a surly gesture toward the drawing-room. Sergeant Heath and Snitkin were already there.

A little later Fleel and Kenyon Kenting arrived together, followed almost immediately by Porter Quaggy. They had barely seated themselves when old Mrs. Falloway, supported by her son Fraim, came down the front stairs and joined us.

"I'm so anxious about Madelaine," Mrs. Falloway said. "How is she, Mr. Vance?"

"I received a telephone call from the hospital shortly before I came here," he replied, addressing himself to the others in the room, as well as to the old woman who, with Fraim's help, had now seated herself comfortably at one end of the small sofa. "Mrs. Kenting is doing even better today than I would have expected. She is still somewhat irrational—which is quite natural, considering the frightful experience she has been through—but I can assure you that she will be home in two or three days, fully recovered and in her normal mind."

He sat down by the window leisurely, and lighted a cigarette.

"And I imagine she will have a most interestin' tale to unfold," he went on. "Y' know, it was not intended that she return."

He moved slightly in his chair.

"The truth is, this was not a kidnapping case at all. The authorities were expected to accept it in that light, but the murderer made too many errors—his fault lay in trying to be excessively clever. I think I can reconstruct most of the events in their chronological order. Some one wanted money—wanted it rather desperately, in fact,—and all the means for an easy acquisition were at hand. The plot was as simple as it was cowardly. But the plotter met a snag when some of the early steps failed rather dismally, and a new and bolder procedure and technique became necess'ry. A damnable new technique, but one that was equally encumbered by the grave possibility of error. The errors developed almost inevitably, for the human brain, however clever, has its limitations. But the person who mapped out the plot was blinded and confused by a passionate desire for the money. Everything was sordid. . . ."

Again Vance shifted his position slightly and drew deeply on his cigarette, expelling the smoke in curling ribbons, as he went on.

"There is no doubt whatever that Kaspar Kenting made an appointment for the early morning hours, after he had returned from his evening's entertainment at the casino with Mr. Quaggy. He came in and went to his room, changed his suit and his shoes, and kept that appointment. It was a vital matter to him, as he was deeply in debt and undoubtedly expected some sort of practical solution of his problem to result from this meeting. The two mysterious and objectionable gentlemen whom Mrs. Kenting described to us as callers here earlier in the week, were quite harmless creatures, but avid for the money Kaspar owed them. One of them was a book-maker, the other a shady fellow who ran a *sub-rosa* gambling house—I rather suspected their identity from the first, and verified it this morning: I happened to recognize one of the men through Mrs. Kenting's description.

"When Kaspar left this house early Wednesday morning, he was met at the appointed place not by the person with whom he had

made his appointment, but by others whom he had never seen before. They struck him over the head before he so much as realized that anything was amiss, threw him into a coupé, and then drove off with him to the East River and disposed of him, hoping he would not be found too soon. It was straight, brutal murder. And the persons who committed that murder had been hired for that purpose and had been instructed accordingly. You will understand that the plotter at the source never intended anything less than murder for the victim—since there was grave risk in letting him live to point an accusing finger later. . . . The slender Chinaman—the *lobby-gow* of the gang, who now has concussion of the brain from the Sergeant's blow last night—then returned to the house here, placed the ladder against the window—it had been left here previously for just that purpose—entered the room through the window, and set the stage according to instructions, taking the toothbrush, the comb, and the pajamas, and pinning the note to the window-sill, generally leaving mute but spurious indications that Kaspar Kenting had kidnapped himself in order to collect the money he needed to straighten out his debts. Kaspar's keeping of the appointment at such an hour naturally implied that the rendezvous was with some one he thought could help him. I found the pajamas and toothbrush, unused, in the Lord-Street house last night. It was the Chinaman that Mrs. Kenting heard moving about in her husband's room at dawn Wednesday. He was arranging the details in which he had been instructed."

Vance continued in a matter-of-fact voice.

"So far the plot was working nicely. The first set-back occurred after the arrival in the mail of the ransom note with the instructions to take the money to the tree. The scheme of the murderer to collect the money from the tree was thwarted, makin' necess'ry further steps. The same day Mrs. Kenting was approached for an appointment, perhaps with a promise of news of her husband—obviously by some one she trusted, for she went out alone at ten o'clock that night to keep the appointment. She was awaited—possibly just inside Central Park—by the same hard gentlemen who had done away with her husband. But instead of meeting with the same fate as Kaspar Kenting, she was taken to the house on Lord Street I visited last night, and held there as a sort of hostage. I rather imagine, don't y' know, that the perpetrator of this fiendish scheme had not yet been able to pay the price demanded for the neat performance of Kaspar's killing, thereby irking the hired assassins. The lady still alive was a very definite menace to the schemer, since she would be able, if released, to tell with whom she had made the appointment. She was, so to speak, a threat held over one criminal by another criminal who was a bit more clever.

"Mrs. Kenting undoubtedly used, that evening, a certain kind of perfume—emerald—because it had been given to her by the person with whom she had the rendezvous. Surely, being a blonde, she knew better than to use it as her personal choice. That will explain to you gentlemen why I asked you so seemingly irrelevant a question the night before last. . . . Incidentally," he added calmly, "I happen to know who gave Mrs. Kenting that Courtet's emerald."

There was a slight stir, but Vance went on without a pause:

"Poor Kaspar! He was a weak chappie, and the price for his own murder was being wangled out of him without his realizing it. Through the gem collection of old Karl Kenting, of course. He was depleting that collection regularly at the subtle instigation of some one else, some one who took the gems and gave him practically nothing compared to what they were actually worth, hopin' to turn them over at an outrageous profit. But semiprecious stones are not so easy to dispose of through illegitimate channels. They really need a collector to appreciate them—and collectors have grown rather exactin' regarding the origin of their purchases. A shady transaction of this nature would naturally require time, and the now-defunct henchmen who were waiting for settlement were becoming annoyed. Most of the really valuable stones, which I am sure the collection contained originally, were no longer there when I glanced over the cases the other morning. I am quite certain that the balas-ruby I found in the poor fellow's dinner coat was brought back because the purchaser would not give him what he thought it was worth—Kaspar probably mistook the stone for a real ruby. There were black opals missing from the collection, also exhibits of jade, which Karl Kenting must undoubtedly have included in the collection; and yesterday morning the absence of a large piece of alexandrite was discovered—"

Fraim Falloway suddenly leaped to his feet, glaring at Vance with the eyes of a maniac. There was an abnormal color in the young man's face, and he was shaking from head to foot.

"I didn't do it!" he screamed hysterically. "I didn't have Kaspar killed! I tell you I didn't—I *didn't*! And you think I'd hurt Madelaine! You're a devil. I didn't do it, I say! You have no right to accuse me." He reached down quickly and picked up a small, but heavy, bronze statue of Antinous on the table beside him. But Heath, who was standing at his side, was even quicker than Falloway. He grasped the youth's shoulder with his free arm, just as the other lifted the statue to hurl at Vance. The figurine fell harmlessly to the floor, and Heath forced young Falloway back into his chair.

"Put your pulse-warmers on him, Snitkin," he ordered.

Snitkin, standing just behind Fraim Falloway's chair, leaned over and deftly manacled the youth, who sank back limply in his chair, breathing heavily.

Mrs. Falloway, who had sat stoically throughout the entire unexpected scene in the drawing-room, now looked up quickly as Snitkin placed the handcuffs on her son. She leaned forward with horror in her eyes. I thought for a moment she was going to speak, but she made no comment.

"Really, Mr. Falloway," Vance admonished in a soothing voice, "you shouldn't handle heavy objects when you're in that frame of mind. Frightfully sorry. But just sit still and relax." He drew on his cigarette again and, apparently ignoring the incident, went on in his unemotional drawl:

"As I was sayin', the disappearance of the stones from the collection was an indication of the identity of the murderer, for the simple reason that the hirin' of thugs and the underground disposal of these gems quite obviously suggested that the same type of person was involved in both endeavors: to wit, both procedures implied a connection with undercover characters—fences and assassins. Not that the reasonin' was final, you understand, but most suggestive. The two notes yesterday were highly enlightenin'. One of them was obviously concocted for effect; the other was quite genuine. But boldness—usually a good technique—was, in this case, seen through."

"But who," asked Quaggy, "could possibly have fulfilled the requirements, so to speak, of your vague and amusing theory?" The smile on his lips was without mirth—it was cold and self-satisfied. "Just because you saw two black opals in my possession—"

"My theory, Mr. Quaggy, is not nearly so vague as you may think," Vance interrupted quickly. "And if it amuses you, I am delighted." Vance looked at the man with steady, indifferent eyes. "But, to answer your question, I should say that it was some one with

an opportunity to render legal service, with legal protection, to members of the underworld. . . ."

Fleel, who was sitting at the small desk at the front of the room, quickly addressed Vance.

"There is a definite implication in your words, sir," he said, with his customary judicial air. (I could not resist the impression that he was pleading for a client in a court of law.) "I'm a lawyer," he went on, with ostentatious bitterness, "and I naturally have certain contacts with the type of men you imply were at the bottom of this outrage." Then he chuckled sarcastically. "However," he added, "I shall not hold the insult against you. The fact is, your amateurish ratiocinations are highly amusing." And, leaning back in his chair, he smirked.

Vance barely glanced at the man, and continued speaking as if there had been no interruption.

"Referrin' again to the various ransom notes, they were dictated by the plotter of Kaspar's murder—that is, all but the one received by Mr. Fleel yesterday—, and they were couched in such language that they could be shown to the authorities in order to side-track suspicion from the actual culprit and at the same time impress Mr. Kenyon Kenting with the urgent necessity of raising the fifty thousand dollars. I had two statements as to the amount of money which Kaspar himself was demanding for his debts—one, an honest report of fifty thousand dollars; the other, no doubt a stupidly concocted tale of thirty thousand dollars—again obviously for the purpose of diverting suspicion from the person connected with the crime."

Vance looked thoughtfully at Fleel and continued.

"Of course, it is possible that Kaspar asked you for only thirty thousand dollars, whereas he had just asked his brother for fifty thousand. But it is highly significant that he first asked his brother for fifty thousand dollars and then asked you for a different amount, whereas the ransom note called for the fifty thousand. This discrepancy between Mr. Kenting's report and your report of the amount would certainly have a tendency to point toward the brother and not toward you—which could easily be interpreted, in view of everything, as another clever means of your pointing suspicion away from yourself in case you were suspected. Certainly Mr. Kenyon Kenting was not lying about the amount, and there could be little or no reason to think that Kaspar's brother was guilty of the crime, for in such a case the money would have had to come from him—and people, don't y' know, do not ordinarily commit crimes in order to impoverish themselves—eh, what? Summing it up, there was no reason for Mr. Kenyon Kenting to lie about the amount demanded by Kaspar, whereas there was a definite reason for you to lie about it."

Vance moved his eyes slowly round the startled group.

"The second note received by Mr. Fleel, was not, as I have already intimated, one of the series written at the instructions of the guilty man—it was a genuine document addressed *to* him; and the recipient felt that he not only could use it to have the ransom money paid over to him, but to disarm once more any suspicion that might be springing up in the minds of the authorities. It did not occur to him that the address, cryptically written in for his eyes alone, could be interpreted by another. Oh, yes, it was a genuine message from the unpaid minions, demanding the money they had earned by disposing of Kaspar."

He turned slowly to Fleel again and met the other's smirk with a cold smile.

"When I suspected you, Mr. Fleel," he said, "I sent you from the District Attorney's office Thursday before Mr. Markham and I came here, in order to verify my expectation that you would urge Mr. Kenyon Kenting to request that all police interference be eliminated. This you did, and when I learned of it, after arriving here with Mr. Markham, I definitely objected to the proposal and counteracted your influence on Mr. Kenting so that you could not get the money safely that night. Seeing that part of your plan hopelessly failing, you cleverly changed your attitude and agreed to act for us—at my request through Sergeant Heath—as the person to place the money in the tree, and went through with the farce in order to prove that no connection existed between you and the demand for money. One of your henchmen had come to Central Park to pick up the package if everything went according to your prearranged schedule. Mr. Van Dine and I both saw the man. When he learned that you had not been successful with your plans, he undoubtedly reported your failure, thereby throwing fear into your hirelings that they might not be paid—which accounts for their keeping Mrs. Kenting alive as an effective threat to hold over you till payment was forthcoming."

Fleel looked up slowly with a patronizing grin.

"Aren't you overlooking the possibility, Mr. Vance, that young Kaspar kidnapped himself—as I maintained from the beginning—and was murdered by thugs later, for reasons and under circumstances unknown to us? Certainly all the evidence points to his self-abduction for the purpose of acquiring the money he needed."

"Ah! I've been expecting that observation," Vance returned, meeting the other's cynical stare. "The self-kidnapping setup was very clever. Much too clever. Overdone, in fact. As I see it, it was to have been you—what shall we call it?—your emergency escape, let us say, if your innocence in the matter should at any time be in doubt. In that event how easy it would have been for you to say just what you have said regarding the implications of a self-motivated pseudo-crime. And I am not overlooking the significant fact that you have consistently advised Mr. Kenyon Kenting to pay over the money in spite of the glaring evidence that Kaspar had planned the kidnapping himself."

Fleel's expression did not change. His grin became even more marked; in fact, when Vance paused and looked at him keenly, Fleel began to shake with mirth.

"A very pretty theory, Mr. Vance," he commented. "It shows remarkable ingenuity, but it entirely fails to take into consideration the fact that I myself was attacked by a sub-machine gunner on the very night of Mrs. Kenting's disappearance. You have conveniently forgotten that little episode since it would knock the entire foundation from under your amusing little house of cards."

Vance shook his head slowly, and though his smile seemed to broaden, it grew even chillier.

"No. Oh, no, Mr. Fleel. Not conveniently forgot—conveniently remembered. Most vivid recollection, don't y' know. And you were jolly well frightened by the attack. Surely, you don't believe your escape from any casualty was the result of a miracle. All quite simple, really. The gentleman with the machine-gun had no intention whatever of perforating you. His only object was to frighten you and warn you of exactly what to expect if you did not raise the money instantaneously for the dastardly services rendered you. You were never safer in your life than when that machine-gun was sputtering away in your general direction."

The smirk slowly faded from Fleel's lips; his face flushed, and he stood up, glowering resentfully at Vance.

"Your theory, Mr. Vance," he said angrily, "no longer has even the merit of humor. Up to this point I have been amused by it and

have been able to laugh at it. But you are carrying a joke too far, sir. And I wish you to know that I greatly resent your remarks." He remained standing.

"I don't regard that fact as disconcertin' in the least," Vance returned with a cold smile. "The fact is, Mr. Fleel, you will be infinitely more resentful when I inform you that at this very minute certified public accountants are at work on your books and that the police are scrutinizing most carefully the contents of your safe." Vance glanced indifferently at the cigarette in his hand.

For two seconds Fleel looked at him with a serious frown. Then he took a swift backward step and, thrusting his hand into his pocket, drew forth a large, ugly looking automatic. Both Heath and Snitkin had been watching him steadily, and as Fleel made this movement Heath, with lightning-like speed, produced an automatic from beneath the black sling of his wounded arm. The movements of the two men were almost concurrent.

But there was no need for Heath to fire his gun, for in that fraction of a second Fleel raised his automatic to his own temple and pulled the trigger. The weapon fell from his hand immediately, and his body slumped down against the edge of the desk and fell to the floor out of sight.

Vance, apparently, was little moved by the tragedy. However, after a deep sigh, he rose listlessly and stepped behind the desk. The others in the room were, I think, like myself, too paralyzed at the sudden termination of the case to make any move. Vance bent down.

"Dead, Markham,—quite," he announced as he rose, a moment or so later. "Consid'rate chappie—what? Has saved you legal worry no end. Most gratifyin'." He was leaning now against the corner of the desk, and, nodding to Snitkin, who had rushed forward with an automatic in his hand, jerked his head significantly toward Fraim Falloway.

Snitkin hesitated but a moment. He slipped the gun back into his pocket and unlocked the handcuffs on young Falloway.

"Sorry, Mr. Falloway," murmured Vance. "But you lost your self-control and became a bit annoyin'. . . . Feelin' better?"

The youth stammered: "I'm all right." He was alert and apparently his normal self now. "And Sis will be home in a couple of days!" He found a cigarette, after much effort, and lighted it nervously.

"By the by, Mr. Kenting," Vance resumed, without moving from the desk, "there's a little point I want cleared up. I know that the District Attorney is aching to ask you a few questions about what happened yesterday evening. He had not heard from you and was unable to reach you. Did you, by any chance, give that fifty thousand dollars to Fleel?"

"Yes!" Kenting stood up excitedly. "I gave it to him a little after nine o'clock last night. We got the final instructions all right—that is, Fleel got them. He called me up right away and we arranged to meet. He said some one had telephoned to him and told him that the money had to be at a certain place—far up in the Bronx somewhere—at ten o'clock that night. He convinced me that this person on the telephone had said he would not deal with any one but Fleel."

He hesitated a moment.

"I was afraid to act through the police again, after that night in the park. So I took Fleel's urgent advice to leave the police out of it, and let him handle the matter. I was desperate! And I trusted him—God help me! I didn't telephone to Mr. Markham, and I wouldn't speak to him when he called. I was afraid. I wanted Madelaine back safe. And I gave the money to Fleel—and thought he could arrange everything. . . ."[29]

"I quite understand, Mr. Kenting," Vance spoke softly, in a tone which was not without pity. "I was pretty sure you had given him the money last night, for he telephoned to the Lord-Street house while we were there, obviously to make immediate arrangements to pay off his commissions, as it were. Sergeant Heath here recognized his voice over the wire. . . . But, really, y' know, Mr. Kenting, you should have trusted the police. Of course, Fleel received no message of instructions last night. It was part of his stupid technique, however, to tell you he had, for he needed the money and was at his wit's end. He too was desperate, I think. When Mr. Markham told me he was unable to get in touch with you, I rather thought, don't y' know, you had done just what you have stated. . . . Fleel was far too bold in showing us that note yesterday. Really, y' know, he shouldn't have done it. There were references in it which he thought only he himself could understand. Luckily, I saw through them. That note, in fact, verified my theory regarding him. But he showed it to us because he wished to make an impression on you. He needed that money. I rather think he had gambled away, in one way or another, the money he held in trust for the Kenting estate. We shan't know definitely till we get the report from Stitt and McCoy,[30] the accountants who are goin' over Fleel's books. It is quite immaterial, however."

Vance suddenly yawned and glanced at his watch.

"My word, Markham!" he exclaimed, turning to the District Attorney, who had sat stolidly and nonplused through the amazing drama. "It's still rather early, don't y' know. If I hasten, old dear, I'll be able to catch the second act of *Tristan and Isolde*."

Vance went swiftly across the room to Mrs. Falloway and bowed over her hand solicitously with a murmured adieu. Then he hurried out to his car waiting at the curb.

\* \* \* \* \*

When the reports from the accountants and the police came in at the end of the day on which Fleel had shot himself, Vance's theory and suppositions were wholly substantiated. The accountants found that Fleel had been speculating heavily on his own behalf with the funds he held in trust for the Kenting estate. His bank had already called upon him to cover the legitimate investments permitted him by law as the trustee of the estate. The amount he had embezzled was approximately fifty thousand dollars, and as he had long since lost his own money in the same kind of precarious bucket-shop transactions, it would have been but a matter of days before the shortage caused by his extra-legal operations would have been discovered.

In his safe were found practically all the gem-stones missing from the Kenting collection, including the large and valuable alexandrite. (How or when he had acquired this last item was never definitely determined.) The package of bills which Kenyon Kenting had so trustingly given him was also found in the safe.

All this happened years before the actual account of the case was set down here. Since then, Kenyon Kenting has married his sister-in-law, Madelaine, who returned to the Purple House the second day after Fleel's suicide.

Less than a year later Vance and I had tea with Mrs. Falloway. Vance had a genuine affection for the crippled old woman. As we



were about to go, Fraim Falloway entered the room. He was a different man from the one we had known during the investigation of what the papers persisted in calling the Kenting kidnap case (perhaps the alliteration of the nomenclature was largely the reason for it). Fraim Falloway's face had noticeably filled in, and his color was healthy and normal; there was a vitality in his eyes, and he moved with ease and determined alacrity. His whole manner had changed. I learned later that old Mrs. Falloway had called in the endocrinologist whose name Vance had given her, and that the youth had been under observation and treatment for many months.

After our greetings that day Vance asked Falloway casually how his stamp collecting was going. The youth seemed almost scornful and replied he had no time for such matters any more—that he was too busy with his new work at the Museum of Natural History to devote any of his time to so futile a pursuit as philately.

It might be interesting to note, in closing, that Kenyon Kenting's first act, after his marriage to Madelaine Kenting, was to have the exterior of the Purple House thoroughly scraped and sand-blasted, so that the natural color of the bricks and stones was restored. It ceased to be the "purple house," and took on a more domestic and *gemütlich* appearance, and has so remained to the present day.

THE END

## Footnotes

- [1] "The Garden Murder Case" (Scribners, 1935).
- [2] This famous case had taken place just three months earlier.
- [3] As I learned later, he was referring to his Scottish terrier, Pibroch Sandyman. Incidentally, this dog won the puppy class that day and received Reserve Winners as well. Later he became a Champion.
- [4] Markham and Vance had been close friends for over fifteen years, and, although Vance's unofficial connection with the District Attorney's office had begun somewhat in the spirit of an experimental adventure, Markham had now come to depend implicitly upon his friend as a vital associate in his criminal investigations.
- [5] There had been several recent kidnappings at this time, two of a particularly atrocious nature, and the District Attorney's office and the Commissioner of Police were being constantly and severely criticized by the press for their apparent helplessness in the situation.
- [6] Vance was referring to the gambling establishment which figured so prominently in the Casino murder case.
- [7] Vance was mistaken about this, as Kenting belonged to the old, or original, Klan, in which there was no such title as King Keagle. This title did not come into existence until 1915, with the modern Klan. Kenting probably had been a Grand Dragon (or State head) in the original Klan.
- [8] Robert A. MacDermott was Vance's kennel manager.
- [9] Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy were finger-print experts attached to the New York Police Department.
- [10] Peter Quackenbush was the official police photographer.
- [11] The official time of sunrise on that day was 4:45, local mean time, or 4:41, Eastern standard time; but daylight saving time was then in effect, and Mrs. Kenting's reference to sunrise in New York at approximately six o'clock was correct.
- [12] Although Vance never collected semiprecious stones himself, he had become deeply interested in the subject as early as his college days.
- [13] "The Benson Murder Case" (Scribners, 1926).
- [14] Captain Anthony P. Jerym, Bertillon expert of the New York Police Department.
- [15] The sensational Davis cup winner and America's first seeded player at the time.
- [16] This was the same Mr. Hannix whom Vance had already met both at Bowie and at Empire, and who had acted as Floyd Garden's book-maker before that young man lost his interest in racing as a result of the tragic events related in "The Garden Murder Case."
- [17] The Westchester Station of the Post-Office Department, situated at 1436 Williamsbridge Road, at the intersection of East Tremont Avenue, collects and delivers mail in the following territory, starting from Paulding Avenue and Pelham Parkway: South side of Pelham Parkway to Kingsland Avenue; to Mace Avenue; to Wickham Avenue; to Gunhill Road; to Bushnell Avenue; to Hutchinson River; west side of Hutchinson River to Givans Creek; to Eastchester Bay; to Long Island Sound; to Bronx River; to Ludlow Avenue (now known as Eastern Boulevard); to Pugsley Avenue; to McGraw Avenue; to Storrow Street; to Unionport Road; to East Tremont Avenue; to Bronxdale Avenue; to Van Nest Avenue; to Paulding Avenue; to Pelham Parkway.
- [18] A detective of the Homicide Bureau who participated in nearly all of Vance's criminal investigations.
- [19] Burke was a detective from the Homicide Bureau, who, as a rule, acted as Sergeant Heath's right-hand man.
- [20] Guilfoyle was another detective from the Homicide Bureau, and had helped with the investigation of the "Canary" murder case.
- [21] Vance's immediate knowledge regarding the exact truth of the situation, when he recognized Mrs. Falloway beneath the tree that night, was another instance of his uncanny ability to read human nature. I myself was startled by the simplicity and accuracy of his logic as the woman confessed the facts; for Vance had reasoned, almost in a flash, that the crippled old woman, who obviously was not guilty of the crime of kidnapping, could not have summoned sufficient strength for so heroic an act, unless it was on behalf of some one very dear to her and whose welfare and protection were foremost in her mind.
- [22] A famous side-show "fat woman" of the time.
- [23] It is interesting to note that in the entire association between Markham and Vance I had never heard either of them pay the other a compliment of any kind. When one of them so much as bordered on a compliment, the other always broke in sharply with a remark which made any further outward display of sentiment impossible. To me it seemed as if both of them had a deep-rooted instinct to keep the intimate and personal side of their affection for each other disguised and unspoken.
- [24] "The Casino Murder Case" (Scribners, 1934).
- [25] Vance was greatly mistaken on this point, as I now have reason to know. It turned out to be no less than a matter of life and death.
- [26] I have made one small and wholly immaterial change in transcribing this note. I have used the year in which I am actually writing the record of that memorable case, instead of stating the exact year in which it occurred (which, naturally, was the year given in the note); for I regard it as both unimportant and unnecessary to identify specifically the time at which the events herewith enumerated occurred. If that date has been forgotten, or if it is of any particular interest to the reader of this chronicle, it will not be difficult to find the year by referring to the back files of newspapers, for what has come to be known as the Kenting kidnap case received nation-wide publicity at the time.
- [27] Sergeant Ernest Heath was what is popularly known as a confirmed bachelor. Even when he retired from the Homicide Bureau at fifty, he devoted himself not to a wife, but to raising wyandottes on his farm in the Mohawk valley.
- [28] This, I later learned, was Givans Basin.
- [29] The practice of turning over ransom money to outsiders, in the hopes of settling kidnap cases, is not an unusual one. There have been several famous instances of this in recent years.
- [30] This was the same firm of certified public accountants whom Markham had called in to inspect the books of the firm of Benson and Benson in the investigation of the Benson murder case.

## 11. GRACIE ALLEN

### 1. A BUZZARD ESCAPES

(Friday, May 17; 8 pm.)

Philo Vance, curiously enough, always liked the Gracie Allen murder case more than any of the others in which he participated.

The case was, perhaps, not as serious as some of the others—although, on second thought, I am not so sure that this is strictly true. Indeed, it was fraught with many ominous potentialities; and its basic elements (as I look back now) were, in fact, intensely dramatic and sinister, despite its almost constant leaven of humour.

I have often asked Vance why he felt so keen a fondness for this case, and he has always airily retorted with a brief explanation that it constituted his one patent failure as an investigator of the many crimes presented to him by District Attorney John F.-X. Markham.

"No—oh, no. Van; it was not my case at all, don't y' know," Vance drawled, as we sat before his grate fire one wintry evening, long after the events. "Really, y'know, I deserve none of the credit. I would have been utterly baffled and helpless had it not been for the charming Gracie Allen who always popped up at just the crucial moment to save me from disaster...If ever you should embalm the case in print, please place the credit where it rightfully belongs...My word, what an astonishing girl! The goddesses of Zeus' Olympian menage never harrassed old Priam and Agamemnon with the eclat exhibited by Gracie Allen in harassing the recidivists of that highly scented affair. Amazin!..."

It was an almost unbelievable case from many angles, exceedingly unorthodox and unpredictable. The mystery and enchantment of perfume permeated the entire picture. The magic of fortune-telling and commercial haruspicy in general were intimately involved in its deciphering. And there was a human romantic element which lent it an unusual roseate colour.

To start with, it was spring—the 17th day of May—and the weather was unusually mild. Vance and Markham and I had dined on the spacious veranda of the Bellwood Country Club overlooking the Hudson. The three of us had chatted in desultory fashion, for this was to be an hour of sheer relaxation and pleasure, without any intrusion of the jarring criminal interludes which had, in recent years, marked so many of our talks.

However, even at this moment of serenity, ugly criminal angles were beginning to protrude, though unsuspected by any of us; and their shadow was creeping silently toward us.

We had finished our coffee and were sipping our chartreuse when Sergeant Heath [Sergeant Ernest Heath, of the Homicide Bureau, who had been in charge of other cases which Vance had investigated.], looking grim and bewildered, appeared at the door leading from the main dining-room to the veranda, and strode quickly to our table.

"Hello, Mr. Vance." His tone was hurried. "...Howdy, Chief. Sorry to bother you, but this came into the office half an hour after you left and, knowing where you were, I thought it best to bring it to you pronto." He drew a folded yellow paper from his pocket and, opening it out, placed it emphatically before the District Attorney.

Markham read it carefully, shrugged his shoulders, and handed the paper back to Heath.

"I can't see," he said without emotion, "why this routine information should necessitate a trip up here."

Heath's cheeks inflated with exasperation.

"Why, that's the guy, Chief, that threatened to get you."

"I'm quite aware of that fact," said Markham coldly; then he added in a somewhat softened tone: "Sit down, Sergeant. Consider yourself off duty for the moment, and have a drink of your favourite whisky."

When Heath had adjusted himself in a chair, Markham went on.

"Surely you don't expect me, at this late date, to begin taking seriously the hysterical mouthings of criminals I have convicted in the course of my duties."

"But, Chief, this guy's a tough hombre, and he ain't the forgetting or the forgiving kind."

"Anyway,"—Markham laughed without concern—"it would be tomorrow, at the earliest, before he could reach New York."

As Heath and Markham were speaking, Vance's eyebrows rose in mild curiosity.

"I say, Markham, all I've been able to glean is that your tutel'ry Sergeant has fears for your curtailed existence, and that you yourself are rather annoyed by his zealous worries."

"Hell, Mr. Vance, I'm not worryin'," Heath blurted. "I'm just considering the possibilities, as you might say."

"Yes, yes, I know," smiled Vance. "Alway careful. Sewin' up seams that haven't even ripped. Doughty and admirable, as always, Sergeant. But whence springeth your qualm?"

"I'm sorry, Vance." Markham apologized for his failure to explain. "It's really of no importance—just a routine telegraphic announcement of a commonplace jail-break at Nomenica. [Nomenica, southwest of Buffalo, was the westernmost State prison in New York.] Three men under long sentences staged the exodus, and two of them were shot by the guards..."

"I'm not botherin' about the guys who was shot," Heath cut in. "It's the other-one—the guy that got away safe—that's set me to thinkin'—"

"And who might this stimulator of thought be, Sergeant?" Vance asked.

"Benny the Buzzard!" whispered Heath, with melodramatic emphasis.

"Ah!" Vance smiled. "An ornithological specimen—*Buteo borealis*. Maybe he flew away to freedom..."

"It's no laughing matter, Mr. Vance." Heath became even more serious. "Benny the Buzzard—or Benny Pellinzi, to give him his honest monicker—is plenty tough, in spite of looking like a bloodless, pretty-faced boy. Only a few years back, he was strutting around telling anybody who'd listen that he was Public Enemy Number One. That type of guy. But he was only small change, except for his toughness and meanness—actually nothing but a dumb, stupid rat—"

"Rat? Buzzard?...My word, Sergeant, aren't fusin' your natural history?"

"And only three years ago," continued Heath doggedly, "Mr. Markham got him sent up for a twenty-year stretch. And he pulls a jail-

break just this afternoon and gets away with it. Sweet, ain't it?"

"Still," submitted Vance, "such A.W.O.L.'s have been taken ere this."

"Sure they have." Heath extended his off-duty respite and took another whisky. "But you must've read what this guy pulled in court when he was sentenced. The judge hadn't hardly finished slipping him the twenty years when he blew off his gauge. He pointed at Mr. Markham and, at the top of his voice, swore some kind of cockeyed oath that he'd come back and get him if it was the last thing he ever did. And he sounded like he meant it. He was so sore and steamed up that it took two man-eating bailiffs to drag him out of the court room. Generally it's the judge who gets the threats; but this guy elected to take it out on the D. A. And that somehow made more sense.

Vance nodded slowly.

"Yes, quite—quite. I see your point, Sergeant. Different and therefore dangerous."

"And why I really came here tonight," Heath went on, "was to tell Mr. Markham what I intended doing. Naturally, we'll be on the lookout for the Buzzard. He might come here direct, all right; and he might head west and try to reach the Dakotas—the Bad Lands for him, if he's got a brain."

"Exactly," Markham interpolated. "You're probably right when you suggest he'll head west. And I'm certainly planning no immediate jaunt to the Black Hills."

"Anyhow, Chief," the Sergeant persisted stubbornly, "I'm not taking any chances on him—especially since we've got a pretty good line on his old cronies in this burg."

"Just what line do you refer to, Sergeant?"

"Mirche, and the Domdaniel cafe, and Benny's old sweetie that sings there—the Del Marr jane."

"Whether Mirche and Pellinzi are cronies," said Markham, "is a moot question in my mind."

"It ain't in mine, Chief. And if the Buzzard should sneak back to New York, I've got a hunch he'd go straight to Mirche for help."

Markham did not argue the possibilities further. Instead, he merely asked: "What course do you intend to pursue, Sergeant?"

Heath leaned across the table.

"I figure it this way, Chief. If the Buzzard does plan to return to his old hunting-grounds, he'll be smart about it. He'll do it quick and sudden-like, figurin' we haven't got set. If he don't show up in the next few days I'll simply drop the idea, and the boys'll keep their eyes open in the routine way. But—beginning tomorrow morning, I plan to have Hennessey in that old lodging-house across from the Domdaniel, covering the little door leading into Mirche's private office. An' Burke and Snitkin will be with Hennessey in case the bird does show up."

"Aren't you a bit optimistic, Sergeant?" asked Vance. "Three years in prison can work many changes in a man's appearance, especially if the victim is still young and not too robust."

Heath dismissed Vance's scepticism with an impatient gesture.

"I'll trust Hennessey—he's got a good eye."

"Oh, I'm not questioning Hennessey's vision," Vance assured him, "—provided your liberty-lovin' Buzzard should be so foolish as to choose the front door for his entry into Mirche's office. But really, my dear Sergeant, Maestro Pellinzi may deem it wiser to steal in by the rear door, don't y know."

"There ain't no rear door," explained Heath. "And there ain't no side door, cither. A strictly private room with only one entrance facing the street. That's the wide-open and aboveboard set-up of this guy Mirche—everything on the up-and-up. Slick as they come."

"Is this sanctum a separate structure?" asked Vance. "Or is it an annex to the café? I don't seem to recall it."

"No. And you wouldn't notice it, if you weren't looking for it. It's like an end room that's been cut off in the corner of the building—the way they cut off a doctor's office, or a small shop, in a big apartment-house. But if you wanta see Mirche that's where you'll most likely find him. The place looks as innocent as an old ladies' home."

Heath glanced round at us significantly as he continued.

"And yet, plenty goes on in that little room. If I could ever get a dictaphone planted there, the D.A.'s office would have enough underworld trials on its hands to keep it busy from now on."

He paused and cocked an eye at Markham.

"How do you feel about my idea for tomorrow?"

"It can't do any harm, Sergeant," answered Markham without enthusiasm. "But I still think it would be a waste of time and energy."

"Maybe so." Heath finished his whisky. "But I feel I gotta follow my hunch, just the same."

Vance set down his liqueur glass, and a whimsical expression came into his eyes.

"But I say, Markham," he drawled, "it would be a waste of time and energy, no matter what the outcome. Ah, your precious law, and its prissy procedure! How you Solons complicate the simple things of life! Even if this red-tailed hawk with the operatic name should appear among his olden haunts and be snared in the Sergeant's seine, you would still treat him kindly and caressingly under the euphemistic phrase, 'due process of law.' You'd coddle him no end. You'd take all possible precautions to bring him in alive, although he himself might blow the brains out of a couple of the Sergeant's confreres. Then you'd lodge and nourish him well; you'd drive him through town in a high-powered limousine; you'd give him a pleasant scenic trip back to Nomenica. And all for what, old dear? For the highly questionable privilege of supportin' him elegantly for life."

Markham was obviously nettled.

"I suppose you could settle the whole situation with a larp"

"It could be, don't y know." Vance was in one of his tantalizing moods. "Here's a worthless johnnie who has long been a thorn in the side of the law; who has, as you jolly well know, killed a man and been convicted accordingly; who has engineered a lawless prison break costing two more lives; who has promised to murder you in cold blood; and who is even now deprivin' the Sergeant of his slumber. Not a nice person, Markham. And all these irregularities might be so easily and expeditiously adjusted by shooting the johnnie on sight, or otherwise disposing of him quickly, without ado or Chinoiserie."

"And I suppose"—Markham spoke almost angrily—"that you yourself would be willing to undertake this illegal purge."

"Willing?" There was a teasing tone in Vance's voice. "I'd be positively delighted. My good deed for that day."

Markham puffed vigorously at his cigar. He was always irritated when Vance's persiflage took this line.

"Deliberately taking a human life, Vance——"

"Please spare me the logion, Reverend Doctor. I know the answer. With Society and Law and Order singing the Greek chorus a capella. But you must admit my suggested solution is logical, practical, and just."

"We've gone into that sophistry before," snapped Markham. "And furthermore, I'm not going to let you spoil my dinner with such nonsensical chatter."

## 2. A RUSTIC INTERLUDE

(Saturday, May 18; afternoon.)

The next day, shortly after noon, we met Markham in his dingy private office overlooking the Tombs. Ordinarily the District Attorney's office was closed at this hour on Saturdays, but Markham was in the meshes of a trying political tangle and wished to see the affair settled as soon as possible.

"I'm deuced sorry, don't y' know," said Vance, "that you must slave on an afternoon like this. I was hoping you might be persuaded to come for a drive over the countryside."

"What!" exclaimed Markham in mock surprise. "Are you succumbing to your natural impulses? Don't tell me Mother Nature's sirenical tones can sway a hothouse sybarite like yourself! Why not have Van lash you to the mast in true Odyssean manner?"

"No. I find myself actually longin' for the spell of an Ogygian isle with citron scent and cedar-sawn—"

"And perhaps a wood-nymph like Calypso."

"My dear Markham! Really, now!" Vance pretended indignation. "No—oh, no. I merely plan a bit of gambolin' in the Bronx greenery."

"I see that the clear-toned Sirens of the flowered fields have snared you." Markham's smile was playfully derisive. "If Heath's ominous dream is fulfilled we'll later be steering a stormy course between Scylla and Charybdis."

"One never knows, does one? But should it come to pass, I trust no man shall be caught from out our hollow ship by the voracious Scylla."

"For Heaven's sake, Vance, don't be so gloomy. You're talking utter nonsense."

(I particularly remember this bit of classical repartee which certainly would not have found its way into this record, had it not been that it proved curiously prophetic, even to the scent of citron and the Messina monster's cave.)

"And I suppose," suggested Markham, "you'll do your gamboling in immaculate attire. I somehow can't picture you in vagabondian trappings."

"You're quite wrong," said Vance. "I shall don a rugged old tweed suit—the most ancient bit of coverin' I possess...But tell me, Markham, how goes it with the zealous Sergeant and his premonitions?"

"Oh, I suppose he's gone ahead with his useless arrangements." Markham spoke with indifference. "But if poor Hennessey has to invite strabismus for very long I'll have more to fear from him in the way of retribution than from Mr. Beniamino Pellinzi...I don't quite understand Heath's sudden case of jitters over my safety."

"Stout fella, Heath." Vance studied the ash on his cigarette with a hesitant smile. "Fact is, Markham, I intend to partake of Mirche's expensive hospitality tonight myself."

"You too!...You're actually going to the Domdaniel tonight?"

"Not in the hope of encounterin' your friend the Buzzard," replied Vance. "But Heath has stirred my curiosity. I should like to take a closer look at the incredible Mr. Mirche. I've seen him before, of course, at his hospice, but I've never really paid attention to his features. And I could bear a peep—from the outside only, of course—at this mysterious office which has so fretted the Sergeant's imagination...And there's always the chance a little excitement may ensue when the early portentous shadows of the mysterious night \_\_\_\_\_"

"Come, come, Vance. You sound like a penny-dreadful. What *arriere pense* is being screened by this smoke of words?"

"If you really must know, Markham, the food is excellent at the Domdaniel. I was merely tryin' to hide a gourmet's yearnin'..."

Markham snorted, and the talk shifted to a discussion of other matters, interrupted now and then by telephone calls. When Markham had completed his arrangements for the afternoon and evening, he ushered us out through the judges' private chambers and down to the street.

After a brief lunch we drove Markham back to his office, and then headed uptown to Vance's apartment. Here Vance changed his suit for the old disreputable tweed, and put on heavier boots and a soft well-worn Homburg hat. Then we went out again to his Hispano-Suiza, and in an hour's time we were driving leisurely along Palisade Avenue in the Riverdale section of the Bronx.

Both sides of the road were thickly grown with trees and shrubs. The fragrance of spring flowers hung in the air, and we caught a fleck of bright colour now and then. On our left, beyond an unbroken steel-mesh fence, a gentle slope dipped to the Hudson. On the right the ground rose more abruptly, so that the rough stone wall did not shut off the prospect.

At the top of a slight incline, just where the road swung inland, Vance turned off the roadway, and brought the car to a gentle stop.

"This, I think, would be an ideal spot for minglin' with the flora and communin' with nature."

Except for the fence on the river side, and the stone wall, perhaps five feet high, along the inner border of the road, we were, to all appearances, on a lonely country road. Vance crossed the broad and shaded grassy strip that stretched like a runner of green carpet between the roadway and the wall. He clambered up the stone enclosure, beckoning me to do likewise as he disappeared in the lush rustic foliage on the farther side.

For over an hour we trudged back and forth through the woods, and then, as we suddenly came face to face with the stone enclosure again, Vance reluctantly looked at his watch.

"Almost five," he said. "We'd better be staggerin' home, Van."

I preceded him to the roadway, and started slowly back toward the car. A large automobile, running almost noiselessly, suddenly came round the turn. I stopped as it sped by, and watched it disappear over the edge of the hill. Then I continued in the direction of our own car.

After a few steps, I became aware of a young woman standing near the wall, well back from the roadway, in a secluded grassy bower. She was shaking the front of her skirt nervously and with marked agitation, and was stamping one foot in the soft loam. She

looked perturbed and displeased, and as I drew nearer I saw that on the front of her flimsy summer frock there was an inch-wide burnt hole.

As a vexed exclamation escaped her, Vance leaped—or, I should say, fell—from the wall behind her. His heel caught in the crude masonry, and as he strove to regain his balance, a sharp projection of the plaster tore the sleeve of his coat. The unexpected commotion startled the young woman anew, and she turned, inquisitively alert.

She was a petite creature, and gracefully animated, with a piquant oval face and regular, sensitive features. Her eyes were large and brown, with extremely long lashes curling over them. A straight and slender nose lent dignity and character to a mouth made for smiling. She was slim and supple, and seemed to fit in perfectly with her pastoral surroundings.

"My word!" murmured Vance, looking down at her. "That wasn't a very graceful entry into your harbour. Please forgive me if I frightened you."

The girl continued to stare at him distrustfully, and as I looked at Vance again I could well understand her reaction. He was quite dishevelled; his shoes and trousers were generously spattered with mud; his hat was crushed and grotesquely awry; and his torn coat-sleeve looked like that of some roving mendicant.

In a moment the girl smiled. "Oh, I'm not frightened," she assured him in a musical voice which had a very youthful engaging timbre, "I'm just angry. Terribly angry. Were you ever angry?...But I'm not angry with you, for I don't even know you...Maybe I would be angry I with you if I knew you...Did you ever think of that?"

"Yes—yes. Quite often." Vance laughed and removed his hat: immediately he looked far more presentable. "And I'm sure you'd be entirely justified, too...By the by, may I sit down? I'm beastly tired, don't y' know."

The girl looked quickly up the road, and then seated herself rather abruptly, much as a child might throw herself carelessly on the ground.

"That would be wonderful. I'll read your palm. Have you ever had your palm read? I'm very good at it. Delpha taught me all the lines. Delpha knows all about the hands, and the stars, and lucky numbers. She's a fortune-teller. And she's psychic, too. Just like me. I'm psychic. Are you psychic? But maybe I can't concentrate today." Her voice took on a mystic quality. "Some days, when I'm feeling in tune, I could tell you how old you are and how many children you have..."

Vance laughed, and seated himself beside her.

"But really, y' know, I don't think I could bear to learn such staggerin' facts about myself just now..."

Vance took out his cigarette-case and opened it slowly. "I'm sure you wouldn't mind if I smoked," he said ingratiatingly, holding out the case to her; but receiving only a giggle and a shake of the head, he lighted one of his Regies for himself.

"But I'm awfully glad you mentioned cigarettes," the girl said. "It reminds me how mad I was."

"Oh, yes." Vance smiled indulgently. "But won't you tell me with whom you were so angry?"

She squinted at the cigarette between his fingers.

"I don't know now," she answered with slight confusion.

"By Jove, that's unfortunate. Maybe it was me you were angry with all the time?"

"No, it wasn't you—at least, I didn't think it was you. Now I'm not so sure. At first I thought it was somebody in a big car that just went by——"

"And what were you angry about?"

"Oh, that...Well, look at the front of my new dress here." She spread the skirt about her. "Do you see that big burnt hole? It's just ruined. And I simply adore this dress. Don't you like it?—that is, if it wasn't burnt? I made it myself—well, anyhow, I told mother how I wanted it made. It made me look awfully cute. And now I can't wear it any more." There was real distress in her tone. "Did you throw that lighted cigarette?"

"What cigarette?" asked Vance.

"Why, the cigarette that burnt my dress. It's about here somewhere... Well, anyhow, it was an awfully good shot, especially since you couldn't see me. And maybe you didn't even know I was here. And that would make it much harder to hit me, don't you think?"

"Yes, I can see your point." Vance was as much interested as he was amused. "But really, my dear, it must have been some villain in the car—if there was a car."

The girl sighed.

"Well, then," she murmured with resignation, "I guess it wasn't you I was mad with. And now I don't know who it was. And that makes me madder than ever. I'm sure if I was mad with you, you'd do something about it."

"Shall we say then, that I'm just as sorry about it as if I had thrown the cigarette?" suggested Vance.

"But now I don't know whether you did or not. If you couldn't see me through the wall, how could I see you?"

"Irrefragable logic!" Vance returned, adjusting himself to her seemingly fanciful mood. "Therefore, you must permit me to make amends—no matter who the culprit was."

"Really," she said, "I don't know what you mean." But a twinkle in her eyes seemed to belie the words.

"I mean just this: I want you to go down to Chateau and Lyons [Chateau and Lyons was at that time one of the more exclusive and fashionable dress shops of New York.] and select one of their prettiest frocks—one which will make you look just as cute as this one does."

"Oh, I couldn't afford it!"

He took out his card-case, and, jotting a few words on one of his visiting cards, tucked it beneath the flap of the girl's handbag which was lying on the grass.

"You just take that card to Mr. Lyons himself and tell him I sent you."

Her eyes beamed gratefully, and she did not protest further.

"As you quite correctly say," Vance continued, "you couldn't see through the wall, and I therefore see no human way of proving that I did not throw the cigarette."

"Well, now, that's settled, isn't it?" The girl giggled again. "I'm so glad it was you I was mad with for throwing the cigarette."

"And so am I," asserted Vance. "And, incidentally, I also hope you'll use the same perfume when you wear your new dress. It's somehow just like the springtime—a 'delicious scent of citron and orange trees,' as Longfellow paeaned in his Wayside Inn."

"Oh, did he?"

"By the by, what is it? I don't recognize it as any of the popular scents."

"I don't know," the girl replied. "I guess nobody knows. It hasn't any name. Imagine not having a name! If we didn't have names we'd get terribly mixed up, wouldn't we?...It was made specially for me by George—but I suppose I shouldn't really call him George to strangers. His name is Mr. Burns. I'm his assistant at the In-O-Scent Corporation—that's a big perfume factory. He's always mixing different things together and smelling them. That's his job. He's very clever too. Only, he's much too serious. But I don't think he mixed any citron in it—I really don't know exactly what citron smells like. I thought it was something you put in cake."

"It's the preserved rind of the citron that goes into cake," Vance explained. "The oil of citron is quite different. It has the smell of citronella and lemons; and when it is treated with sulphuric acid it even has the smell of violets."

"Isn't that wonderful!" she exclaimed. "Why, you sound just like George. He's always saying things like that. I'm sure Mr. Burns knows all about it. He gets me so mixed up sometimes, bringing him the right bottles of extracts and essences. And he's so particular about it. Sometimes he even says I don't know how to boil his old flasks and tubes and graduates. Imagine!"

"But I'm sure," Vance asserted, "that you brought him the right phials when he prepared the scent you are wearing. And I'm sure one of them contained citron, though it may have had some other name...And speaking of names, is your name, by any chance, Calypso?"

She shook her head.

"No, but it's something almost like that. It's Gracie Allen."

Vance smiled, and the girl's chatter took still another direction. "But aren't you going to tell me what you were doing over beyond the wall? You know, that's private property, and I wouldn't go in there for anything. It wouldn't be right. Would it? And anyhow, I don't know where there's a gate. But this is nice out here. I've come here several times, and yet no one's ever thrown lighted cigarettes at me before, although I've been right in this same spot many times. But I guess everything has to happen the first time sometime. Have you ever thought of that?"

"Yes—oh, yes. It's a profound question." He chuckled. "But aren't you afraid to come to such an unfrequented spot alone?"

"Alone?" Again the girl glanced up the road. "I don't come alone. I generally come with a friend who lives over toward Broadway. His name is Mr. Puttie, and he works in the same business house I do. Mr. Puttie's a salesman. And Mr. Burns—I told you about him before—was very angry with me for coming out here this afternoon with Mr. Puttie. But he's always angry when I go anywhere with anybody else, and especially if it's Mr. Puttie. Don't you think that's silly?" She made a self-satisfied moue.

"And where might Mr. Puttie be now?" asked Vance. "Don't tell me he's attempting to sell perfumes along the highways and byways of Riverdale."

"Oh, goodness, no! He never works on Saturday afternoons. And neither do I. I really think the brain should have a rest now and then, don't you?...Oh, you asked me where Mr. Puttie in. Well, I'll tell you—I'm sure he wouldn't mind. He's gone to look for a nunnery."

"A nunnery? Good Heavens! What for?"

"He said there was a lovely view from there, with benches and flowers and everything. But he didn't know whether it was up the road from here or down. So I told him to find out first. I didn't feel like going to a nunnery when I didn't even know where it was. Would you go to a nunnery if you didn't know where it was—especially if your shoes hurt you?"

"No, I think you were eminently sensible. But I happen to know where it is: it's quite a distance down the other way."

"Well, Jimmy—that is, Mr. Puttie—has gone in the wrong direction then. That's just like him. I'm lucky I made him look first..."



### 3. THE STARTLING ADVENTURE

(Saturday, May 18; 6:30 pm.)

The girl leaned forward, and looked at Vance with impulsive eagerness.

"But I forgot: I'm just dying to know what you were doing on the other side of the wall. I do hope it was exciting. I'm very romantic, you know. Are you romantic? I mean, I just love excitement and thrills. And it's so thrilling and exciting along here—especially with that high wall. I know you must have been having a simply wonderful adventure of some kind. All kinds of thrilling and exciting things happen inside of walls. People don't just build walls for nothing, do they?"

"No—rarely." Vance shook his head in pretended earnestness. "People generally have a very good reason for building walls, such as: to keep other people out—or, sometimes, to keep them in."

"You see, I was right!...And now tell me, she pleaded, "what wild, exciting adventure did you have there?"

Vance drew a deep puff on his cigarette. "Really, y' know," he said with a mock seriousness, "I'm afraid to breathe a word of it to anyone...By the by, just how exciting do you like your adventures?"

"Oh, they must be terribly exciting—and dangerous—and dark—and filled with the spirit of revenge. You know, like a murder—maybe a murder for love..."

"That's it!" Vance slapped his knee. "Now I can tell you everything—I know you'll understand." He lowered his voice to an intimate, sepulchral whisper. "When I came dashing so ungracefully over the wall, I had just committed a murder."

"How simply wonderful!" But I noticed she edged away from him a bit.

"That's why I was running away so fast," Vance went on.

"I think you're joking." The girl was at her ease again. "But go on."

"It was really an act of altruism," Vance continued, seeming to take genuine enjoyment in his fantastic tale. "I did it for a friend—to save a friend from danger—from revenge."

"He must have been a very bad man. I'm sure he deserved to die and that you did a noble deed—like the heroes of olden times. They didn't wait for the police and the law and all those things. They just rode forth and fixed everything up—just like that."

She snapped her fingers, and I could not help thinking of Markham's sarcastic allusion to Vance's conclusive "lirp" the previous evening.

Vance studied her in sombre astonishment.

"Out of the mouth of babes——" he began.

"What?" Her brow furrowed.

"Nothing, really." And Vance laughed under his breath..."Well, to continue with my dark confession: I knew this man was a very dangerous person, and that my friend's life was in peril. So I came out here this afternoon, and back there, in yon shady wood, where no one could see, I killed him...I am so glad you think I did right."

His fabricated story, based on his conversation with Markham the night before, fitted in well with the girl's unexpected request for an exciting adventure.

"And what was the murdered man's name?" she asked. "I hope it was a terrible name. I always say people have just the names they deserve. It's like numerology—only it's different. If you have a certain number of letters in your name, it isn't like having a different number of letters, is it? It means something, too. Delpha told me."

"What names do you especially like?" Vance asked.

"Well, let me see...Burns is a pretty name, don't you think?"

"Yes, I do." Vance smiled pleasantly. "Incidentally, it's Scotch——"

"But George isn't a bit Scotch," the girl protested indignantly. "He's awfully generous."

"No, no," Vance hastened to assure her. "Not Scotch like that. I was going to say that it's Scotch for 'brook' or 'rivulet'..."

"Oh, water! That's different. You see, I was right!" she chirped; then nodded sagely. "Water! That's George! He never drinks—you know, liquor. He says it affects his nose, so he can't smell."

"Smell?"

"Uh—huh. George has simply got to smell—it's his job. Smelling scents, and knowing which one will sell big, and which one will make you a vamp, and which one is bad enough for hotel soap. He's terribly clever that way. He even invented In-O-Scent—mixed it all himself. And Mr. Doolson—he's our boss—named the new factory after George. Well, not exactly after George, but you know what I mean."

Pride shone in her eyes.

"And oh!" she ran on; "George has five letters in his name—honest—just you count them—B—U—R—N—S. And I've got five letters in my last name, too. Isn't that funny? But it means something—something important. It's—it's science. I vibrate to five. But six is awfully unlucky for me. I'm allergic—that's what Delpha calls it—to six. It's very scientific—really!"

"Mr. Puttie has six letters in his name," said Vance, with a puckish glance at her.

"That's right. I've thought of that...Oh, well...But I forgot:—what was the name of the man you so bravely killed?"

"He had a very unpleasant name. He was called Benny the Buzzard."

The girl's head bobbed up and down vigorously in complete understanding.

"Yes, that's a very bad name. It's got—let me see—seven letters. Oh! That's a mystical number. It's sort of like Fate!"

"Well, he was sent to prison for twenty years." Vance resumed his ingenious recital. "But he broke away and escaped only yesterday, and came back to New York to kill my friend."

"Oh, then there will be headlines in all the papers tomorrow about your murdering him!"

"My word! I hope not." Vance pretended a show of great concern. "I feel I have done a good deed, but I do hope, don't y' know, I am not found out. And I am sure you wouldn't tell anyone, would you?"

"Oh, no," the girl assured him.

Vance heaved an exaggerated sigh, and slowly rose to his feet.

"Well, I must get into hiding," he said, "before the police learn of my crime. Another hour or so and—who knows?—they may be after me."

"Oh, policemen are so silly." She pouted. "They're always getting people into trouble. Do you know?—if everybody was good we wouldn't need any policemen, would we?"

"No—o——"

"And if we didn't have any policemen, we wouldn't need to bother about being good, would we?"

"My word!" Vance murmured. "Do you, by any chance, happen to be a philosopher in disguise?"

She seemed astonished.

"Why, this isn't a disguise. I only wore a disguise once—when I was a little girl. I went to a party disguised as a fairy."

Vance smiled admiringly.

"I'm sure," he said, "it was quite a needless costume. You'll never need a disguise, my dear, to pass as a most charming fairy...Would you care to shake hands with a dyed-in-the-wool villain?"

She put her hand in his. "You're not really a villain. Why, you only murdered one bad man. And thank you so much for the lovely new dress," she added. "Did you really mean it?"

"I really did." His sincerity dissipated any remaining doubt. "And good luck with Mr. Puttie—and Mr. Burns."

She waved solemnly as we made our way down the dusty road toward our car. Vance was occupied with lighting another Regie, and as we turned the bend of the road I looked back. A dapper young man stood before the girl; and I knew that Mr. Puttie, the perfumery salesman, had returned from his fruitless quest for the nunnery.

"What an amazin' creature!" murmured Vance, as we climbed into the car and drove off. "I really think she half believes my dramatization of the Sergeant's fears and my ribbing of Markham. There's naivete, Van. Or, mayhap, a basically shrewd nature, plethoric with romance, striving to live among the clouds in this sordid world. And living by the manufacture of perfume. What an incredible combination of circumstances! And all mixed up with springtime—and visions of heroics—and young love."

I looked at him questioningly.

"Quite," he repeated. "That was definitely indicated. But I fear that Mr. Puttie's long jaunts from upper Broadway will come to naught in the end. You noted that she anointed herself with the fragrant aroma of Mr. Burns' nameless concoction, even when transiently countrysiding with Mr. Puttie. All signs considered, I regard the mixer and smeller of the subtle scents of Araby as the odds-on favourite to win the Lovin' Cup."

#### 4. THE DOMDANIEL CAFE

(Saturday, May 18; 8 pm.)

The Domdaniel cafe, situated in West 50th Street near Seventh Avenue, had for many years attracted a general and varied clientele. The remodelling of the large old mansion in which the café was housed had been tastefully achieved, and much of the old air of solidity and durability remained.

From either side of the wide entrance to the ends of the building ran a narrow open terrace attractively studded with pseudo-Grecian pots of neatly-trimmed privet. At the western end of the house a delivery alley separated the cafe from the neighboring edifice. At the east side there was a paved driveway, perhaps ten feet wide, passing under an ivy-draped porte-cochere to the garage in the rear. A commercial skyscraper at the corner of Seventh Avenue abutted on this driveway.

It was nearly eight o'clock when we arrived that mild May evening. Lighting a cigarette, Vance peered into the shadows of the porte-cochere and the dimly-lighted area beyond. He then sauntered for a short distance into this narrow approach, and gazed at the ivy-covered windows and side door almost hidden from the street. In a few moments he rejoined me on the sidewalk and turned his seemingly casual attention to the front of the building.

"Ah!" he murmured. "There's the entrance to Senor Mirche's mysterious office which so strangely inflamed the Sergeant's hormones. Probably a window enlarged, when the old house was remodelled. Merely utilitarian, don't y' know."

It was, as Vance observed, an unpretentious door opening directly on the narrow terrace; and two sturdy wooden steps led down to the sidewalk. At each side of the door was a small window—or, I should say, an opening like a machicolation—securely barred with a wrought-iron grille.

"The office has a larger window at the side, overlooking the tessellated driveway," said Vance; "and that too, is closely grilled. The light from without must be rather inadequate when, as the Sergeant seems to think, Mr. Mirche is engaged in his nefarious plottin's."

To my surprise, Vance went up the wooden steps to the terrace and casually peered through one of the narrow windows into the office.

"The office appears to be quite as honest and upright inside as it does from out here," he said. "I fear the suspicious Sergeant is a victim of nightmares..."

He turned and looked across the street at the rooming-house. Two adjoining windows on the second floor, directly opposite the small corner door of the Domdaniel, were dark.

"Poor Hennessey!" sighed Vance. "Behind one of those sombre squares of blackness he is watchin' and hopin'. Symbolic of all mankind...Ah, well, let's not tarry longer. I have amorous visions of a fricandeau de veau Macedonie. I trust the chef has lost none of his cunning since last I was here. Then, it was really sublime."

We walked on to the main entrance, and were greeted in the impressive reception-hall by the unctuous Mr. Mirche himself. He seemed well pleased to see Vance, whom he addressed by name, and turned us over to the head-waiter, pompously exhorting our cicerone that we be given every attention and consideration.

The rejuvenated interior of the Domdaniel had a far more modern appearance than did the exterior. Withal, much of the charm of another day still lingered in the panels of carved wood and the scrolled banisters of the stairway, and in a wide fireplace which had been left intact at one side of the huge main room.

We could not have selected a better table than the one to which we were led. It was near the fireplace, and since the tables along the walls were slightly elevated, we had an unobstructed view of the entire room. Far on our right was the main entrance, and on our left the orchestra stand. Opposite us, at the other end of the room, an archway led to the hall; and beyond that, almost as if framed in the doorway, we could see the wide carpeted stairs to the floor above.

Vance glanced over the room cursorily and then gave his attention to ordering the dinner. This accomplished, he leaned back in his chair and, lighting a Regie, relaxed comfortably. But I noted that, from under his half-closed eyelids, he was scrutinizing the people about us. Suddenly he straightened up in his chair, and leaning toward me, murmured: "My word! My aging eyes must be playing tricks on me. I say, peep far over on my right, near the entrance. It's the astonishing young woman of the citron scent. And she's having a jolly time. She is accompanied by a youthful swain in sartorial splendor...I wonder whether it is her explorin' escort in Riverdale, or the more serious teetotaler, Mr. Burns. Whoever it is, he is being most attentive, and is pleased with himself no end."

At once I recognized the elegant young man of whom I had caught a glimpse as we rounded the turn on Palisade Avenue on our way back to the car. I informed Vance that it was undoubtedly Mr. Puttie.

"I'm in no way surprised," was his response. "The young woman is obviously following the approved and time-honoured technique. Puttie will receive, alas! an overwhelming percentage of her favours until the really important moment of final decision is at hand. Then, I opine, the beneficiary will be the neglected Burns." He laughed softly. "The chicaneries of amour never change. If only Burns himself were on the scene tonight, separate and apart, glowerin' with jealousy, and eatin out his heart!" He smiled with wistful amusement.

His glance roved about the room again as he puffed lazily at his cigarette. Before long his eyes rested quizzically on a man alone at a small table near the far corner.

"Really, y' know, I believe I have found our Mr. Burns, the dolorous hypotenuse of my imagin'ry triangle. At least the gentleman fulfils all the requirements. He is alone. He is of a suitable age. He is serious. He sits at a table placed at just the right angle to observe his strayin' wood-nymph and her companion. He is watching her rather closely and seems displeased and jealous enough to be contemplating murder. He has no appetite for the food before him. He has no wine or other alcoholic beverage. And—he is actually glowerin'!"

I let my gaze follow Vance's as he spoke, and I observed the lonely young man. His face was stern and somewhat rugged. Despite

the sense of humour denoted by the upward angle of his eyebrows, his broad forehead gave the impression of considerable depth of thought and a capacity for accurate judgment. His grey eyes were set well apart, and engaging in their candour; and his chin was firm, yet sensitive. He was dressed neatly and unostentatiously, in severe contrast with the showy grandeur of Mr. Puttie.

During an intermission in the floor show the lone young man in question rose rather hesitantly from his chair and walked with determined strides to the table occupied by Miss Allen and her companion. They greeted him without enthusiasm. The newcomer, frowning unpleasantly, made no attempt to be cordial.

The young woman raised her eyebrows with a histrionic hauteur altogether incongruous with the elfish cast of her features. Her companion's manner was degage and palpably condescending—his was the role of the victor over a conquered and harassed enemy. His effect upon Burns—if it was Burns—must have been exceedingly gratifying to him. Combined with the young woman's simulated disdain, it perceptibly enhanced the interloper's gloom. He made an awkward gesture of defeat, and, turning away, went despondently back to his table. However, I noticed that Miss Allen shot several covert glances in his direction—which suggested that she was far from being the indifferent damsel she had pretended to be.

Vance had watched the little drama with delighted interest.

"And now, Van," he said, "the canvas of young love is quite complete. Ah, the eternally sadistic, yet loyal, heart of woman!..."

Fifteen or twenty minutes later Mirche, beaming and bowing, came into the dining-room from the main entrance hall, and passed on toward the rear of the room to a small table just behind the orchestra dais, at which one of the entertainers sat. She was a blond and flashingly handsome woman whom I knew to be the well-known singer Dixie Del Marr.

She greeted Mirche with a smile which seemed more intimate than would be expected from an employee to an employer. Mirche drew out the chair facing her and sat down. I was somewhat surprised to note that Vance was watching them closely, and felt that this was no idle curiosity on his part.

I turned my gaze again to the singer's table. Dixie Del Marr and Mirche had begun what appeared to be a confidential chat. They were leaning toward each other, evidently wishing to avoid being overheard by those about them. Mirche was emphasizing some point, and Dixie Del Marr was nodding in agreement. Then Miss Del Marr made some answering remark to which he, in turn, nodded understandingly.

After a brief continuation of their conversation in this overt, yet secretive, manner, they both sat back in their chairs, and Mirche gave an order to a passing waiter. A few moments later the waiter returned with two slender glasses of rose-coloured liquid.

"Very interestin'," murmured Vance. "I wonder..."

## 5. A RENDEZVOUS

(Saturday, May 18; 9:30 pm.)

It was shortly thereafter that I noticed Gracie Allen rise gaily from her seat beside the self-satisfied Mr. Puttie. She waved to him coyly as she sallied forth across the dining-room, like a graceful gazelle.

"My word!" chuckled Vance. "The astonishin' wood-nymph is coming our way. If she recognizes me, my tall tale of derring-do this afternoon will crumble to dust about my mendacious head..."

Even as he spoke, she spied him, threw up her hands in rapturous surprise, and came to our table.

"Why, hello," she sang out; and then reprimanded Vance in lower tones: "You're a terribly bold murderer. Oh, awfully bold. Don't you know that someone is apt to see you here? You know, like a waiter, or somebody."

"Or you, yourself," smiled Vance.

"Oh, but I wouldn't tell. Don't you remember? I promised not to tell." She sat down with startling suddenness, and giggled musically. "And I always say everybody should keep a promise, if you know what I mean... But my brother's funny that way. He doesn't ever keep a promise. But he keeps lots of other things. And sometimes he gets into awful trouble by not keeping a promise. He's always getting into trouble. Maybe it's because he's so ambitious. Are you ambitious?"

"Speaking of promises," said Vance, "do you keep all your promises to Mr. Burns?"

"I never made any promise to George," she assured Vance, the tinge of a confused blush mounting her saucy features. "Whatever made you think of that? But he's tried awfully hard to make me promise him something. And he gets terribly angry with me. He's angry tonight. But, of course, he wouldn't show it in front of so many people. He's so very dignified. No one can ever tell what he's thinking about. But nobody can tell what I'm thinking about, either. Only, I'm not dignified. Mr. Puttie says I'm just cute and attractive. And he's known me a long time. And I think it's much better to be cute and attractive than to be dignified. Don't you?"

Vance made no effort to restrain his mirth. "I certainly do think so," he answered. "And by the by, where is the dignified Mr. Burns this evening?"

The girl tittered with embarrassment. "He's sitting over there across the room." She turned her head gracefully, to indicate the lone young man who had previously attracted our attention. "And he seems very unhappy, too. I can't imagine why he came here tonight—I know he's never been here before...Do you want to know a secret? Well, I'll tell you, anyhow. I was never here before, either. But I really like it here. Don't you? It's awfully big—and noisy. And there's so many people. Don't you like a lot of people in one place? I think that people are terribly nice. But I'm afraid George doesn't like it here. Maybe that's why he's so unhappy."

Vance did not interrupt her. He seemed to find pleasant diversion in her inconsequential rambling.

"And oh!" she exclaimed, as if at some sudden thought of momentous importance. "I forgot to tell you: I know who you are! What do you think of that? You're Mr. Philo Vance, aren't you? Don't you think I'm terribly smart to know that? I bet you don't know how I found out. I looked at the calling card you gave me this afternoon—and there was your name! That is, Mr. Puttie looked at your card and he said that must be your name. He also got angry for a minute when I told him about the new dress I'm going to get Monday. But then, right away, he was all right again. He said that if you were that foolish, it was all right with him, and that you were born every minute. I don't know what he meant. But that's how I found out what your name was." She barely paused for breath. "And oh! Mr. Puttie told me something else about you. Something very exciting. He said you were a sort of detective and got credit for all the hard work the poor policemen do. Is that really true?"

She did not wait for an answer.

"Once my brother wanted to be a policeman, but he didn't. Anyhow, he's hardly big enough to be a real policeman. He's not tall like Mr. Puttie. He's little, like me and George. And I never saw a little policeman, did you? But maybe he could have been a detective. I'll bet he never thought of that. Or maybe they don't have little detectives either. Can anybody be a detective if they're too little? Or maybe you don't know."

Vance laughed delightedly, looking into the girl's eyes as if baffled by her entangling digressions.

"I have known some small detectives," he told her.

"Well, anyhow, I guess my brother didn't know about that. Or maybe he didn't want to be a detective. Maybe he just wanted to be a policeman because they wear uniforms...Oh, Mr. Vance! I just thought of something else. I'll bet I know why you're not afraid to be here tonight. They can't arrest a detective! And they can't arrest a policeman, either, can they? If they did, who would they have left to arrest robbers and people like that?...And speaking of my brother, he's here tonight, too. He's here every night."

"Ah!" murmured Vance. "Where is he sitting?"

"Oh, I don't mean he's here in the dining-room," the girl stated naively. "He works here."

"Indeed! What does he do?"

"He has a very important job."

"Has he been with the Domdaniel long?"

"Why, he's been here over six months! That's a very long time for my brother. He never seemed to like work very much. I guess he's just a thinker. Anyhow, he says he's never appreciated. And only today he said he was going to try to get his salary raised. But he's afraid the boss here doesn't appreciate him, either."

"What might be the nature of your brother's work?" Vance inquired.

"He works in the kitchen. He's the dishwasher. That's why his job is so important. Just imagine if a big café like this didn't have a dishwasher! Wouldn't it be awful? Why, you couldn't even get a meal. How could they serve you food if all the dishes were dirty and cluttered up?"

"I must grant your argument," Vance said. "It would be a most distressin' situation. As you say, your brother's job is a most important

one. And incidentally, you, are the most delightfully amazing and the most perfectly natural child I've ever met."

The compliment was evidently lost on her, for she returned at once to the subject of her brother. "But maybe he's going to quit here tonight. He said he would if he didn't get a raise. But I really don't think he should quit, do you? And I'm going to tell him so!...I bet you don't know where I was going just now."

"Not to the kitchen, I hope."

"Why, you're a good detective." The girl's eyes, starry and fluttering, opened wide. "That's where I would have been going, only, Philip—that's my brother—said they wouldn't let me in the kitchen. But I'm going to meet him on the kitchen stairs. He said I was only putting on airs when I told him I was coming here tonight. Imagine! He wouldn't believe me. So I said, 'All right, I'll show you.' And he said, 'If you are in the Domdaniel you meet me on the landing of the kitchen stairs at ten o'clock.' So that's where I was going. He was so sure I wouldn't be here that he said if I showed him I was here by meeting him, he wouldn't give up his job, no matter if he didn't get his raise. And I know mother wants him to keep his job. So you see, everything will work out just fine... Oh, what time is it, Mr. Vance?"

Vance glanced at his watch.

"It's just five minutes to ten."

The girl rose as suddenly as she had sat down.

"I don't care so much about fooling Philip," she said. "But I do want to make mother happy."

As she hurried toward the distant archway, the lonely Mr. Burns rose and followed her swiftly into the hall. Almost simultaneously the two brushed past the damask draperies of the doorway, and disappeared from view.

Vance had witnessed the young man's pursuit of Miss Allen and nodded with benevolent satisfaction.

"Poor unhappy lad," he remarked. "He has grasped his one fleeting opportunity of speaking alone with his inamorata. I trust he's wise enough not to upbraid her...Ah, well! Whatever course he pursues, the goddess Aphrodite is already smiling favourably upon him, though he does not recognize her beamin' countenance."

I turned my attention indifferently toward the table where Mirche and Miss Del Marr had been sitting. The singer, however, had disappeared; and Mirche was scanning the dining-room with complacency. Then he strode down the aisle toward the main entrance.

As he came to our table he paused with a pompous bow, to assure himself that all was well with us, and Vance invited him to join us.

There was nothing particularly distinctive about Daniel Mirche. He was the usual politico-restaurateur type, large and somewhat ostentatious. He was at once aggressive and fawning, with a superficially polished manner. His sparse hair was slightly grey, and his eyes had a peculiar greenish cast.

Vance led the conversation easily along various lines related to Mirche's interest in the cafe and its management. A discussion of wines and their vintages followed; and it was but a few moments before Vance had launched into one of his favourite topics—namely, the rare cognacs of the west-central Charente Departement in France—the Grande Champagne and Petite Champagne districts and the vineyards around Mainxe and Archiac.

As I glanced idly across the dining-room, I noted that Mr. Burns had returned to his table; and soon the young lady herself reappeared in the archway opposite, steering a direct course back to Mr. Puttie. She did not even glance in our direction; and from the crestfallen look of her elf-like face, I assumed that she had failed in her objective.

However, I did not apply myself for long to these reflections. My attention was caught by the unobtrusive and almost cat-like entrance of a slender, exiguous man, who moved, as if loath to attract attention, to a small table in the opposite corner of the room. This table, not far from the one at which the despondent Mr. Burns sat, was already occupied by two men whose backs were to the room; and as the newcomer took the vacant seat facing them, they merely nodded.

My interest in this slight figure was based on the fact that he reminded me of pictures I had seen of one of the most notorious characters of the time, named Owen. There were many unsavoury rumours regarding the man, and there had been reports that he was the guiding intelligence—or, as the cliché has it, the "master-mind"—behind certain colossal illegal organizations of gangland. To such an extent was he believed to play a leading, though surreptitious, part in the activities of the underworld that he had earned for himself the sobriquet of "Owl."

There was a remarkable character implicit in his super-refined features. An evil character, to be sure, but one which hinted at vast, and perhaps heroic, potentialities. He had been graduated cum laude from a great university; and he recalled to my mind a brilliant painting I had once seen of Robespierre: there was the same smooth and intelligent Machiavellian expression. He was dark of hair and eye, but with a colourless, waxy complexion. The outstanding impression he gave was one of adamant hardness: one could readily imagine him performing the duties of a Torquemada and smiling thinly as he did so.

(I have described this man at such length because he was to play a vital role in the strange record of the case I am here setting down. That night, however, I could not, by the most fantastic flight of my imagination, have associated him in any way with the almost incredible and carefree Gracie Allen. And yet these two divergent characters were soon to cross each other's paths in the most astounding fashion.)

I was just about to dismiss the man from my mind, when I became conscious of an unusual undertone in Vance's voice as he chatted with Mirche. With that peculiarly alert languor I had come to know so well, he was gazing at the table in the far corner where the trio of men sat.

"By the by," he said a bit abruptly to Mirche, "isn't that the famous 'Owl' Owen yonder, near the corner pillar?"

"I am not acquainted with Mr. Owen," Mirche returned suavely. However, he turned slightly with a natural curiosity in the direction which Vance had indicated. "But it well might be," he added after a moment's scrutiny. "He is not unlike the pictures I have seen of Mr. Owen...If I can help you, I might be able to ascertain."

Vance waved the suggestion aside.

"Oh, no—no," he said. "That's awfully good of you, and all that; but it's of no importance, don't y' know."

The members of the orchestra were returning to their places, and Vance pushed back his chair.

"I've had a most pleasant and edifyin' evening," he said to Mirche. "But really, I must be toddlin' now."

Mirche's polite protestations seemed genuine enough as he suggested that we remain at least until after Dixie Del Marr's next number. "A splendid singer," he added enthusiastically. "And a woman of rare personal charm.—She goes on at eleven, and it's almost that now."

But Vance pleaded urgent matters that still required his attention that night, and rose from his chair.

Mirche expressed his profound regrets, and accompanied us to the main entrance where he bade us an effusive good night.

## 6. THE DEAD MAN

(Saturday, May 18; 11 pm.)

We descended the broad stone steps to the street and turned east. At Seventh Avenue Vance suddenly hailed a taxicab and gave the driver the District Attorney's home address.

"Markham will probably have returned from his round of political chores by this time," he said as we headed downtown. "He'll doubtless twit me unmercifully for my evening's empty adventure; but somehow I felt a strange uneasiness tonight in the spacious confines of the Domdaniel, after listening to the Sergeant's uncompliment'ry remarks about the place last night: it was quite the same as of yore. Yet why should the toxiphorous Borgias haunt my mind as I toyed with my fricandeau and sipped my Chateau Haut-Brion? Mayhap, as the years roll by, the entanglin' tentacles of suspicion are closin' about my once trustin' nature. Eheu, eheu!..."

The cab came to a jerky stop before a small apartment house, and we went at once to the District Attorney's apartment. Markham, in his smoking jacket and slippers, greeted us with amused surprise.

"Not another wing-sandalled Hermes, I hope."

"Nary a caduceus up my sleeve. Are you being beset by heralds?"

"More or less," returned Markham, with a wry grimace. "The Sergeant here has just brought me a message."

I had not been aware of Heath's presence, but now I saw him standing in the shadow near a window. He came forward with a friendly nod.

"My word, Sergeant," said Vance. "Wherefore?"

"I came on account of that message Mr. Markham was speakin' about, Mr. Vance. A message from Pittsburgh."

"Were the tidings bad?"

"Well, they weren't what you might call good," Heath complained. "Plenty bad, I'd say."

"Indeed?"

"I guess I wasn't so far wrong in the way I figured things last night... Captain Chesholm in Pittsburgh just sent me a report that one of his motorcycle boys had spotted a car running without lights on a back road, and that when the car slowed up for a sharp turn, a guy in the back seat took a couple of shots at him. The car got away, headin' east to the main highway."

"But, Sergeant, why should this bit of desult'ry gun-play in Pennsylvania disturb your even tenour?"

"I'll tell you why," Heath removed the cigar from his mouth. "The officer thought he recognized Benny the Buzzard!"

Vance was unimpressed.

"In the circumst'nces, it could hardly have been a very definite identification."

"That's exactly what I told the Sergeant," Markham nodded approvingly. "During the next few weeks we'll be getting reports that Pellinzi has been seen in every state in the Union."

"Maybe," persisted Heath. "But the way this car was travellin' fits in with my idea perfect. The Buzzard coulda hit New York this morning if he'd come straight from Nomenica. But by circling down to Pennsylvania and coming east from there, he probably figured he would avoid a lot of trouble."

"Personally," Markham said, "I'm convinced the fellow will stay clear of New York." His tone was tantamount to a criticism of the Sergeant's anxiety.

Heath felt the rebuff.

"I hope I haven't bothered you by coming here tonight, Chief. I knew you had a couple of appointments this evening, and I thought you'd still be up."

Markham relented.

"Your coming here was quite all right," he said reassuringly. "I'm always happy to see you, Sergeant. Sit down and help yourself from the decanter...Perhaps Mr. Vance himself is seeking an audience for his information regarding the arch of Mirche's eyebrows and other horrendous details of his sojourn to the Domdaniel...How about it, Vance? Have you a bedtime story of goblins with which to regale us?"

Heath had relaxed in a chair and poured himself a drink. Vance, too, reached for his favourite brandy.

"I'm deuced sorry, Markham old dear," he drawled. "I have no fantasies to unfold—not even one about a mysterious fleeing auto. But I shall try to match the Sergeant's inspiration with a yarn of a wood-nymph and a perfume-sniffer; of a xanthous Lorelei who sings from a podium instead of from a rocky crag; of a sleek owner of a caravanserai, and an empty office screened with mysterious grilles; of an ivy-covered postern, and an owl without feathers...Could you bear to hearken to the chantin' of my runes?"

"My resistance is low."

Vance stretched his legs before him.

"Well, imprimis," he began, "a most charming and astonishing young woman joined us at our table this evening for a few minutes—a child whose spinning brain, much like a pinwheel, radiated the most colourful sparks, and whose spirit was as guileless as an infant's."

"The wood-nymph of whom you prated in your preamble?"

"Yes—none other. I saw her first this afternoon in a shady nook in Riverdale. And she was at the Domdaniel tonight, accompanied by a johnnie named Puttie, with whom she was baiting the true swain of her heart—a Mr. Burns. He, too, was present tonight, but at a distance, and alone—and glowering unhappily."

"Your encounter with her in the afternoon suggests more interesting possibilities," Markham commented listlessly.

"Perhaps you're right, old dear. The fact is, the lady was alone when I intruded into her woodland bower. But she accepted my encroachment quite simply. She even offered to read my palm.—It seems that some haruspex named Delpha taught her the lines of the



hand—"

"Delpha?" Heath cut in sharply. "You mean the fortune-teller who does business under that phony name?"

"It could be," said Vance. "This Delpha, I gathered, deals in palmistry, astrology, and numerology, and other allied didos. Do you know the seeress, Sergeant?"

"I'll say I do. I know her husband Tony, too. They're connected in some queer way with a lot of wrong guys in the underworld. They're tipsters, jewelry touts—what you might call spies for stick-ups. But you can't get the goods on 'em. Their name's Tofana; and they run a flashy joint for suckers...Delpha!" he snorted. "Plain Rosie she is to the neighbours. She may get by for a while longer; but I'll nail her some day."

"You positively astound me, Sergeant. I simply can't imagine my sylvan fairy—who, by the by, is a working girl in the In-O-Scent perfume factory on week-days—having aught to do with the darksome witch of your description."

"I can," said Heath. "That's old Rosa Tofana's neatest stall—surrounding herself with young innocents. And while she's putting up the sweet, stainless front, old Tony is probably cooking up some deviltry, or picking pockets, or moll-buzzing, or dope-peddling in another part of town. Slick guy, Tony—can do 'most anything."

"Ah, well," murmured Vance, "we may be speaking of two quite different sibyls, don't y' know. 'Delpha' may be a popular nomenclature with the mystic sorority. Probably a bit of phonetic suggestion for the Delphic oracle..."

"Courage, Vance," Markham put in pleasantly. "Don't let the Sergeant side-track you from your fairy-tale."

"And the most amazin' detail," Vance went on, "was the scent of citron that hung about the pixie. The perfume was mixed especially for her, and was nameless. Most mysterious—eh, what? It had been concocted by the gentleman named Burns—some sort of scent-wizard employed in the same factory she is—who was so annoyed at her apparent deflection to a rival suitor."

Markham smiled wryly.

"I hardly see where the mystery of the situation comes in."

"Nor I," confessed Vance. "But let your massive brain dwell upon the fact that the young lady should have chosen this very night to visit Mirche's hospitiun."

"Probably dogged your footsteps from Riverdale till you reached the Domdaniel."

"That, alas! is not the answer. She was already there when I arrived."

"Then perhaps the young lady was hungry."

"I had thought of that." Vance's eyes were twinkling gaily. "Perhaps you've solved the mystery!...But," he went on, "that doesn't account for the further fact that Mirche himself was at the Domdaniel."

"And where else would you have him, pray?...But perhaps you're going to tell me he's the long-lost father of your heroine?"

"No," sighed Vance. "Mirche, I fear, is sublimely unaware of the young lady's very existence. Most annoyin'. And I was trying so hard to build up a diverting yarn for your benefit."

"I appreciate the effort." Markham's cigar needed relighting, and he gave his attention to it. "But tell me what you thought of Mirche. I recall that your main object in going to the Domdaniel tonight was to make a closer study of the man."

"Ah, yes." Vance shifted deeper into his chair. "You're always so practical, Markham...Well, I don't like Mirche. A smooth gentleman; but not an admirable one. However, he exerted himself quite earnestly to enchant me. I wonder why...Perhaps he was plotting some shady deed—though he impressed me as being the type who would need another to do his plotting for him. No, not a leader of men, but an unquestioning and able follower. A dark and wicked fellow...Well, there you have the villain of the piece."

"And what shall I do with him?...Your tale is fizzling by the second."

"I fear you're right," admitted Vance. "Let me see...I lovingly inspected Mirche's office; but it was disgustingly void of any wrong. Merely a fair-sized room without a single occupant. And then I gazed fondly at the old door and windows beyond the porte-cochre—inside the driveway, y' know. But all my intensive scrutiny yielded nothing of a helpful nature. The ivy round them, however, was most pleasing. English ivy."

"Now you're down to botany," said Markham. "I must say, I prefer the Sergeant's account of the Pittsburgh shooting...But didn't you speak of a Lorelei?"

"Ah, yes. And deuced blond she was—as becomes a Rhenish siren. Her name, however, has a Gallic ring: Del Marr. A striking Lorelei—more intelligent, I should judge, than Mirche. But there were serious words between her and our Boniface. During a restful intermission of the orchestra they sat together, and I am sure the conversation was not confined to arpeggios and treble clefs and obbligatoros. Rather intimate atmosphere. Liberty, egalite, fraternite—comme ca. No mere entertainer conversing with her impresario."

"I figured it that way myself, years ago," Heath put in. "Furthermore, she's got a swell car and a chauffeur, too. Her singing don't pay for all that. And I don't like the looks of that chauffeur either; he's a tough mug—looks like he oughta be a bouncer in a saloon."

"At least, Vance," said Markham hopefully, "you have found one potential connection between the almost totally disorganized and unrelated components of your drama. Maybe you can develop your narrative structure with that; as a basis."

Vance shook his head despondently. "No, I fear I am not equal to the task."

"What of the 'owl without feathers' you mentioned a while ago?"

"Ah!" Vance sipped his cognac. "I was referring to the opaque and mysterious Mr. Owen of obnoxious memory and ill repute."

"I see. 'Owl' Owen, eh? I had a vague idea he was basking in the California sunshine. It was rumored some time ago that he was dying—probably of his sins."

"Oh, he was decidedly at the Domdaniel, sitting far across the room from me with two other men."

"Those two guys," Heath supplied, "were probably his bodyguard. He don't move without 'em."

"I fear there is no material for you in that quarter, Vance," said Markham. "The F.B.I. were once worried about him; but after an investigation they gave the man a clean bill of health."

"I admit defeat." Vance smiled sadly. "I even tried to lure Mirche into an admission of knowing Owen. But he denied the remotest acquaintance with the man..."

After another hour of random talk we were interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. Markham frowned with annoyance as he

answered it; then, putting the receiver down, he turned to Heath.

"For you, Sergeant. It's Hennessey."

Heath, too, was annoyed.

"Sorry, Chief. I didn't leave this number with anyone when I came here."

As he greeted Hennessey over the wire his voice was bellicose. He listened for several minutes, his expression changing rapidly from belligerency to deep puzzlement. Suddenly he bawled into the transmitter:

"Hang on a minute!" Holding the receiver at his side, he turned to us.

"It sounds crazy to me, Chief, but Hennessey's calling from the Domdaniel, and I gotta see him right away..."

"Splendid!" ejaculated Vance. "Why not have Hennessey come here? I'm, sure Mr. Markham wouldn't object."

Markham shot Vance a look of questioning amazement.

"Very well, Sergeant," he grumbled.

Heath quickly put the receiver to his ear again.

"Hey, listen, Hennessey," he barked. "Hop over here to the D.A's."

"What might all the excitement be, Sergeant?" asked Vance. "Has Mirche absconded with his own till and eloped with Miss Del Marr?"

"It's damn queer," muttered Heath, ignoring the question. "The boys found a dead guy over at the cafe."

"I do hope he was found in Mirche's office," Vance said lightly.

"You win." Heath stared at the floor.

"And who might the corpse be?"

"That's what makes it cuckoo. A kitchen helper of some kind that worked there."

"Will that fact help you revive your fizzled tale?" Markham asked Vance.

"My word, no! It blasts my limp'in' yarn completely." Vance turned to Heath again. "Did you get the name of the defunct chappie, Sergeant?"

"I didn't pay much attention to it when Hennessey said the guy was just a kitchen mechanic. But it sounded something like Philip Allen."

Vance's eyelids flickered slightly.

"Philip Allen, eh? Most interestin'!"

## 7. QUEER COINCIDENCES

(Sunday, May 19; 1:05 am.)

Hennessey arrived in less than fifteen minutes. He was a heavy-set, serious-minded man with rugged features and an awkward manner.

Heath went directly to the point.

"Tell your story, Hennessey. Then I'll ask questions. But first I want to know why you called me here at this time of night."

"Hell, Sergeant!" Hennessey returned. "I'd been trying for over an hour to get hold of you. I knew you had some idea about Mr. Markham and the Domdaniel, and I figured you'd want to know about an unexpected death there. So I called your home and a lot of other places I thought you might be at. No dice. Then I took a chance and called you here. I didn't want you bawling me out tomorrow."

"Well, what do you know?" grumbled Heath.

"The story sounds cockeyed, Sergeant, but along about eleven o'clock I saw Mr. Vance come out of the cafe. Earlier, I'd seen him monkeying around Mirche's office——"

"At eight," Vance put in with a smile.

Hennessey took out his notebook and turned a few pages.

"Seven fifty-six, Mr. Vance."

"My word, what meticulous observation!"

Hennessey grinned. "Well, about fifteen or twenty minutes after Mr. Vance left, two men from the Bureau drives up with Doc Mendel [One of the Assistant Medical Examiners of New York.]; and the three of 'em go in Mirche's office. It looked like funny business to me, so I left Burke on watch, and Snitkin and I went to see what it was all about. Just as we was hopping up the steps, Mirche himself comes hurrying down the terrace, all excited, and busts past us into the office. I guess the doorman—you know him: Joe Hanley—musta told him that somethin' queer was goin' on..."

"Never mind guessing."

"All right," Hennessey continued. "Inside the office was a guy in a black suit lying all bunched up on the floor, half-way under the desk. Mirche went over to him, sort of staggerin' and dead-white himself. He leaned close over the guy, alongside the doc who was opening the fellow's shirt and putting one of those ear-trumpets on his chest..."

"A stethoscope! My word!" Vance looked at Markham. "I didn't know an official Aesculapius ever carried one of those trusty instruments."

They don't, as a rule," said Markham. "Mendel's a young fellow; just been appointed to the staff; and I wouldn't be surprised if he carries a sphygmomanometer around with him, and his diploma, too."

"Go on, Hennessey," Heath growled. "Then what?"

"Guilfoyle asked Mirche who the guy was. I don't know whether it was before or after Mirche answered the question; but anyhow along about then Dixie Del Marr came rushing in. And Mirche says, husky-like, it was one of his dishwashers at the cafe—a fellow named Philip Allen. I coulda told Guilfoyle that much. I knew Allen, and had seen him myself that afternoon. Then Guilfoyle asks Mirche what the fellow was doing in the office, and where he lived, and what Mirche knew about his being dead. The old toad says he don't know nothing about the dead guy, or how he come to be there, or where he lives—that it was all a mystery to him. And he sure looked the part."

"You're sure he wasn't puttin' one over on you?" asked Heath suspiciously.

"Huh! Not me," Hennessey asserted. "A guy can't look that jolted and not mean it."

"What happened then?"

Hennessey continued more rapidly.

"The doc went on examining the man, lifting up his eyelids, looking down his throat, moving his legs and arms—the regular rigamarole. And while he was busy monkeying with the guy, this Dixie Del Marr opens the door of a built-in closet, and brings out a ledger. She turns a few pages, then says: 'Here it is, Dan!—meanin' Mirche. 'Philip Allen lives at 198 East 37th Street—with his mother.'"

Markham looked up and turned to Vance.

"I see that your not too profound deduction is being mildly substantiated. Your blond Lorelei is evidently Mirche's bookkeeper."

Hennessey was impatient at the interruption.

"Guilfoyle then asked the doc what the fellow had died of. The doc had the body on its face now, and when he looked round at Guilfoyle you'da thought he'd never seen a corpse before. 'I don't know,' he said. 'He might have died a natural death, but I can't tell with this much of an examination. He's got some burns on his lips, and his throat don't look so hot!—or words to that effect. 'You'll have to get him down to the morgue for a post-mortem.' He didn't even seem to know how long the guy was dead."

"What about the Del Marr woman?" prompted Heath.

"She put the book back and sat down in a chair looking hard and indifferent, until Mirche sent her back to the cafe."

"So you sent the body down to the morgue." Heath was puffing gloomily on his cigar.

"That's right, Sergeant. Guilfoyle took care of calling for the buggy. He and the other man from the Bureau, Sullivan, stayed on the job...It's a dumb enough story, but I know you've always been leery about this fellow Mirche—especially now with the Buzzard on the loose."

Heath furrowed his brow and fixed Hennessey with a cold stare.

"All right!" he bellowed. "Who went in that office after Mr. Vance arrived there at eight?"

"Oh, that's easy." The officer laughed mirthlessly. "The Del Marr woman went in around eight-thirty and come right out again. Then, a little while later, the doorman sauntered down, and he went in too. But I figure that ain't nothing unusual for him: I reckon Hanley just sneaked in for a snifter, for he came out rubbing his coat sleeve across his mouth..."

"What time was all this?" asked Heath.

"Early in the evening—within an hour after Mr. Vance had been there."

"I suppose you checked if either of 'em saw the dead guy?"

"Sure I did. But neither one of 'em saw him. The doorman went in after the Del Marr woman did; and you can bet your life that if there'd been a corpse in there, Hanley would have let out a holler. He's a right guy, Sergeant."

"Sure; I've known Joe Hanley plenty long." Heath thought a moment. "All of that don't add up...But here's something you can tell me: What time did you take your nap tonight?"

The import of Heath's question suddenly dawned on me.

"Honest to God, Sergeant, I didn't take any nap. But—so help me!—I never saw that guy Allen go into the office."

"Huh!" A world of sarcasm was in the Sergeant's grunt. "You didn't go to sleep, but Allen slips into the office, has a heart attack, or somethin', and folds up under Mirche's desk!—That's a hot one for the record!"

Hennessey turned a vivid red.

"I—I don't blame you for squawking, Sergeant. But, on the level, I didn't look away from that door for a split second——"

"Then this guy just made himself invisible and wished himself in there. Or maybe he came down the chimney like Santa Claus—if there'd been a chimney." The Sergeant's irony seemed unnecessarily brutal.

"I say, Sergeant," Vance put in. "The real object of Hennessey's vigil, y' know, was to keep an eye open for Benny Pellinzi. You certainly didn't put three husky gentlemen in the lodging-house to keep track of a poor dishwasher."

Heath took up another phase of the problem.

"Who put in the call to Headquarters, Hennessey?"

"That's another funny one, Sergeant. The call came through in the regular way at ten-fifty—not more'n ten minutes or so after you'd left. It was a woman who phoned. She wouldn't give her name; played mysterious and hung up."

"Yeah. I'll say that's funny...Mighta been this Del Marr wren."

"I thought of her myself, and asked her about it. But she seemed as ignorant about it as Mirche did. But it coulda been one of the old crones that work around the kitchen. A lot of the help comes and goes through that driveway alongside the office. And if one of 'em should happen to get nosy, they could stretch up and look through the window."

"What about the office building that adjoins the driveway?" Vance asked.

Heath answered the question.

"There's no windows there, sir. A solid brick wall for the first three floors..."

Vance's cigarette had burnt out, and he lighted a fresh one.

"Puttin' it all together," he commented, "it doesn't look very promisin' for a mysterious crime. Very sad. I had such lofty hopes when Hennessey phoned at this more or less witchin' hour."

"I gotta admit," Heath confessed, "I can't get hold of anything special in Hennessey's report, myself...But there's something else I'd like to know." He turned back to Hennessey. "You say you knew this dishwasher, Allen, and saw him earlier in the day. What about that?"

"The way I happen to know him," returned the officer, "is that he came running outa the driveway one night last winter, about three in the morning, and damn near knocked me down. I grabbed him and checked him up with Hanley. Then I turned him loose...This afternoon I seen him buzzing round Mirche's office. He went in and out three or four times between lunch and five o'clock. Then, around six, when Mirche had got there, he went in again and stayed about ten minutes that time. When he came out, that was the last I seen of him."

"Where did he go?"

"How should I know? I ain't no mind-reader. He didn't go back to the kitchen, if that's what you want to know. He just went on down the street."

"You sure it was Allen you saw?" the Sergeant asked dispiritedly.

"I'll say I'm sure!" Hennessey laughed. "But it's damn funny you should ask me that. The first time I seen Allen this afternoon, I got the screwy idea it coulda been Benny the Buzzard: they're both about the same size, with the same round pasty-looking face. And Allen had on a plain black suit, like I told you—which is the way the Buzzard mighta dressed if he'd been sneaking back here and didn't want to be spotted too easy. You remember the loud natty get-ups he wore in the old days. Anyhow, I though I'd make sure. I knew I was being dumb, but I went over and said hello to the fellow. It was Allen, all right. He told me he was hanging around to get a raise out of old Mirche. Swell chance!"

Heath scratched his head.

"Anything else about this fellow Allen come to you?"

"I was just thinking," Hennessey said. "Yeah...he met a guy about the middle of the afternoon—around four o'clock. He was a little fellow like Allen. They met just west of the cafe, and pretty soon they got into an argument. It looked like they was going to come to blows any minute. But I didn't pay much attention to 'em; and finally this guy went on his way...Anything else on your mind, Sergeant?"

Vance beckoned Heath to one side and spoke a few whispered words to him. At length the Sergeant shrugged his shoulders and nodded. Then he turned again to Hennessey.

"That's all," he said. "Go home and get some more sleep. But be back on the job at noon."

When Hennessey had gone, Markham, noting a sudden change in Vance's manner, frowned and leaned forward.

"What's on your mind, Vance?" he asked.

"Hennessey's tale. Y know, in my fairy-story this evening, I didn't mention the name of the wood-nymph. The name is Gracie Allen.

And Philip Allen is her brother. She informed me quite frankly he was a dishwasher at the Domdaniel. She even told me he was going to beard Mirche in his den this afternoon to petition for an increased stipend. And when Miss Allen stopped at my table tonight, she was on her way to meet her brother somewhere in the recesses of the cafe."

Markham leaned back again with a short laugh.

"Maybe you can fit all that into the fantasy you were spinning earlier."

"As you say, old dear." Vance was no longer in a jesting mood. "I'm certainly going to try. I don't fancy so many irrelevant things happening in one place and at one time. Something must be holding them together. At any rate, I'm in no mood to emulate Pepys and betake myself home and to bed."

Vance walked the length of the room and back, his head down; then he came to an abrupt stop, and smiled with an abashed, yet determined, earnestness.

"See here, Markham," he said; "I admit my ideas are dashed vague, and that the charmin' little witch in Riverdale may have cast a spell over me. But I feel compelled to find out what I can about Philip Allen's untimely death, and maybe lessen the shock for the young lady. And I need your helpin' hand. Wouldst humour my vagaries once more?"

Markham sighed with resignation.

"Anything to get rid of you at this ungodly hour."

"Feelin' thus, give me the Allen case instanter, to play with as I jolly well please—with the doughty Sergeant at my side, of course."

Markham hesitated.

"How do you feel about this, Sergeant?"

"If Mr. Vance has got some fancy ideas," returned Heath vigorously, "I'd just as soon string along with him."

"All right, Sergeant, go ahead and humour our amateur playwright." Then Markham turned back to Vance. "And as for you," he said with good-natured effrontery, "I think you're a raving maniac."

"Granted," said Vance. "*No de lunatico inquirendo* writ necess'ry."

## 8. AT THE MORTUARY

(Sunday, May 19; 1:50 am.)

Vance and Heath and I went first to Vance's apartment. Here, while Vance changed from evening clothes to a plain suit, Heath did some necessary telephoning.

He questioned Guilfoyle at some length regarding any pertinent details Hennessey might have omitted, and gave orders for Sullivan to remain at the Domdaniel till noon the next day. He then called Doctor Mendel. I gathered, both from his expression and the questions he put, that Heath was puzzled and annoyed by the information he was getting from the young doctor. When Vance rejoined us, the Sergeant was apparently still pondering the matter.

"This thing," he said, "is beginning to look even more cuckoo than Hennessey's story sounded. Doc Mendel still thinks Allen mighta died natural; but he found a lot of nutty evidence that there coulda been dirty work. He's passing the buck, and got the body to the morgue quick, where Doremus [Doctor Emanuel Doremus, Chief Medical Examiner of New York.] will do the autopsy. Mendel don't want any part of it. When I asked him what time he thought the fellow died, he stalled around about rigor mortis and some sort of spasm."

"Cadaveric spasm," supplied Vance.

"Yeah, that's it. And then he began mumbling that there's lots of things is medicine that ain't known yet.—Is he tellin' me!"

"Sounds most familiar, don't y know," sighed Vance. "But, in the meantime, what about Mrs. Allen?"

"Sure; she's gotta be notified. Thought I'd send Martin—he's smooth and easy."

"No—oh, no, Sergeant," said Vance. "I could bear to see the lady myself. You take on the chore, and I'll stagger along."

"All right, sir." The Sergeant cocked his eye and grinned. "You asked for it—and it's your case. Anyhow, this identification job won't take long."

We found Mrs. Allen's residence in East 87th Street a modest place—an old brownstone-front structure that had been divided into small apartments. Mrs. Allen herself answered our ring. She was fully dressed, and all the lights were on in the plainly furnished room.

She was a frail, mouse-like person who seemed much older than I had expected Miss Allen's mother to be. There was a softness and vagueness in her expression—almost a wistfulness—like that of a woman who had grown old before her time either through sudden sorrow or prolonged hardships.

She appeared highly nervous and frightened by our presence at the door; but when the Sergeant told her who he was, she straightway invited us in. She sat down rigidly as if to steel herself against some blow. Her hands were clasped so tightly that the knuckles showed white.

Heath cleared his throat. For all his hardness of nature, he appeared peculiarly sympathetic.

"You're Mrs. Allen," he began. It was half question and half statement.

The woman nodded shakily.

"You got a son named Philip?"

She merely nodded again; but the pupils of her eyes dilated.

Heath shifted his weight and looked about him for a moment. His face softened perceptibly. Only once before had I seen the Sergeant so deeply moved: that was when he gazed into the abandoned closet at the still form of little Madeleine Moffat, ["The Bishop Murder Case" (Cassell, 1929)] during his investigation of the Bishop murder case.

"You're sitting up pretty late, aren't you, Mrs. Allen?" he asked, as if he had found no words as yet to soften the blow.

"Yes, Mr. Officer," the woman said, in a small tremulous voice. "I always sit up and wait for my daughter when she's out. But I don't mind."

Heath nodded and, with a sudden rush of words, came to the point.

"Well, I'm sorry, but I got bad news for you," he blurted. "Your son Philip's met with an accident." He paused for several moments. "Yes, Mrs. Allen, I gotta tell you—he's dead. He was found tonight at the cafe where he works."

The woman clutched at her chair. Her eyes opened wide; and her body swayed a little. Vance went quickly to her and, taking her by the shoulders, steadied her.

"Oh, my poor boy!" she moaned several times. Then she looked from one to the other of us as if dazed. "Tell me what happened."

"We don't quite know, madam," Vance said softly.

"But when," she asked in a colourless tone, "—when did this happen?"

"We got the call about eleven o'clock tonight," Heath told her.

"I—I don't know what to do." She looked up appealingly. "Will you take me to him?"

"That's just what we came here for, Mrs. Allen. We want you to come with us—for only a few minutes—a little way downtown—and identify him. Mr. Mirche has already done that, of course; but just for the records we got to ask you to do it too. Then we can straighten everything out..."

Vance now spoke to the woman.

"I know it's a frightfully sad errand for you, Mrs. Allen. But, as the Sergeant explained, it is a necess'ry matter of form; and it will make things easier for you and your daughter later on. You'll try to be brave, won't you?"

She nodded vaguely.

"Yes, I've got to be brave for Gracie's sake."

I could not but admire the fortitude of this frail woman, and when she got up with determination to put on her hat and cape, my admiration for her rose even higher.

"I'll only stop to leave a note for my daughter," she said apologetically, when she was ready to go. "She would worry so if she came

home and I wasn't here."

We waited while she found a piece of paper. Vance offered her his pencil. Then, with an unsteady hand, she wrote a few words, and left the paper in full view on the table.

On the way downtown the woman did not speak, but listened meekly to the Sergeant's instructions and suggestions.

When we passed through the elevator door of the city's mortuary in 89th Street, she put her hands to her face and half breathed a few words, as if in prayer, adding in a louder tone, "Oh, my poor Philip! He was such a good boy at heart."

Heath took her protectingly by the arm, and led her solicitously into the bare basement room. The episode did not prove as gruesome as I had pictured it beforehand. Mrs. Allen's harrowing experience was over the moment Heath halted her steps before the still form that had been wheeled out on a slab from its crypt. Her ordeal was terminated quickly and in merciful fashion.

After one momentary glance, she turned away with a stifled sob and collapsed in a crumpled heap.

The Sergeant, who had been watching the woman closely from the time we had stepped out of the elevator, took her up swiftly in his arms, and carried her into the dimly-lighted reception-room, where he placed her on a wicker sofa. Her face was colourless, and her breathing shallow; but after a few minutes she began to move feebly. Then, with the rush of blood to the cheeks and moisture to the skin, which accompanies the reaction from a faint, came a flood of fears.

When she had wept freely for a moment or two, Heath pulled up a chair and sat down facing her.

"I know, Mrs. Allen," he said, "this must be mighty painful for you, but you know we got to be careful in cases like this. It's the law. We couldn't afford to make any mistakes about it. And you wouldn't want us to, would you?"

"Oh, that would be terrible." Her hand moved slowly across her eyes, as if to blot out some terrifying vision.

"Sure...I know," mumbled the Sergeant. "That's why you got to forgive us for being sort of heartless."

"When," she asked, like one who had not heard his words, "—when will the poor boy—?"

"That's another thing I got to tell you, Mrs. Allen." Heath interrupted her unfinished query. "You see, we ain't going to be able to let you take your son right away. The doctor ain't sure just what he died of; and we got to make sure. It's as much for your sake as it is for ours. So we got to keep him for a day—maybe two days."

She moved her head up and down sadly.

"I know what you mean," she said. "I once had a nephew who died in a hospital..." She left the sentence unfinished, and added: "I know I can trust you."

"Yes, Mrs. Allen," Vance assured her. "The Sergeant won't take any longer than is necessary. These matters must be handled legally and carefully. I promise to let you know myself the very moment the matter is settled... I'll also be very glad to help you and your daughter in any other way I can."

The woman turned slowly to Vance and studied him for a moment. A look of confidence and appeal came into her eyes.

"It's my daughter," she began softly. "I want to ask you something for her sake. It will mean so much to her, and to me, just now. Please—please—don't tell my daughter about Philip yet. Not till she has to know—and then I want to tell her myself...She would worry about things which maybe aren't true at all. She has a lot of imagination—inherited from me, I guess. Why not let her have one more day, or maybe two more days, of happiness? Just until you make sure?"

It was obvious the woman's request was actuated by a suspicion that her son had not died a natural death; and she feared a similar doubt might haunt the daughter too.

"But, Mrs. Allen," Vance asked, "if we keep this matter quiet for a time, how would you account to your daughter for her brother's absence? Surely, she would be concerned about that."

Mrs. Allen shook her head.

"No. Philip stays away from home often, sometimes for days at a time. Only today he said he might give up his job at the cafe and maybe leave the city. No, Gracie won't suspect anything."

Vance looked interrogatively at Heath.

"I believe, Sergeant," he said, "that it would be both humane and wise to comply with Mrs. Allen's wishes."

Heath nodded vigorously.

"Yes, so do I, Mr. Vance. I think it can be managed."

An understanding look passed between the two, and then Vance addressed Mrs. Allen again.

"We will be very happy to make you that promise, madam."

"And there will be nothing about it in the papers?" she asked tentatively.

"I think that, too, can be arranged," Vance said.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Allen simply.

Just then an attendant came into the room and motioned to the Sergeant, who rose and walked across to him. A few words passed between them, and together they walked out through a side door. A few minutes later the Sergeant returned, slipping something into his pocket.

Mrs. Allen had now somewhat recovered her composure; and as the Sergeant rejoined us, he smiled at her encouragingly.

"I guess we can be taking you home now."

We drove Mrs. Allen back to her little apartment, and bade her good night.

A few minutes later the three of us were in Vance's library. It was just half-past two in the morning.

"A strange little woman," Vance murmured, as he poured a nightcap of brandy for each of us. "Remarkably brave, too. I really had no anxiety about leaving her alone in her home. She rallied better than I thought she would after the distressing experience."

"I've known a lot of little women like that," commented Heath, "who could take it better than a big husky bruiser."

"Yes, quite...I wonder if her effort to spare her daughter will be as successful as she hopes. Gracie Allen is no ordinary young woman—she's astute, despite her astonishin' and flighty vivacity."

"The old lady sure made it easy for us," the Sergeant remarked.

Vance nodded as he sipped his brandy.

"Exactly. That's just what I had in mind, Sergeant. We need have no concern about interference until Doremus' post-mortem report is completed. Mrs. Allen will surely not press us, for I imagine she will be grateful for any additional respite for her daughter. And Mirche will certainly find it advantageous to keep his own counsel—he's not eager for any unsav'ry publicity in connection with the Domdaniel...Will you do all you can to keep the case hushed up as long as possible, Sergeant?"

"At last you're asking me to do something easy," grinned Heath. "I'll tell the boys at the Bureau to pipe down; and you can go on runnin' round and asking questions for a couple of days without anyone nagging at you."

Vance smiled languidly, but he was still troubled.

Heath finished his brandy, and lighted a long black cigar. "By the way, Mr. Vance, here's something that might interest you." He reached into his coat pocket and drew out a small wooden cigarette-case, peculiarly grained and with alternating squares of light and dark lacquer, giving it a distinctive checkerboard design. "I found it among Allen's belongings at the morgue."

"But why, my dear Sergeant, should it interest me?"

"Well, I don't exactly know, sir." Heath was almost apologetic. "But I know you got ideas about tonight that I ain't got."

"But there's nothing extr'ordin'ry in the fact that the young chap smoked cigarettes."

"It ain't that, sir." Heath opened the case and pointed to one inside corner of the lid. "There's a name burnt in the wood there—looks like a amateur job. And, it so happens, the name is 'George'. That ain't the dead fellow's name."

Vance's expression changed suddenly. He leaned forward and, taking the cigarette-case from Heath, looked at the crudely burnt lettering.

"Things shouldn't happen this way—really, y' know, they shouldn't, Sergeant. Gracie Allen's true-love is named George. George Burns, to be precise. The same johnnie I mentioned earlier at Mr. Markham's. And this Mr. Burns was at the Domdaniel tonight. And so was Gracie. And her flashy escort, Mr. Puttie. And Philip Allen. And the oleaginous Mirche. And the undecipherable Dixie Del Marr. And the mysterious 'Owl' Owen. And the ominous shadow of a buzzard."

"What do you make of it, Mr. Vance?"

"Sergeant—oh, my Sergeant!" sighed Vance. "What could anyone make of it? Precisely nothing. That's why I'm aging so perceptibly before your very eyes. That's why my locks are turning white."

"How do you think that cigarette-case got in Philip Allen's pocket, Mr. Vance?" Heath held stubbornly to his problem.

"Stop torturing me!" Vance pleaded.

Heath took the cigarette-case, snapped it shut, and returned it to his pocket.

"I'm going to find out," he said with determination. "If Philip Allen didn't die a natural death, and if this gimmick belongs to the Burns guy, I'll sweat the truth out of him if I got to invent a new way to do it... This thing's getting me down, too, Mr. Vance. None of it makes sense, sir; and I don't like anything that don't make sense...I'll find the baby—and I'll find him tonight. The Domdaniel's closed by now, so maybe he went home—if he's got a home. I'll tackle the factory first. What did you say that name was, sir?"

"The In-O-Scent Corporation," smiled Vance. "Rather discouragin' name with which to start your quest for a suspect—eh, what, Sergeant? Somehow I rather hope the name'll prove symbolic."

"You're too deep for me, sir," Heath complained, moving toward the door. "All I gotta worry about right now is finding that guy Burns."

"Well, Sergeant, when you do corner Mr. Burns, we can either eliminate one part of the puzzle, or else put it some place where it will fit." He drew a deep sigh. "I'll be waiting for your scented tidings in the morning."



## 9. HELD ON SUSPICION

(Sunday, May 19; 10:30 am.)

It was almost half-past ten Sunday morning when Heath called at Vance's apartment. Vance had risen only shortly before and was sitting in the library, robed in a mandarin dressing-gown, having his usual scant breakfast of thick Turkish coffee. He had just lighted his second cigarette when the Sergeant was ushered in, looking somewhat weary but triumphant.

"At last I've got him!" he announced, without pausing for salutations.

"My word, Sergeant!" Vance greeted him. "Seat yourself and relax. You should have some strengthenin' coffee. No doubt you're referring to Burns. But don't tell me you were round and about all night on your quest."

Heath sat down heavily.

"I was round and about plenty.—And if you don't mind, Mr. Vance, would you put a little something else in that coffee? I need pickin' up."

Vance complied, smiling.

"Tell me about your nocturnal wanderin's, Sergeant."

"Well, the fact is, sir, I ain't exactly got him yet," Heath amended; "but I'm expecting a phone call here any minute from Emery—I've got him watching Mrs. Allen's house, and—"

"Mrs. Allen's house?"

"Yeah! That's where the guy's headin' for."

"The affair sounds frightfully complicated, don't y know."

"It wasn't so complicated, Mr. Vance," answered Heath. "It was just a damn nuisance...When I left here last night, I went down to the In-O-Scent factory, and got hold of the night watchman. He let himself into the office with his pass-key, and found the book of employees, and showed me Burns' name with the address of a second-rate hotel only a few blocks away. So I takes it easy and goes over there. But it seems Burns has already been in, changed his clothes, and gone out again. The night clerk gives me this information. Then I shows him the cigarette-case. And that's where I run into a piece of luck. The fellow's ready to swear Burns has got one just like it. Burns often stops to gabble with him when he gets in late."

"And," put in Vance, "most likely offers the other a cigarette during the gay banter."

"That's it, sir...Then I calls Emery, down at the Bureau, to come up and wait around, in case this Burns figures on coming back. After he gets there I goes home to grab a couple of hours' sleep."

"And did your Cerberus interrupt your slumbers with news of the missing perfume-sniffer?"

"No. Burns didn't show up at his hotel again. So at eight o'clock I goes back to the Hotel myself to see what else I can get outa the night clerk. And it seems that him an' Burns an' two other guys, friends of Burns, sometimes sits around playing cards in the lobby at night. One of 'em lives across the street, but this guy says he ain't seen Burns for days. But he tells me to try the other fellow, named Robbin, out in Brooklyn, as Burns often spends a night at Robbin's place—especially Saturday night. So I beats it out to Brooklyn. I don't phone Robbin's place, because I don't wanta give Burns any tip-off. It takes me over an hour to locate the house, which is half a dozen blocks off the main line, over to hell-and-gone in Bensonhurst."

"What a beastly matutinal odyssey, Sergeant!" Vance shuddered dolefully. "And what befell when you came at last to the hut of Eumaeus?"

"The guy's name is Robbin, like I told you. And he don't live in a hut...Well, I asked him about Burns, and he told me Burns had come out there at three o'clock this morning, saying he wasn't feeling so hot and wanted company. Robbin also told me Burns was nervous and didn't sleep very good. He was up early and had beat it before I got there...What do you make of that, Mr. Vance?"

"Sounds very much like florescent love in a state of suspense," said Vance. "Ah, the sweet cruelty of woman!"

"I don't know what you're getting at, sir," replied the Sergeant, "but it sounds like a guilty conscience to me. Especially with Burns not staying home—running away, so to speak—and hiding out in the wilds of Bensonhurst...Anyhow, when I showed Robbin the cigarette-case, he knew it right away. He couldn't remember for sure if Burns had it on him last night. I asked Robbin if he had any idea where Burns went. Then he just laughed and said he knew where Burns went, but that he wouldn't be there till eleven o'clock. So, seeing that he couldn't have got back to New York yet, I telephones to Emery at Burns' hotel, to get on the job watching her house..."

"Mrs. Allen's house?"

"Yeah. That's where Robbin said Burns would be at eleven o'clock. And he didn't have any doubts about it either. I figured this was reasonable. You yourself, Mr. Vance, told me Burns was the girl's boyfriend; and he mighta had an idea of getting some kind of help from her and the old lady before they got wise to him. So I hops back here to New York in a hurry. And here I am, reportin' to you and waitin' for Emery's phone call."

"Extr'ordin'ry!" murmured Vance. "What zeal! You've fitted many facts together, and not unskilfully, while I merely slumbered. And I presume you will fare forth when you get Emery's summons and chivy young Burns no end."

"I'll say I will!" Then the Sergeant added: "I'm beginning to think you actually had an idea last night at the D.A.—'s."

"I wonder...In any event, I'm going along with you, Sergeant." And Vance started for the door of his dressing-room.

"I thought you'd be wanting to go, sir. But there's one thing got to ask you—let me handle this my own way."

"Oh by all means, Sergeant." And Vance went from the library.

He had just returned to the room, fully dressed, when the telephone rang. Heath jumped from his chair and had the receiver at his ear before Currie, Vance's old valet and majordomo, could reach the instrument.

It was the awaited call from Emery, and after listening for a brief moment. Heath responded eagerly.

"Right! I'll there in five minutes." He slammed down the receiver and, rubbing his hands together in satisfaction, made for the door.

"Come on, Mr. Vance. We're getting places at last..."

As we turned the corner from Lexington Avenue, we saw Emery lounging across the street from Mrs. Allen's house. He took a few steps toward us and nodded significantly.

Heath grunted his acknowledgment, and gave Emery orders to follow us inside.

It was Gracie Allen who answered our ring this time. She caught sight of Vance immediately and threw up her hands in exuberant delight.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Vance! How wonderful!" she called out musically, seeming almost to flutter. "How did you find out where I live? You must be an awfully smart detective..."

As she noticed the grim presence of the two other men, she broke off abruptly.

"These gentlemen are police officers. Miss Allen," Vance told her, "and we have come to——"

"Oh! They caught you, didn't they!" she exclaimed in dismay. "Isn't that terrible!" Her eyes grew large. "But honest, Mr. Vance, I didn't tell on you. I wouldn't do such a thing—really, I wouldn't. Not after I gave you my promise..."

Heath and Emery were brushing past her into the room, and Vance held up his hand to her.

"Please, my dear," he said earnestly. "Just a moment. We've come here about quite a different matter."

She stepped back from him, awed by his serious manner; and Vance followed the two officers into the room.

On a sofa against the opposite wall sat young George Burns, obviously annoyed by our intrusion. Heath had already crossed rapidly to him.

"Your name's George Burns, ain't it?" he asked gruffly.

"It always has been," Burns returned with surly resentment. "Who wants to know?"

"Wise guy, eh?" Heath fumbled in his pockets, and then asked in a conciliatory tone. "Got a cigarette, Burns?"

Burns automatically brought out a package of cigarettes.

"What!" exclaimed the Sergeant. "Ain't you got a cigarette-case?"

"Why, of course, he has!" stated Gracie Allen loftily. "I gave him one myself last Christmas—a real pretty one, like a checkerboard —"

Vance silenced her with an arresting gesture.

"Yes," admitted Burns, "I did have one; but I—I lost it yesterday." He seemed nonplussed by the line of questioning.

"Maybe this is it." Heath spoke with menacing emphasis, as he shoved the little cigarette-case under Burns' nose.

Burns, startled and intimidated, nodded weakly. Taking the case, he held it against his nostrils and muffed at it several times. Then he looked up at the Sergeant.

"Kiss Me Quick!"

"What!" exploded Heath.

"Oh," mumbled Burns, embarrassed. "That's just the name of a well-known handkerchief perfume. The formula calls for cassie, jonquille, civet, citronel—"

"Oh, and I know what else," supplied Miss Allen eagerly. "Jasmin and tuberose——"

Burns was exasperated.

"You're thinking of Leap Year..."

[Both Kiss Me Quick and Leap Year Bouquet are popular "fancy" concentrates. Full descriptions and recipes may be found in Poucher's standard work, "Perfumes, Cosmetics and Soaps."]

"Say, listen!" bawled Heath. "What's going on here, anyhow?"

Vance was laughing quietly to himself.

The Sergeant snatched the cigarette-case from Burns, and put it back into his pocket.

"Where did you lose that case yesterday?"

Burns fidgeted.

"I—I didn't exactly lose it. I just—well, I just sort of lent it to somebody."

"So! Lending Christmas presents from your best girl, was you?"

"Well, I didn't exactly lend it, either." Burns became confused. "I met a fellow and offered him a cigarette. Then we got in a little argument; and I guess he just forgot..."

"Sure! He just walked off with the case," retorted Heath with mammoth sarcasm. "And you forgot to ask him for it, and let him keep it—as a nice little present from you to him. That's swell!...Who was the fellow?"

Burns squirmed. "Well—if you must know—it was Miss Allen's brother."

"Sure it was! You're pretty foxy, ain't you?" Then a new idea suddenly smote the Sergeant. "That musta been up near the Domdaniel cafe. Along about four o'clock in the afternoon."

"How did you know?" Burns asked, amazed.

"I'm asking the questions," snapped Heath. "And it wasn't just a little argument like you said. It came pretty near being a fist-fight, didn't it? You were good and sore about something, weren't you?"

Burns stared helplessly at the Sergeant, and then at Gracie Allen.

"Oh, goodness, George!" the girl exclaimed. "Were you and Philip squabbling again. You're just a pair of squabs."

Heath gritted his teeth. "You keep outa this, Baby-doll,"

"Oooo!" The girl giggled coyly. "That's what Mr. Puttie called me last night."

Heath turned back to Burns in disgust. "What were you and Allen fighting about?"

The man rolled his eyes vaguely, as if afraid to answer yet afraid not to answer. Finally he stammered:

"It was about Gracie—Miss Allen. Philip doesn't seem to like me. He told me to keep away from—well, away from here. And then he said I didn't know how to dress—that I didn't have the style of this Mister Puttie..."

"Well, I got something to tell you, too. And it's nifty——"

Vance quickly tapped the Sergeant on the shoulder and whispered something to him.

Heath drew himself up and, turning round, pointed at the girl.

"You go in the other room, Miss. I got something to say to this young man alone—get me?—alone."

"That's right, Gracie." I was surprised to hear Mrs. Allen's quiet voice. She was standing timidly wedged in a small opening between the sliding doors at the rear of the room. How long she had been there I did not know. "You come with me, Gracie, and leave these gentlemen with George."

The girl did not demur; and she and her mother went into the rear room, drawing the doors together behind them.

"And now for the bad news, young fellow," Heath resumed, stepping threateningly toward the dumbfounded Burns. But again Vance interrupted him.

"Just a moment, Sergeant.—Why, Mr. Burns, were you so surprised just now at the scent on your cigarette-case?"

"I don't—I don't know, exactly." Burns frowned. "It's not a usual scent; I haven't come across it for a long time. But at the café last night, I did notice it quite strong at the entrance in the front hall, just as I was going into the dining-room."

"Who was wearing it?"

"Oh, I couldn't possibly know that—there were so many people standing around."

Vance seemed satisfied and, with a gesture, turned the young man back to the Sergeant.

"Well, here's the bad news," Heath barked abusively at Burns. "We found a dead guy last night—and that cigarette-case of yours was in his pocket."

Burns' head came up with a jerk, and a stunned, frightened light came into his eyes.

"My God!" he breathed. "Who—who was it?"

Heath grinned cruelly.

"I just can't imagine. Maybe you can guess."

"It wasn't—Philip!" Burns gasped. "Oh, my God!...I know he isn't here today. But he went out of town—honest to God, he did. He told me yesterday he was going."

"You ain't quite smart enough, though you was pretty foxy tryin' to drag someone else in it with that hocus-pocus about perfume." Heath paused, and then reached a sudden decision. He made a curt sign to Emery. "We're taking this baby along with us," he announced. "We'll keep him where we can reach him easy."

Vance coughed diffidently.

"So you're going to take him into custody on suspicion—eh, Sergeant? Or, perhaps, as a material witness."

"I don't care what you call it, Mr. Vance. He's going to sit around where he can't get out, doing some heavy thinking, till we get Doremus's report...You better put the bracelets on him, Emery, till we get to the corner and call the wagon."

Heath and Emery were just leading the petrified Burns to the door, when Gracie Allen came dashing back into the room, wriggling free from her mother's restraining hold.

"Oh, George, George! What's the matter? Where are they taking you? I had a feeling—like when I get psychic..."

Vance stepped to her and put both his hands on her shoulders.

"My dear child," he said in a consoling voice, "please believe me when I tell you there is nothing for you to worry about. Don't make it any harder for Mr. Burns...Won't you trust me?"

Her head dropped, and she turned to her mother. The two officers, with Burns between them, had already left the room; and, as Vance turned and reopened the door, Mrs. Allen's gentle voice spoke again.

"Thank you, sir. I am sure Gracie trusts you—just as I do."

The girl's head was on her mother's shoulder. "Oh, mom," she sniffled. "I don't really care about George not dressing as snappy as Mr. Puttie."

## 10. AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

(Sunday, May 19; noon.)

When the patrol-wagon arrived and the unhappy Burns was stepping into it, Vance smiled at him encouragingly.

"Cheerio," he said; and then stood watching the wagon as it drove off. As soon as it was out of sight he summoned a taxicab and went at once to the District Attorney's apartment.

"Really, Markham," he began, "Sergeant Heath is far too logical. Ordin'rily I'd welcome such admirable mentation; but in this case I must sue for your intervention."

He then gave Markham a concise summary of all the events that had taken place since we left his apartment the night before; the trip to the mortuary and the promise to Mrs. Allen; Heath's appropriation of the cigarette-case and his all-night search for Burns; the interview with the befuddled young man when he was found; and, finally, Heath's decision to hold Burns until Doremus reported.

Markham listened attentively, but without enthusiasm. "I think, all in all, Heath has done a fairly intelligent piece of work. I can't see just where, or why, you want me to intervene."

"Burns is innocent," asserted Vance. "And I'm obdurate in my belief. Ergo, I want you to call the police station and tell Heath to release him. In fact, Markham, I insist upon it.—But I want the Sergeant to bring the chappie up here first—if that's convenient for you. Y' see, I want him to understand clearly that one condition of his freedom is absolute silence, for the present, on the matter of the johnnie in the morgue. That was our promise to Mrs. Allen, and Burns must co-operate with us when he is released...Please hasten, old dear."

"You know this Burns?" asked Markham.

"I've seen him but twice. But I have my whimsies, don't y' know."

"As good a euphemism as any for your present unbalanced state of mind!... Just why do you want this fellow released?"

"I'm enraptured with the wood-nymph," smiled Vance.

Markham drew his lips together in annoyance.

"If I didn't know you, I'd say——"

"Tut, tut!...Call Heath—there's a good fellow."

Markham rose resignedly: he had known Vance too long not to perceive the seriousness so often hid beneath his bantering. Then he went toward the telephone.

"This is your case," he said, "—if it is a case—and you can handle it any way you see fit. I have my own troubles."

The Sergeant had just reached the station when Markham called and gave orders in accord with Vance's request.

Fifteen minutes later Heath escorted Burns into the District Attorney's library. Vance carefully outlined the circumstances to Burns, and exacted from him a definite promise to make no mention of Philip Allen's death to anyone, impressing upon him the situation with regard to Gracie Allen herself.

George Burns, with unmistakable sincerity, readily enough agreed to the restriction; and the Sergeant informed him he was free to go.

When we were alone, however, Heath began to fume.

"After all my work last night!" he complained bitterly. "Runnin' down that cigarette-case; losing my sleep and doing plenty of fancy work this morning; tying that guy in bow-knots and getting him just where I wanted him!...And it was all your idea, Mr. Vance. And now I find you something definite, and what do you do? You have the baby turned loose!"

He chewed viciously on his cigar. "But if you think I'm not going to keep that guy covered, you ain't so smart, Mr. Vance. I sent Tracy up here ahead of me, and he's going to tail Burns from the minute he steps out of this building."

"I rather expected you would do just that, don't y' know." Vance shrugged pleasantly. "But please, Sergeant, don't get an erroneous impression from my whim to free the young perfume mixer. I shall put all my energy into unravellin' the present tangle. And I shall await the Medical Examiner's report all a-twitter...By the by, in the midst of your energetic activities, did you learn anything about the autopsy?"

"Sure I did," said Heath. "I called up Doc Doremus just before I left the station. He gave me hell, as usual, but he said he'd get busy right after lunch, and that he'd have the report tonight."

"Most gratifyin'," sighed Vance. "I salute you, Sergeant, and beg forgiveness for upsettin' your admirable but useless plan to deprive Mr. Burns of his liberty. I do hope, y' know, it won't distract your mind from safeguardin' Mr. Markham from the shadow of Pellinzi."

"Nothin's going to distract me from worrying about the Buzzard and Mr. Markham," Heath asserted. "Don't you worry! That office is being watched day and night; and there's husky lads on hand to pluck that bird proper if he shows up."

The Sergeant left us a few minutes later, and we accepted Markham's invitation to remain for lunch.

It was almost three o'clock when Vance and I returned to his apartment. Currie met us at the door, looking highly perturbed.

"I'm horribly upset, sir," he said sotto voce. "There's a most incredible young person here waiting to see you. I tried most firmly to send her away, sir; but I couldn't seem to make her understand. She was most determined and—and hoydenish, sir." He took a quick backward glance. "I've been watching her very carefully, and I'm sure she has touched nothing. I do hope, sir——"

"You're forgiven, Currie." Vance broke into the distracted old man's apologies, and, handing him his hat and stick, went directly into the library.

Gracie Allen was sitting in Vance's large lounge chair, engulfed in the enormous tufted upholstery. When she leaped up to greet Vance it was without her former exuberance.

"Hello, Mr. Vance," she said solemnly. "I bet you didn't expect to see me. And I bet you don't know where I got your address. And the grouchy old man who met me at the door didn't expect to see me either. But I didn't tell you how I got your address. I got it the

same way I got your name—right on your card. Though I really don't feel like going down and getting that new dress tomorrow. Maybe I won't go. That is, maybe I'll wait till I know that nothing's happened to George..."

"I'm very glad you were so clever as to find my address." Vance's tone was subdued. "And I'm delighted you're still using the citron scent."

"Oh, yes!" She looked at him gratefully. "You know, I didn't like it so much at first, but now—somehow—I just love it! Isn't that funny? But I believe in people changing their minds. Just sup—"

"Yes," nodded Vance, with a faint smile. "Consistency is the hobgoblin——"

"But I don't believe in hobgoblins—that is, I haven't since I was a little girl."

"No, of course not."

"And when I found out you lived so close to me, I thought that was awfully convenient, because I just had to ask you a lot of important questions." She looked up at Vance as if to see how he would react to this announcement. "And oh, I discovered something else about you! You have five letters in your name—just like me and George. It's Fate, isn't it? If you had six letters maybe I wouldn't have come. But now I know everything is going to come out all right, isn't it?"

"Yes, my dear," nodded Vance. "I'm sure it will."

She released her breath suddenly, as if some controversial point had successfully been disposed of. "And now I want you to tell me exactly why those policemen took George away. I'm really frightfully worried and upset, although George phoned me he was all right."

Vance sat down facing the girl. "You really need not be concerned about Mr. Burns," he began. "The men who took him away this morning foolishly thought there were some suspicious circumstances connected with him. But everything will be cleared up in a day or two. Please trust me."

There was complete confidence in her frank gaze.

"But it must have been something very serious that made those men come to my house this morning and upset George so terribly."

"But," explained Vance, "they only thought it was serious. The truth is, my dear, a man was found dead last night at the Domdaniel, and——"

"But what could George have to do with that, Mr. Vance?"

"Really, y' know, I'm certain he has nothing to do with it."

"Then why did the men act so funny about the cigarette-case I gave George? How did they get it, anyhow?"

Vance hesitated several moments; then he apparently reached a decision as to how far he should enlighten the girl.

"As a matter of fact," he explained patiently, "Mr. Burns' cigarette-case was found in the pocket of the man who died."

"Oh! But George wouldn't give away anything I bought for him."

"As I say, I think it was all a great mistake." The girl looked at Vance long and searchingly. "But suppose, Mr. Vance,—suppose this man didn't just die. Suppose he was—well—suppose he was killed, like you said you killed that bad man in Riverdale yesterday. And suppose George's cigarette-case was found in his pocket. And suppose—oh, lots of things like that. I've read in the papers how policemen sometimes think that somebody is killed by innocent people, and how——" She stopped abruptly and put her hands to her mouth in horror.

Vance leaned over and put his hand on her arm. "Please, please, my dear child!" he said. "You're beginning to believe in hobgoblins again. And you mustn't. They're such ridiculous little imps; and they don't really exist. Nothing is going to happen to Mr. Burns."

"But it might!" Her fears were but slightly allayed. "Can't you see, it might! And you've got to be an awfully, awfully good detective if anything like that should happen." A frightened, pleading look was in her eyes. "I was terribly worried this morning after George had gone. And do you know what I did? I went up-town and talked with Delpha. I always go to Delpha when I have any troubles—and sometimes even when I haven't any. And she always says she's glad to see me, because she likes to have me around. I guess it's because I'm so psychic. And having psychic people around makes it easy for you to concentrate, doesn't it?...She's got the queerest place, Delpha has. It makes you feel spooky at first. She's got long black curtains hanging all around, and you can't see any windows. And there's only one door; and when the black curtains are pulled across it, you just feel as though you were somewhere far away with only Delpha and the spirits that tell her things."

She looked about her and shook herself slightly.

"And then, Delpha has great big pictures of hands on the curtains, with lots of lines on them. And funny signs, too—Delpha calls them symbols. And there's a big glass ball on a table, and a little one. And maps of the stars, with funny words around them which mean something in case you're a crab or a fish or a goat, or things like that."

"And what did Delpha tell you?" Vance asked with kindly interest.

"Oh! I didn't tell you, did I?" The girl's face brightened. "She was very mystical, and she seemed terribly surprised when I told her about George. She asked me the funniest questions: all about the men that came to the house, and about the cigarette-case—you know, like she was trying to draw me out. I guess she was trying to read my mind because it was vibrating. And Delpha always says it's a great help to her when anybody is in tune. Anyhow, she said that nothing was going to happen to George—just like you say, Mr. Vance. Only, she said I must help him..."

She looked at Vance eagerly.

"You'll let me help you get George out of trouble, won't you? Mother said you told her you were going to do everything you could. I know I can be a sort of detective, if you tell me how. You see, I've simply got to help George."

Vance, puzzled and disturbed by the girl's genuine appeal, rose thoughtfully and walked to the window. Finally he returned to his chair and sat down again.

"So you want to be a detective!" he said cheerfully. "I think that's an excellent idea. And I'm going to give you all the help I can. We'll work together; you shall be my assistant, so to speak. But you must keep very busy at it. And you mustn't let anyone suspect that you're doing detective work—that's the first rule."

"Oh, that's wonderful, Mr. Vance! Just like in a story." The girl's spirits immediately rose. "But now tell me what I must do to be a detective."

"Very well," began Vance. "Let me see...First, of course, you must make note of anything that will be helpful. Footprints in suspicious places are a good starting-point. If people walk on soft earth, they naturally leave their tracks; and then, by measuring these tracks you can tell what size shoes they were wearing..."

"But suppose they were wearing another size shoe, just to fool us?"

Vance smiled admiringly.

"That, my child," he said, "is a very wise observation. People have been known to do that very thing. However, I do not think we need be concerned with that question just yet...To go on, you should always look at desk-blotters for clues. Blotted writing can generally be read by holding it up to a mirror."

He demonstrated this point for her, and she was as fascinated as a child watching a magician.

"And then, y' know, cigarettes are very important. Should you find the butt of a cigarette, you might be able to tell who had smoked it. You would start by looking for a person who smoked that brand. And sometimes the tip of the cigarette will give the smoker away. If there is rouge on it, then you know it was smoked by a lady who used lip-stick."

"Oh!" The girl suddenly looked crestfallen. "Maybe if I had looked carefully at the cigarette that burned my dress yesterday, I might have been able to tell who threw it."

"Possibly," Vance returned gaily. "But there are many other ways of verifying your suspicions about people. For instance, if someone had gone to commit a crime in a house where there was a watch-dog, and you knew that the dog had not barked at him, then you could conclude that the intruder was a friend of the dog. Dogs, y' know, do not bark at a friend."

"But suppose," the girl interposed, "the people kept a cat instead of a dog. Or maybe a canary. What do you do then?"

Vance could not help smiling.

"In that case, you'd have to look for other things to identify the culprit..."

"That's where the footprints would come in handy, isn't it?...But lots of people wear the same size shoes. My shoes fit mother perfectly. And, what's more, her shoes fit me."

"There are still other ways——"

"I know one!" she broke in triumphantly. "What about perfume? For instance, if we found a lady's handbag, and it smelled like Frangipanni, then we'd look for a lady who used Frangipanni—not one who used Gardenia...But I wouldn't be very good at that. Would you? I'm always getting scents mixed up. It makes George just furious. But he would be simply wonderful at smelling. He can tell any kind of perfume right away, and what it comes from, too, and all about it—even when I don't smell anything at all. He just has a sort of gift—like when he smelled his cigarette-case this morning...But please go on, Mr. Vance."

Vance did go on, for more than half an hour, carefully impressing upon her the things he knew would interest her. There was no possible doubt of his sympathetic understanding when, as the girl was about to go, he rang for Currie and gave him explicit instructions.

"This young lady, Currie," he said, "is to be received whenever she calls here. If I am out and she should care to wait, you are to make her welcome and comfortable."

When Miss Allen had gone, Vance said to me: "The feeling of having something to lean on, as it were, will do the child a world of good at present. She's really most unhappy, and not a little frightened. Her imagined new occupation should prove a much-needed temporary tonic... Y' know, Van, I have a suspicion I'm growing a bit sentimental as the years go by. Mellowin' with age—same like the grapes of France."

And he sipped his brandy slowly.

## 11. FOLKLORE AND POISONS

(Sunday, May 19; 9 pm.)

Markham telephoned Vance at nine o'clock that evening. Vance listened attentively for several minutes, a puzzled frown deepening on his face. Finally he hung up the receiver and turned to me.

"We're going down to Markham's. Doremus is there. I don't like it—I don't at all like it, Van. Doremus called him a little while ago full of news and mystery. Didn't know where Heath was, and wanted to see Markham first, anyway. Markham must have unearthed the disgruntled Sergeant, and now wants me to come down as well. Only some cataclysmic upheaval would get the peppery Doremus sufficiently excited to seek the District Attorney out in person, instead of merely turning in his official report. Very mystifyin'."

Fifteen or twenty minutes later a cab let us out in front of Markham's home. A gruff call halted us just as we were entering the building, and Sergeant Heath came bustling down the street.

"I just got the D.A.'s message at home, and beat it right over," panted Heath. "Funny business, if you ask me, Mr. Vance."

The butler was holding the door ajar for us, and we followed him into the library, where the District Attorney and Doctor Emanuel Doremus were awaiting us.

The doctor squinted malevolently at Heath.

"It would be one of your cases," he blustered, shaking an accusing finger at the Sergeant. "Why can't you ever dig up a nice, neat, easy murder, instead of these fancy affairs?" Then he nodded greetings to Vance with a weak attempt at cheeriness.

Doremus was a small, fiery man who gave the impression of a crabbed stockbroker rather than of a highly efficient scientific man.

"I'm getting sick of these trick murders of yours," he went on to the Sergeant. "Furthermore, I haven't had any food since noon. Can't eat properly even on a Sunday. You and your crazy corpses!"

The Sergeant grinned and said nothing. He knew Doremus of old, and had long since come to accept his eccentric and sometimes querulous manner.

"No, doctor," put in Vance placatingly; "the unhappy Sergeant is merely an innocent onlooker...What seems to be the difficulty?"

"You're in on this too, eh?" Doremus retorted. "I might have known! Say, don't you like to see people shot or stabbed, pretty and clean, instead of being poisoned so I've got to work all the time?"

"Poisoned?" asked Vance curiously. "Who's been poisoned?"

"The stiff I'm talking about," shouted Doremus; "the fellow Heath handed me. I forget his name."

"Philip Allen," supplied the Sergeant.

"All right, all right. He'd be just as dead with any other name. And what makes me sore is I don't know any more about what killed him than if he was a dead Zulu in Isipingo."

"You spoke of poison, doctor," prompted Vance calmly.

"I did," snapped Doremus. "But you tell me what kind of poison. It doesn't check with any books of mine on toxicology."

"Really, y' know, that doesn't sound exactly scientific," smiled Vance. "Hope we're not travellin' back to mysticism."

"Oh, it's scientific enough," Doremus pursued. "The poison—whatever it is—was undoubtedly absorbed through the derma or the mucous membrane. It might have been lots of things. But I couldn't get any straight-cut reaction from the regulation tests. It might have been a combination of some kind." He grunted. "I'll find it, all right. Not tonight, though. It may take a day or so. It's the damndest thing I've ever been up against."

"I can readily believe that," said Vance, "or you wouldn't be here tonight."

"Maybe I shouldn't be. But this pest"—he indicated Heath—"kept yelling about the case being so important, and that it might have something to do with Mr. Markham. Sounded like a hoax; but I thought it best to tell him I couldn't add up the figures tonight. Let him worry. I'm hungry."

"What have I to do with this, Sergeant?" Markham's tone carried a biting reprimand.

"Wasn't it in Mirche's office, Chief?" parried Heath aggressively. "And that's where I been looking for trouble for you...And Hennessey watching, and—and everything," he ended lamely, as Vance cut him short with a wave of the hand.

"We appreciate your trouble and your courtesy, doctor," Vance said. "You're quite sure the fellow couldn't have died a natural death?"

"Not unless medical science has gone completely bughouse," Doremus returned emphatically. "This fellow was poisoned—that much I know. I don't wonder young Mendel threw up his hands. Not only was it poison, but it was a quick, powerful poison that could have taken effect at once. But it didn't act exactly like anything I'm familiar with."

"But, doctor," persisted Vance, "you must have some idea."

"Huh! I've got plenty of ideas. That's my difficulty: too damn many ideas."

"For instance?"

"Well, there's our old friend, potassium cyanide. There's plenty of indications pointing to hydrocyanic acid. I'd say he got a few sniffs of cyanide gas and passed out. The bulging eyes and the colour of the skin might mean cyanide—and they might also mean something else again. And I did get a bit of the smell in the lungs and gastric mucosa. But nothing from the mouth, or when I opened the cranial cavity. But that doesn't mean anything either, especially as a lot of other things showed up that didn't spell prussic acid backwards or forwards, or two ways from the middle."

"I believe Doctor Mendel spoke of some burns—probably just a local reaction—on the lips and in the throat. What of them?"

"You tell me." Doremus seemed annoyed with the world in general. "My whiff of the lungs indicated a probable inhalation of something, as I've already said."

"Might it have been nitrobenzene?" suggested Vance.

"I wouldn't know—I'm just a medical man."

"Come, come, doctor," Vance said good-naturedly. "I'm merely trying to steer you clear of ancient toxic lore."

Doremus sat up with a jerk and grinned apologetically.

"I don't blame you, Mr. Vance. I'm hot and annoyed. Maybe I do sound as if I was messing around with ancient Egyptians, and mandragora, and viper venoms, and secret Gypsy potions, and witches' ointments with their henbane, and Borgia poisons, and Perugia water, and aqua Tofana——"

"Did you say Tofana, doc?" interrupted Heath. "That's the name of that fortune-telling Delpha, Mr. Vance. And I don't put poison beyond her and her husband."

"No, no, Sergeant," Vance corrected him. "The Tofana the doctor mentioned died in Sicily in the seventeenth century. And she wasn't a fortune-teller. Far from it. She devoted her talents to mixing a liquid which has since come to be known by her name. Aqua Tofana was a deadly poison; and this woman plied her poisoning trade on such a wholesale scale that the name of her concoction has never been forgot. Though her mixture was probably nothing but a strong solution of arsenic, there's still a lot of mystery attaching to it.—That's the lady, dead for centuries, to whom Doctor Doremus was referring."

"I still say Rosa Tofana ain't beyond the same kind of tricks," insisted Heath doggedly.

"You seem astonishingly full of hatreds and suspicions, Sergeant."

"In my business I gotta be," Heath mumbled.

Vance turned back to Doremus.

"Forgive us for interrupting, doctor. We all seem to have become embittered by the present case...But what about poisons isolated from flowers? These would be difficult to trace, wouldn't they?"

"No! They're easy enough, but they'd take time. And I know 'em all. You mean, I take it, colchicine from meadow saffron, helleborin from the Christmas rose, narcissine from the daffodil, convallarin from the lily of the valley—things like that. But I assure you it wasn't anything as mild as these that did this fellow in...Or maybe——" He cocked his eye in a leer at Vance. "Now it's you that's talking about the so-called poisoned posies of medieval romance. Humph! Modern science laughs at 'em."

"No—oh, no. I haven't gone afield as far as that," laughed Vance. "I was merely thinking of the lavender peddler in London, who passed out when he sniffed the oil of mirbane he'd put on his flowers to enhance their aroma."

"There's nothing to that." Doremus shook his head scornfully. "I'm only saying that I don't know just now what it was this Allen man inhaled... But give me time—give me time. I'll find out tomorrow. And, what's more, it won't be as crazy as it sounds now."

"Could you say when he died, doc?" asked Heath.

Doremus glared at the Sergeant.

"How would I know? I'm no necromancer. I didn't even see the body till this afternoon." His anger abated at sight of Heath's discomfiture. "I talked with Doctor Mendel, but he wouldn't venture a guess. Said there was no rigor mortis when he first saw the body. But you can't time stiffening of the muscles with a stop-watch. The onset is highly variable—lot of different factors operating. From what I've been able to learn, the fellow could have died within a couple of hours before he was found, or he could have died as long as ten hours before...I don't know; Mendel don't know; you don't know..."

When Doremus had sputtered a while longer, he left us with a breezy wave of the hand.

"Well, Vance," said the District Attorney, "how are you going to fit that preposterous situation into your story?"

Vance shook his head pensively.

"I don't know, Markham. But rest assured it fits somewhere, and I'm still haunted by the various converging factors of my tale...And, Sergeant, that was a curious interpolation of yours about the Tofanas. Y' know, your friend Rosa is strangely interested in the deceased gentleman..."

He rose and walked back and forth several times.

"I'm not admitting defeat yet, Markham. There are too many questions in my mind crying out for answers. How, for instance, did the chap get into Mirche's office again after Hennessey saw him at six o'clock?"

"Hennessey musta been lookin' the other way," said Heath stolidly.

"That's not likely, Sergeant. Something very peculiar there."

He smoked for a while in silence.

"I wish I could see the plans for the remodeling of that old house when Mirche took it over for his cafe. There might be something suggestive about them. An odd desire, I'll admit. But I could bear to look at them."

"I don't see how those plans would do you any good," said Heath. "But if you really want 'em, I can get 'em for you easy. Doyle and Schuster did the job, and I've had dealings with their chief draughtsman before."

"That sounds hopeful, Sergeant. When could you get the blue-prints for me?"

"Before you're up in the morning, sir," returned the other confidently. "Say around ten o'clock."

Markham looked amused.

"Why not get the blue-prints for a couple of mare's-nests, too, while you're about it, Vance?—The sensible thing to do, it seems to me, would be to wait till you get Doremus' final report."

"You're quite right," Vance reluctantly conceded. "But my instincts don't run to so many coincidences. I crave simplicity. Besides, I have an appealin' young lady to consider."

"I assure you," said Markham unsympathetically, "after you've scanned the blue-prints tomorrow, you'll have ample time to consider your young lady."

"No—no, Markham." Vance spoke soberly. "It is not a subject for levity..."

Then he told in detail of Gracie Allen's pathetic visit to him that afternoon—her appeal for help, her concern for Burns, and his own compassionate suggestions to keep her mind occupied.

"Both the Sergeant and I," he concluded, "have made a promise to her mother, and, after the girl's impromptu visit today, I want to impress upon both of you that we must be considerate whenever the girl chooses to intrude on us."



"I deem it a pleasure, not to say a rarity, to commend your sentimental punctilio," Markham said. "But I myself shall probably not be called upon to assist in the charitable deception. The brunt of the situation, it seems to me, will fall upon you and the Sergeant."

"It's all right with me, Chief," said Heath. "That Mrs. Allen is a mighty sweet little woman. And the girl is plenty cute."

Vance smiled gratefully.

"You'll have to be rather careful, Sergeant. The best way to meet the situation is to show no outward sympathy. That might make the girl suspicious. We should simply act at all times as if we knew no more about her brother's death than she does herself. An actor, Sergeant! Could you be an actor?"

"Sure I'll be an actor!" Heath voiced his decision with ready sincerity. "But I ain't so hard-boiled yet that I'm gonna promise not to sometimes get a lump in my gullet..."

He seemed a little ashamed of his unbecoming outburst of sentiment.

"Hell!" he added quickly. "I'll even be one of those damn matinee idols."

## 12. A STRANGE DISCOVERY

(Monday, May 20; 9 am.)

Vance had been reluctant Sunday evening to leave Markham's apartment, and had remained late. But he was up earlier than usual the following morning. By half-past eight he was completely dressed and had drunk his coffee. Shortly after nine, Sergeant Heath arrived, striding into the library in jaunty triumph.

"Here you are, Mr. Vance," he announced, placing a long cardboard tube on the desk. "If all my jobs were as easy as getting these blue-prints for you, I'd never die from overwork."

"My word, such efficiency!"

Vance drew the plans from their holder and spread them on the desk. He scrutinized them all, inspecting the sheet for each floor in turn. He gave more time, however, to the ground-floor plan which included the actual cafe room, the entrance-hall and the checkrooms, the kitchen quarters, and the office. The Sergeant watched him with expectant amusement.

"Quite conventional," Vance murmured, tapping the sheets with his finger. "An excellent bit of planning. Intelligently done. No more, no less. Sad.. sad."

At this moment Gracie Allen unexpectedly arrived. She preceded Currie into the room, making his announcement superfluous.

"Oh, I just had to come and see you, Mr. Vance! Somehow I don't seem to be getting anywhere—and I worked so hard. Honest, I did!"

"But my word! Young lady,"—Vance spoke pleasantly—"why aren't you at the factory this morning?"

"I just couldn't go there," she returned. "Not for a while, anyhow. I've got so much on my mind—that is, terribly important things. And I'm sure Mr. Doolson won't mind...George didn't go to the factory today, either. He phoned me last night and said he couldn't possibly do anything. He's so upset."

"Well, perhaps after all, Miss Allen, a few days' rest..."

"Oh, I'm not resting." She appeared hurt. "I'm frightfully busy every minute. You yourself said I have to keep busy. Remember?" She caught sight of Heath, and a frightened look came into her large eyes as she recognized him.

Vance eased the situation by casually introducing the Sergeant.

"He is working with us, too," he added. "You can trust the Sergeant. I explained his error to him yesterday, and now he's on our side... Furthermore," Vance went on cheerfully, "he has five letters in his name."

"Oh!" Her fears were somewhat allayed by this information, though she looked dubiously at Heath again before she broke into a faint smile. Then she pointed to the desk. "What are all those blue papers, Mr. Vance?—they weren't there yesterday. Maybe they're a clue, or something. Are they?"

"No, I'm afraid not. They're just plans of the Domdaniel where you were Saturday night..."

"Oh, may I look?"

"Certainly," Vance replied, and bent over the desk with her. "See, this is the big dining-room, and the entrance-door from the hall; and over here is the kitchen, and the side door; and right along here is the driveway that goes under the arch; and right in this corner is the office, with the door opening on the terrace; and—"

"Wait a minute," she interrupted. "That's not really an office."

She bent closer over the chart and traced corridors and directions with her finger, calling them off as she did so. She ended by following the outline of the small room. Then she looked up.

"Why, that's Dixie Del Marr's private room. She told me so herself... Don't you think she's just beautiful, Mr. Vance? And she can sing so lovely, too. I wish I could sing like her. You know, classical songs."

"I'm sure your singing is much prettier," Vance told her gallantly. "But I think you're mistaken about that room being Miss Del Marr's. Really, y' know, it's Mr. Mirche's office—isn't it, Sergeant?"

"I'll say it is!"

Gracie Allen bent still lower over the papers.

"Oh, but it is the room I was in," she asserted conclusively. "I'll show you:—that window looks right out on the driveway; and here's the street, through those tiny windows. It even says '50th Street' right on the picture. Why, it's got to be Miss Del Marr's room. And you can't have two rooms in the same place, can you—even in a picture?"

"No, not very well——"

"And aren't the walls all done in mauve? And aren't there three or four big leather chairs along this wall? And isn't there a big dead fish on a board, hanging up here?" She pointed out the locations as she spoke. "And isn't there a funny little glass chandelier hanging——Oh, where's the ceiling, Mr. Vance? I don't see any ceiling on this picture."

Heath had become highly interested in the girl's inventory.

"Sure," he said. "The walls are a sort of light purple; and Mirche says he caught that fish down in Florida. She's dead right, Mr. Vance...But see here. Miss, when were you ever in that room?"

"Why, I was in it just last Saturday night."

"What!" bellowed Heath.

The girl was startled.

"Did I say something wrong? I didn't mean to go in there."

Vance spoke now.

"What time during the evening did you go in there, Miss Allen?"

"Why, you know, Mr. Vance. When I went to look for Philip, at ten o'clock...But I didn't see Philip. He wasn't around. And he didn't

come home yesterday, either. I guess he's gone on a vacation somewhere. And he promised he wouldn't quit his job."

Vance diverted the girl's aimless chatter.

"Let's not talk about Philip now. Just tell me how you happened to go out on the terrace looking for your brother, when you really wanted to go to the rear of the cafe."

"I didn't go out on the terrace." She shook her head emphatically. "What would I want to go on the terrace for, anyhow? I'd have caught cold in that thin dress I was wearing. Don't you think that was an awfully pretty dress, Mr. Vance? Mother made that too."

"Yes, you looked very charming in it...But you must have forgot, for the only way to get into that room is from the terrace."

"Oh, but I went in the other way—through the door at the back." She pointed to the wall directly opposite the street door of Mirche's office; then her eyes opened wide as she scrutinized the blue-print. "There's something awfully funny here, Mr. Vance. Whoever made this picture wasn't very careful."

Vance came closer to her. The Sergeant, too, moved nearer, and stood beside them with an air of curious expectancy, his cigar poised in mid-air.

"You think there should be another door shown at that spot?" Vance asked softly.

"Why, of course! Because there is a door right there. Otherwise, how could I have gotten in Miss Del Marr's private room? But I can't imagine why she keeps that fish in there. I don't think it's pretty at all."

"Don't worry about the fish. Look here at the plan a minute...Now, here's the archway through which you left the dining-room—"

"Uh—huh. The one with the big carved stairway in front of it."

"And then—let's see—you must have gone this way in the hall——"

"That's right. George wanted me to stay and speak to him, but I was in a hurry. So I went right on back, until I passed another little passage. And then I didn't know which way to go."

"You must have turned into that narrow passage, and walked down to this point, here." Vance brought to a stop the pencil with which he was tracing her course on the blue-print.

"That's just what I did! How do you know? Were you watching me?"

"No, my dear," Vance answered patiently. "But maybe you're a little confused. There is a door here, at the end of this narrow passage, where you say you walked down."

"Yes, I saw that door. I even opened it. But there wasn't anything there—only the driveway. That's how I knew I was lost. And then as I stood there leaning against the wall and wondering how to find Philip, this other door I was telling you about—you know, the one into Miss Del Marr's room—opened right behind me." She tittered, as at some joke she was just about to relate. "And I fell right into the room! It was terribly embarrassing. But I didn't spoil my dress at all. And I might have torn it, falling like that...I guess it was my own fault though, for not looking where I was leaning. But I didn't know there was a door there. I didn't see any door at all. Anyhow, there I was in the room. Isn't that silly—not seeing a door and leaning up against it, and then falling down right into a lady's room?" She laughed engagingly at the recital of her mishap.

Vance led the girl to a chair and arranged a pillow for her.

"Sit right there, my dear," he said, "and tell us all about it."

"But I have told you," she said, arranging herself comfortably. "It was awfully funny, and I was so embarrassed. Miss Del Marr was embarrassed too. She told me that was her private room. So, I told her I was awfully sorry and explained about looking for my brother—she even knew Philip. I guess that's because they both work at the same place, like me and George...And then she showed me back down the hall, and pointed out the exact way to the landing on the kitchen stairs. She was awfully nice. Well, I waited a long time, but Philip didn't show up. So I went back to Mr. Puttie. I knew how to find my way back, all right...And now, Mr. Vance, I want to ask you some more questions about what you said yesterday——"

"I'd love to answer them, Miss Allen," Vance said; "but I really haven't any time this morning. Maybe later—this afternoon. You won't mind, will you?"

"Oh, no." The girl jumped up quickly. "I've got something very important to do, too. And maybe George will come up for a while." She shook Vance's hand, nodded suspiciously to Heath, and in a moment she was gone.

"Holy suffering sauerkraut!" exploded Heath, almost before the door closed on Miss Allen. "Didn't I tell you that Mirche was a crafty customer? So he's got a secret door! The dizzy doll didn't see it—sure she didn't! Somebody musta got careless—her leani'n up against an invisible door and goin' plop—right into the room where her brother was killed! That's somethin'!"

Vance smiled grimly.

"But, after all, Sergeant, there's no law against a man having a secret door to his own office. And that, undoubtedly, is our answer to the question of how the dead fellow got in there without being seen by Hennessey. But someone must have been in there with him. Not Mirche: he was at my table between ten and eleven. And certainly no dead man was there at ten."

"But don't you think Mr. Vance——"

"Spare me, Sergeant!" Vance was pacing the floor.

"I'd like to go up to the Domdaniel and smash that fake door in!" Heath asserted violently.

"No—oh, no," counselled Vance. "You mustn't be impetuous. Silkeness. Let that be your watchword for the nonce."

"Still and all," said the determined Heath, "if this Domdaniel is the headquarters for a crooked ring of some kind, like I've always suspected, nothing'd give me more pleasure than smashing the whole place—and Mirche along with it."

"Your nature's too vehement, Sergeant," Vance rebuked him. "One doesn't go about shattering people's offices without proof of their guilt."

"I'm just sayin' what I'd like to do."

"And another thing, Sergeant: Mirche would be merely one weak link in your imagin'ry criminal chain. As I said, he's far from being a leader of men."

"He looks like a pretty slick article to me," Heath remonstrated meekly. "Anyhow, that 'Owl' Owen you was worrying about would fill the bill."

"Quite—quite," mused Vance. "But he was merely a fellow diner when I saw him. Very correct and unobtrusive. Though I admit I didn't relish his being there that night, with so many other queer things all coming together and signifying nothing." He made an ambiguous gesture. "I think we may forget him for the present, and concentrate on ascertaining who killed the poor chap."

"Yeah? How? By checkin' up a little closer on Mirche?"

"Precisely, Sergeant. And I shan't overlook Dixie Del Marr either. Not after that amazing information about the door into her private room."

"And just how do you intend doing it, Mr. Vance?"

"Quite openly, Sergeant. I shall drop in for a chat...Where, by the by, does brother Mirche reside?"

"That's easy," Heath told him. "Upstairs at the Domdaniel."

"I thought as much...And could you answer with equal ease if I asked you the domicile of Miss Del Marr?"

"Sure." Heath grunted. "I wouldn't have lasted this long on the homicide squad, if I didn't know where the people live that I think are crooked and mixed up in dirty business.—You'll find her at the Antler Hotel, on 53rd Street."

"You're a fund of information, Sergeant," Vance complimented him.

"When do you intend to see 'em, sir?...And then what?"

"I'll try to commune with Mirche and Miss Del Marr this very morning. After that, I'll endeavour to lure Mr. Markham to lunch. Then I should be charmed to meet you here again at three this afternoon."

"It's still your case, Mr. Vance," mumbled Heath. "I'm not goin' to tell you how to handle it." He remained another half-hour before taking his departure.

Then Vance telephoned to Markham, after which he sat down and lighted a cigarette, with more than ordinary deliberation.

"Still another amazin' facet in the gem, Van," he said. "Markham was on the point of calling me when I was put through to his office. Mr. Doolson—he of the In-O-Scent Corporation—had just come and gone. Markham promised he'd pour forth the story when I see him later—he seemed inordin'tely amused. We're to be at his office round one o'clock. I told him if we weren't there by two, to send a posse of trusty stalwarts to our rescue at the Domdaniel."

### 13. NEWS OF AN OWL

(Monday, May 20; 11 am.)

At eleven o'clock Vance went to the Domdaniel. He had no difficulty about seeing Mirche. After a delay of only five minutes, Mirche came into the reception-hall where we were waiting. He greeted Vance effusively, though he gave me the impression that he was acting out a rehearsed part.

"To what am I indebted for this unexpected visit, sir?" he asked smoothly.

"I merely wanted a chat with you anent the poor fellow who was found dead here Saturday night." Vance spoke with a casual pleasantness.

"Oh, yes." If Mirche was surprised, he disguised the fact successfully. "Of course, if it's about his family, we will be very glad to see what can be done...Naturally, I should like to avoid any scandal—the public is sensitive about such matters. A most unfortunate incident.—But suppose we go into my office."

He led the way along the terrace, and opening the door, stood aside to let us precede him. Vance seated himself in one of the large leather chairs, and Mirche sat down half facing him.

"The police have naturally been asking a great many questions about the affair," Mirche began. "But I was hoping the whole thing had been settled by now."

"These things are most distressing, I know," said Vance. "But there are one or two points about the situation that rather interest me."

"I'm greatly surprised that you should be interested, Mr. Vance." Mirche was cool and suave. "After all, the man was only a dishwasher here. I had dismissed him just before the dinner hour. A question of pay—he didn't think he was getting enough. I don't see why he should have come back, unless he thought better of the matter and wished to be reinstated. Most unfortunate he should die in my office. But he didn't seem to be a particularly robust fellow, and I suppose one can never tell when the heart will give out...By the way, Mr. Vance, have they found out just what did cause his death?"

"No, I don't believe so," answered Vance noncommittally. "However, that isn't the point that interests me at the moment. The fact is, Mr. Mirche, there was an officer in the street outside Saturday night, and he insists he didn't see this dishwasher of yours enter the office here, after he was last seen coming out of it at about six o'clock."

"Probably didn't notice him," said Mirche indifferently.

"No—oh, no. The officer—who, by the by, knew young Allen—is quite positive the man did not enter your office from the balcony all evening."

Mirche looked up and spread his hands.

"I must still insist, Mr. Vance—"

"Is it possible the fellow could have come in here some other way?" Vance paused momentarily and looked about him. "He might, don't y' know, have come through that little door in the wall at the rear."

Mirche did not speak for a moment. He stared shrewdly at Vance, and the muscles in his body seemed to tighten. If I have ever seen a living picture of a man thinking rapidly, Mirche was that picture.

Suddenly the man let out a short laugh.

"And I thought I had guarded my little secret so well!...That door is a device of mine—purely for my own convenience, you understand." He rose and went to the rear of the office. "I'll show you how it works." He pressed a small medallion on the wainscoting, and a panel barely two feet wide swung silently into the room. Beyond was the narrow passageway in which Gracie Allen had lost her way.

Vance looked at the concealed catch on the secret door and then turned away, as if the revelation were nothing new to him.

"Quite neat," he drawled.

"A great convenience," said Mirche, closing the door. "A private entrance to my office from the cafe. You can see, Mr. Vance—"

"Oh, yes—quite. Useful no end when you crave a bit of privacy. I've known certain Wall Street brokers to have just such contraptions. Can't say I blame them...But how should your dishwasher have known of this arrangement?"

Mirche stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"I'm sure I don't know. Although it's wholly possible, of course, that some of the help around here have spied on me—or perhaps run into the secret accidentally."

"Miss Del Marr's aware of it, of course?"

"Oh, yes," Mirche admitted. "She helps me here a bit at times. I see no reason for not letting her use the door when she wishes."

It was apparent that Vance was somewhat taken aback at Mirche's frankness, and he straightway turned the conversation into other channels. He put numerous questions about Allen, and then reverted to the events of Saturday night.

In the midst of one of Vance's questions the front door opened, and Miss Del Marr herself appeared in the doorway. Mirche invited her in and immediately introduced us.

"I have just been telling these gentlemen," he said quickly, "about the private entrance to this room." He forced a laugh. "Mr. Vance seemed to think there might be some mysterious connection between that and——"

Vance held up his hand, protesting pleasantly.

"I'm afraid you read hidden meanings into my words, Mr. Mirche." Then he smiled at Miss Del Marr. "You must find that door a great convenience."

"Oh, yes—especially when the weather is bad. In fact, it has proved most convenient." She spoke in a casual tone, but there was a hardness, almost a bitterness, in her expression.

Vance was scrutinizing her closely. I expected him to question her regarding Allen's death, for I knew this had been his intention.

But, instead, he chatted carelessly regarding trivial things, quite unrelated to the matter which had brought him there.

Shortly before he made his adieu, he said disarmingly to Miss Del Marr: "Forgive me if I seem personal, but I cannot help admiring the scent you are wearing. I'd hazard a guess it is a blend of jonquille and rose."

If the woman was astonished at Vance's comment, she gave no indication of it.

"Yes," she replied indifferently. "It has a ridiculous name—quite unworthy of it, I think. Mr. Mirche uses the perfume, too—I am sure it was my influence." She gave the man a conventional smile; and again I detected the hardness and bitterness in her manner.

We took our leave soon thereafter, and as we walked toward Seventh Avenue, Vance was unusually serious.

"Deuced clever, our Mr. Mirche," he muttered. "Can't understand why he wasn't more concerned about the secret door. He's worried, though. Oh, quite. Very queer...No need whatever to question the Lorelei. Changed my mind about that the moment she spoke so dulcetly and looked at Mirche. There was hatred, Van,—passionate, cruel hatred...And they both use Kiss Me Quick. Oh, where does that aromatic item belong?...Most puzzlin'!"

At the District Attorney's office Markham told us about Doolson's visit that morning.

"The man is desperately concerned, Vance, and for the most incredible reason. It seems he has an exalted opinion of this young Burns' ability. Imagines his perfumery business cannot function without the fellow. Is convinced that Burns holds the key to the factory's continued success. And more of that sort of amazing twaddle."

"Not twaddle at all, Markham," Vance put in. "Doolson probably has every reason to regard Burns highly. It was Burns who concocted the formula for In-O-Scent and saved Doolson from bankruptcy. I understand just what the man means."

"Well, it seems, further, that the business of the concern is of a somewhat seasonal nature and that the annual peak is approaching. Doolson has invested heavily in an intensive campaign of some kind, and is in immediate need of various new popular scents. His contention is that only Burns can turn the trick."

"Both interesting and plausible. But why his visit here to your sanctum?"

"It appears Burns has chucked his job until cleared of all suspicion in the Allen affair. He's nervous and, I imagine, not a little frightened. Can't work, can't think, can't sniff—completely disorganized. And Doolson is frantic. He had a talk with the fellow this morning, and got the reasons for his obstinate refusal to return to his work. Burns told him the affair was being kept quiet temporarily, and gave no names; but explained that he was in some way concerned with it and therefore upset. Having complete faith in Burns, Doolson hastened here in despair. Probably thought my office wasn't making enough speed."

"Well?"

"He insists on offering a reward for the solution to the case, in the desperate hope of spurring me and the staff to get the matter settled at once, so his precious Burns can get back to work. Personally, I think the man is crazy."

"It could be, Markham. But don't disabuse him."

"I've already tried. But he was insistent."

"And at what figure does he estimate the immediate and carefree services of Mr. Burns?"

"Five thousand dollars!"

"Quite insane," Vance laughed.

"I agree with you. I wouldn't believe it myself if I didn't have the written and signed instructions and the certified cheque right here in my safe at this moment—incidentally, with an expiration clause of forty-eight hours."

After Vance had absorbed this fantastic information, he related his own activities of the morning. He told of the secret door to Mirche's office, and dwelt on the Sergeant's stubborn suspicion that the Domdaniel was the centre of some far-reaching criminal ring.

To this last, Markham nodded slowly and thoughtfully.

"I'm not sure," he remarked, "that the Sergeant's suspicions are unfounded. That place has always troubled me a bit, but nothing definite has ever been brought to light."

"The Sergeant mentioned Owen as a possible guiding genius," Vance said. "And the idea rather appeals to me. I'm half inclined, don't y' know, to search for the 'Owl' and see if I can ruffle his feathers...By the by, Markham, in case my impulse should overcome my discretion, what might be his Christian name? Really, one can't go about inquiring for a predat'ry nocturnal bird."

"As I remember, it's Dominic."

"Dominic—Dominic..." Suddenly Vance stood up, his eyes fixed before him. "Dominic Owen! And Daniel Mirche!" He held his cigarette suspended. "Now the whole thing has become fantasy. You're right, Markham—I'm having visions: I'm enmeshed in an abracadabra. It's all as fantastic as the Papyrus of Ani!"

"In the name of Heaven——" began Markham.

"Doesn't it pierce your consciousness?" Then he said: "Dominic—Daniel. To wit, DOMDANIEL!"

Markham raised his eyebrows sceptically.

"Sheer coincidence, Vance. Though a neat bit of fantasy, I'll admit. As I recall my Arabian Nights, the original Domdaniel was under the ocean, somewhere near Tunis, and was the abode of evil spirits. Even if Mirche had ever heard of that undersea palace and was a partner of Owen's in the cafe, he'd never have had enough initiative, or courage, for that."

"Not Mirche, Markham. But Owen. He would have the subtlety and the daring and the grim humour. The idea would have been quite magnificent, don't y'know. Offering the world a key to his secret, and then chuckling to himself much like one of the evil afrits who originally inhabited that subterranean citadel of sin..."

He commiserated with Markham on the intricacies of life, and left him to draw his own conclusions.

It was not Heath who was waiting for us when we returned to Vance's apartment a little before three. It was the ubiquitous Gracie Allen; and, as usual, she greeted Vance with gay exuberance.

"You told me to come back this afternoon. Or didn't you? Anyhow, you did say something about later this afternoon, and I didn't know what time that was; so I thought I'd come early. I've got lots of clues collected—that is, I've got three or four. But I don't think they're any good. Have you got any clues, Mr. Vance?"

"Not yet," he said, smiling. "That is, I haven't any definite clues. But I have several ideas."

"Oh, tell me all about your ideas, Mr. Vance," she urged. "Maybe they will help. You never know what will come out of just thinking. Only last week I thought there'd be a thunderstorm—and there was!"

"Well, let me see..." And Vance, somewhat in the spirit of facetiousness, yet with a manifest benignity, told her of his surmise regarding the meaning of the word "Domdaniel." He dwelt entertainingly on the mystery and romance of the Arabian Nights legend of the original Domdaniel—the Syrian califs, the "roots of the ocean," the four entrances and the four thousand steps, and Maghrabi and the other magicians and sorcerers.

Heath had come in at the beginning of the story, and stood listening throughout as enthralled as was the girl. When Vance had finished Gracie Allen relaxed momentarily.

"That's simply wonderful, Mr. Vance. I wish I could help you find the man named Dominic. We have a big fat shipping clerk down at the factory named Dominic. But he can't be the one you mean."

"No, I'm sure he's not. This one is a small man, with very dark, piercing eyes, and a white face, and hair that's almost black."

"Oh! Maybe it was the man I saw in Miss Del Marr's room."

"What!" The Sergeant's exclamation startled the girl.

"Goodness! Did I say something wrong again, Mr. Heath?"

Vance reproachfully waved the Sergeant back. Then he spoke calmly to the girl.

"You mean, Miss Allen, that you saw someone besides Miss Del Marr when you fell into that room last Saturday?"

"Yes. A man exactly like you described."

"But why," asked Vance, "did you not tell me about him this morning?"

"Why, you didn't ask me! If you'd asked me I'd have told you. And anyhow, I didn't think it made any difference—about the man being there, I mean. He didn't have anything at all to do with my tumble."

"And you're sure," Vance went on, "that he looked like the man I just described to you?"

"Uh—huh, I'm sure."

"I don't suppose you had ever seen him before."

"I never saw him before in all my life. And I'd have remembered, too, if I'd ever seen him. I always remember faces, but I can't hardly ever remember names. But I did see him afterwards."

"Afterwards? Where was that?"

"Why, he was sitting in the dining-room, right in the corner, not very far from George. I can't imagine how I happened to look over in that direction, because I was with Mr. Puttie that evening."

"Was there anyone else with the man when you saw him in the dining-room?" Vance pursued.

"But I couldn't see them, because they had their backs to me."

"Them? Just whom do you mean?"

"Why, the two other men at the same table."

Vance inhaled deeply on his cigarette.

"Tell me, Miss Allen: what was the man doing when you saw him in Miss Del Marr's room?"

"Well, let me see. I guess he was a very personal friend of Miss Del Marr's because he was putting a big notebook away in one of the drawers. And he must have been a very personal friend of Miss Del Marr's, or he wouldn't know where the book belonged, would he? And then Miss Del Marr came over to me and put her hand on my arm, and led me out very quick. I guess she was in a hurry. But she was awfully nice..."

"Well, that was a very amusing experience, my dear."

Shortly after this astounding recital, Miss Allen cheerfully took leave of us, saying, with a comical air of mystery, that she had a lot of very important things to attend to. She intimated that she might even be seeing Mr. Burns.

When she had gone Vance looked across at the Sergeant as if expecting some comment.

Heath sprawled in a chair, apparently stunned. "I got nothin' to say, Mr. Vance. I'm goin' nuts!"

"I'm a bit groggy myself," said Vance. "But now it's imperative that I see Owen. Frankly, I've been only half-hearted about communing with him, and only vaguely believed in my game of charades about Owen and Mirche. Yet Gracie Allen knew of the connection all along. Yes, now it is highly imperative that I tree the 'Owl.' Can you help, Sergeant?"

Heath pursed his lips. "I don't know where the guy's staying in New York, if that's what you mean. But one of the federal boys I know might have the dope. Wait a minute..."

He went to the telephone in the hall, while Vance smoked in silent preoccupation.

"At last I got it," Heath announced as he came back into the room a half-hour later. "None of the federal boys knew Owen was in town, but one of 'em dug up the file and told me that Owen used to live at the St. Carlton during the old investigation. I took a chance and called up the hotel. He's stopping there, all right—got in Thursday..."

"Thank you, Sergeant. I'll phone you in the morning. In the meantime, discourage thought."

The Sergeant departed, and Vance immediately put a call through to Markham.

"You're breakfasting with me tomorrow," he told the District Attorney. "This evening I shall endeavour to call on the erudite Mr. Owen. I've many things to tell you, and I may have more by morning. Remember, Markham: breakfast tomorrow—it's a ukase, not a frivolous invitation..."

## 14. A DYING MADMAN

(Monday, May 20; 8 pm.)

At eight o'clock that evening Vance went to the St. Carlton hotel. He did not telephone from the reception desk, but wrote the word "Unprofessionally" across one of his personal cards and sent it to Owen. A few minutes later the bellboy returned and led us upstairs.

Two men were standing by a window when we entered, and Owen himself was seated limply in a low chair against the wall, slowly turning Vance's card between his slender tapering fingers. He looked at Vance, and tossed the card on the inlaid tabouret beside him. Then he said in a soft, imperious voice, "That's all tonight." The two men went out of the room immediately, and closed the door.

"Forgive me," he said with a wistful, apologetic smile. "Man is a suspicious animal." He moved his hand in a vague gesture: it was his invitation for us to sit down. "Yes, suspicious. But why should one care?" Owen's voice was ominously low, but it had a plaintive carrying quality, like a birdcall at dusk. "I know why you came. And I am glad to see you. Something might have intervened."

With a closer view of the man, I got the impression that grave illness hung over him. An inner lethargy marked him; his eyes were liquid; his face was almost cyanosed; his voice a monotone. He gave me the feeling of a living dead man.

"For several years," he went on, "there has been the vagrant hope that some day...Need for consciousness of kind, like-mindedness..." His voice drifted off.

"The loneliness of psychic isolation," murmured Vance. "Quite. Perhaps I was not the one."

"Nobody is the one, of course. Forgive my conceit." Owen smiled wanly and lighted a cigarette. "You think that either of us willed this meeting? Man makes no choices. His choice is his temperament. We are sucked into a vortex, and until we escape we struggle to justify or ennoble this 'choice.'"

"It doesn't matter, does it?" said Vance. "Something vital always evades us, and the mind can never answer the questions it propounds. Saying a thing, or not saying it and thinking it, is no different."

"Exactly." The man gave Vance a glance of interrogation. "What thought have you?"

"I was wondering why you were in New York. I saw you at the Domdaniel on Saturday." Vance's tone had changed.

"I saw you too, though I was not certain. I thought then you might get in touch with me. Your presence that night was not a coincidence. There are no coincidences. A babu word to cloak our reeking ignorance. There is only one pattern in the entire universe of time."

"But your visit to the city. Do I intrude on a secret?"

Owen snarled, and I could feel a chill go down my spine. Then his expression changed to one of sadness.

"I came to see a specialist—Enrick Hofmann."

"Yes. One of the world's greatest cardiologists. You saw him?"

"Two days ago." Owen laughed bitterly. "Doomed! Mene, mene, tekeli, upharsin."

Vance merely raised his eyebrows slightly, and drew deeply on his cigarette.

"Thank you," said Owen, "for sparing me the meaningless platitudes." Then he asked suddenly: "Are you a Daniel?"

"Does Belshazzar need an augur?" Vance looked straight at the man... "No, alas! I am no Daniel. Nor am I a Dominic."

Owen chuckled diabolically.

"I was sure you knew!" He wagged his head in satisfaction. "Mirche will die without the faintest suspicion of the jest. He's as ignorant of the Thousand and One Nights as he is of Southey and Carlyle. [Southey used the Domdaniel as the subject of his "Thalaba"; and it was Carlyle who made the Domdaniel of the Arabian Night synonymous with a "den of iniquity."] An illiterate swine!"

"It was a clever idea," said Vance.

"Oh, no; not clever. Merely a bit of humour." Lethargy again seemed to pervade him; his expression became a mask; his hands lay limp on the arms of the chair. He might have been a corpse. There was a long silence; then Vance spoke.

"The handwriting on the wall. Would it comfort you to have me suggest that perhaps all the years throughout infinity are counted and divided?"

"No," Owen snapped. "Comfort"—another babu word." Then he went on wistfully: "Eternal recurrence—resurgam. The perfect torture." He began to mutter. "The sea will begin to wither.. an extinct planet.. absorbed in the sun.. greater suns.. the ultimate moment.. eternal dispersal of things.. billions of years hence.. this same room..." He shook himself weakly, and stared at Vance. "Moore was right: it is like madness."

Vance nodded sympathetically.

"Yes. Madness. Quite. The moment's finite is all we dare face. But there is no finite."

"No, no finite, of course." Owen spoke sepulchraly. "But those billions of years beyond, when the mind returns to infinity.. like the endless ripples made by a stone cast in the water. Then we must have cleanliness of spirit. Not now. But then. We must cause no endless ripples...Thank God, I can talk to you."

Again Vance nodded.

"Yes, I quite understand. 'Cleanliness'—I know what you mean. The finite balances itself—that is, we can balance it, even at the last. We can go back clean to endless time. Yes. 'Cleanliness of spirit'—an apposite phrase. No ripples. I wholly agree."

"But not through restitution," Owen said quickly. "No preposterous confessionals."

Vance waved his hand in negation.

"I didn't mean that. Merely a neant—a nothingness—after the finite, when there will be no further struggle, no more trying to eliminate the impulses placed in us by the same agency that puts a taboo on our indulging them..."

"That's it!" There was a flicker of animation in Owen's voice; then he lapsed again into languor. The slight gesture of his hand was



as graceful as a woman's. But the steely hardness in his gaze remained. "You will see that I cause no ripples, in case..?"

"Yes," returned Vance simply. "If the occasion should ever arise, and I am able to help, you may count on me."

"I trust you...And now, may I speak a moment? I have long wanted to say these things to someone who would understand..."

Vance merely waited, and Owen went on.

"Nothing has the slightest importance—not even life itself. We ourselves can create or smear out human beings—it is all one, whichever we do." He grinned hopelessly. "The rotten futility of all things—the futility of doing anything, even of thinking. Damn the agonizing succession of days we call Life! My temperament has ever drawn me in many directions at once—always the thumbscrew and the rack. Perhaps, after all, to smear souls out is better."

He seemed to shrink as from a ghost; and Vance put in: "I know the unrest that comes from too much needless activity, with all its multiplying desires."

"The aimless struggle! Yes, yes. The struggle to fit oneself into a mould that differs from one's ancient mould. That is the ultimate curse. The instinct to achieve—faugh! We learn its worthlessness only when it has devoured us. I have been fired by different instincts at different times. They are all lies—cunning, corroding lies. And we think we can subject our instincts to the mind. The mind!" He laughed softly. "The mind's only value is attained when it teaches us that it is useless."

He moved a little, as if a slight involuntary spasm had shaken him. "Nor can we attribute our distorted instincts to racial memory. There are no races—only one great filthy stream of life flowing out of the primeval slime. The abortive sensualism of primordial animal life lies dormant within all of us. If we suppress it, it manifests itself in cruelty and sadism; if we unleash it, it produces perversions and insanity. There is no answer."

"Man sometimes strives to counteract these horrors by releasing an inner ideal from its abstract conception through visual symbols."

"Symbols themselves are abstractions," came Owen's mordant monotone. "Nor can logic help. Logic leads no man to the truth: logic leads only to insane delusions. The apotheosis of logic:—angels dancing on the point of a needle...But why do I even bother, in this shadow between two infinities? I can give only one answer: the obscene urge to eat well and live well—which, in turn, is an instinct and, therefore, a lie."

"It may go farther back than that instinct," Vance suggested. "It may be an urge brought here when the shadow of life first fell across the path of infinity—the cosmic urge to play a game with life, in order to escape from the stresses and pressures of the finite."

(I now knew that Vance had some very definite—but, to me, obscure—purpose in mind as he talked with this strange, unnatural man before him.)

"Here in this dreamed-out world," said Owen hazily, "one course is no better than another; one person or thing is no more important than any other person or thing. All opposites are interchangeable—creation or slaughter, serenity or torture. Yet vanity seeps through the scabby crust of my congealed metaphysics. Bah!" He hunched himself over and stared at Vance. "There is neither time nor existence here."

"As you say. Infinity is not relatively divisible."

"But there is the terrifying possibility that we can add some factor to the time before us. And if we do, that factor will continue eternally... There must be no pebble thrown. We must cut through this shadow clean."

Owen had closed his eyes, and Vance scrutinized him without expression. Then he said in an almost consoling tone:

"That is wisdom...Yes. Cleanliness of spirit."

Owen nodded with great languor.

"Tomorrow night I sail for South America. Warmth—the ocean.. nepenthe, perhaps. I'll be engaged all tomorrow. Things to be done—accounts, a house-cleaning, temporal orderliness. No ripples to follow me for all time. Cleanliness—beyond... You understand?"

"Yes." Vance did not lower his gaze. "I understand. Cessation here, lest there be a 'hound of Heaven'..."

The man's slow eyes opened. He straightened and lighted another cigarette. His strange mood was dissipated, and another look came into his eyes. Throughout this discussion he had not once raised his voice; nor had there been more than the mildest inflection in his words. Yet I felt as if I had been listening to a bitter and passionate tirade.

Owen began speaking now of old books, of his days at Cambridge, of his cultural ambitions as a youth, of his early study of music. He was steeped in the lore of ancient civilizations and, to my astonishment, he dwelt with fanatical passion on the Tibetan Book of the Dead. But, strangely enough, he spoke of himself always with a sense of dualism, as if telling of someone else. There was a sensitive courtesy in the man, but somehow he instilled in me a repugnance akin to fear. There was always an invisible aura about him, like that of a primitive, smouldering beast. I was unwholesomely fascinated by the man; and I experienced an unmistakable sensation of relief when Vance stood up to go.

As we parted from him at the door, he said to Vance with seeming irrelevancy:

"Counted, weighed, divided... You have promised me."

Vance met his gaze directly for a brief moment. "Thank you," breathed Owen, with a deep bow.

## 15. AN APPALLING ACCUSATION

(Tuesday, May 21; 9:30 am.)

"Yes, Markham, quite mad," Vance summarized, as we were finishing breakfast in his apartment the next morning. "Quite. A poisonous madman, like some foul, crawling creature. His end is rapidly approaching, and a hideous fear has wrecked his brain. The sudden anticipation of death has severed his cord of sanity. He's seeking a hole in which to hide from the unescapable. But he has nowhere to take cover—only the mephitic charnel house which his warped brain has erected. That is his one remaining reality...A vile creature that should be stamped out as one would destroy a deadly germ. A mental, moral and spiritual leper. Unclean. Polluted. And I—I—am to save him from the horrors infinity holds for him!"

"You must have had a pleasant evening with him," commented Markham with distaste.

Sergeant Heath, having arrived in answer to an earlier telephone summons from Vance, had listened attentively to the conversation. But he seemed to withdraw into himself when, a few moments later, Gracie Allen came tripping gaily into the library.

She carried a small wooden box, held tightly to her. Behind her was George Burns, diffident and hesitant. Miss Allen explained things buoyantly.

"I just had to come, Mr. Vance, to show you my clues. And George had just come to see me; so I brought him along, too. I think he should know how we're getting along. Don't you, Mr. Vance? And mother, she's coming over too in a little while. She said she wants to see you, though I can't even imagine why."

The girl paused long enough for Vance to present Markham. She accepted him without the suspicion she had previously accorded Heath; and Markham was both fascinated and amused by her lively and irrelevant chatter.

"And now, Mr. Vance," the girl continued, going to the desk and taking the tight cover from the little box she had brought, "I've simply got to show you my clues. But I really don't think they're any good, because I didn't know exactly where to look for them. Anyhow..."

She began to display her treasures. Vance humoured her and pretended to be greatly interested. Markham, puzzled but smiling, came forward a few steps; and Burns stood, ill at ease, at the other side of the desk. Heath, annoyed by the frivolous interruption, disgustedly lighted a cigar and walked to the window.

"Now here, Mr. Vance, is the exact size of a footprint." Gracie Allen took out a slip of paper with some figures written on it. "It measures just eleven inches long, and the man at the shoe store said that was the length of a number nine-and-a-half shoe—unless it was an English shoe, and then it might be only a number nine. But I don't think he was English—I mean the man with the foot. I think he was a Greek, because he was one of the waiters up at the Domdaniel. You see, I went up there because that's where you said the dead man was found. And I waited a long time for someone to come out of the kitchen to make a footprint; and then, when no one was looking, I measured it..."

She put the paper to one side.

"And now, here's a piece of blotter that I took from the desk in Mr. Puttie's office at lunch-time yesterday, when he wasn't there. And I held it to a mirror, but all it says is '4 dz Sw So,' just like I wrote it out again here. All that means is, 'four dozen boxes of sandalwood soap.'..."

She brought out two or three other useless odds and ends which she explained in amusing detail, as she placed them beside the others.

Vance did not interrupt her during this diverting, but pathetic, display. But Burns, who was growing nervous and exasperated at the girl's unnecessary wasting of time, finally seemed to lose his patience and burst out: "Why don't you show the gentlemen the almonds you have there, and get this silly business over with?"

"I haven't any almonds, George. There's only one thing left in the box, and that hasn't anything to do with it. I was just sort of practising when I got that due—"

"But something smells like bitter almond to me."

Vance suddenly became seriously interested.

"What else have you in the box, Miss Allen?" he asked.

She giggled as she took out the last item—a slightly bulging and neatly sealed envelope.

"It's only an old cigarette," she said. "And that's a good joke on George. He's always smelling the funniest smells. I guess he can't help it."

She tore away the corner of the envelope and let a flattened and partly broken cigarette slip into her hand. At first glimpse, I would have said that it had not been lighted, but then I noticed its charred end, as if a few inhalations had been taken of it. Vance took the cigarette and held it gingerly near his nose.

"Here's your smell of bitter almond, Mr. Burns." His eyes were focused somewhere far in space. Then he sealed the cigarette again in one of his own envelopes, and placed it on the mantelpiece.

"Where did you find that cigarette, Miss Allen?" he asked.

The girl giggled again musically.

"Why, that's the one that burned a hole in my dress last Saturday out in Riverdale. You remember...And then when you told me all about how important cigarettes are, I thought I'd go out there right away. I wanted to see if I could find the cigarette and maybe tell if it was a man or a woman that had thrown it at me. You see, I didn't really believe it was you that did it...I had a terrible time finding the cigarette, because I had stepped on it and it was half covered up. Anyhow, I couldn't tell anything from it, and I was awfully mad all over again. I started to throw it away. But I thought I'd just better keep it, because it was the first clue I had gotten—although it really didn't have anything to do with the case I was helping you with."

"My dear child," said Vance slowly, "it may not have anything to do with our case, but it may have something to do with some other case."

"Oh, wouldn't that be wonderful!" the girl exclaimed delightedly. "Then we'd have two cases, and I'd really be a detective, wouldn't I?"

Markham had come forward.

"What did you mean by that last remark, Vance?"

"Cyanide may have been on this cigarette." He looked at Markham significantly. "For the possible action of this drug, as well as the possible means of its administration, I have only to refer you to Doremus's remarks Sunday night."

Markham made a gesture of impatience. "For Heaven's sake, Vance! Your attitude toward this case is becoming more insane every minute."

Vance ignored the other's comment, and continued. "Assuming my fantastic, and probably fleeting, notion that this cigarette is the actual lethal weapon we have been yearning for, many other equally fantastic things in the case become rational. We could then connect several of our unknown, nightmarish quantities and thus build up a theory which—within its own limitations, at least—would glimmer with sense. Perpend: We could account for Hennessey's failure to see the chap enter the office Saturday evening. We could limit the knowledge of the secret door to Mirche and his immediate circle—which, you must admit, would be logical. We could assume that the crime took place elsewhere than in Mirche's office—in Riverdale, to be specific—and that the body was brought to the office for some definite reason. Such an assumption might offer an explanation of the peculiar manner in which the police were notified; and it might account for the difficulty Doctor Mendel had in determining the time of death. For if the killing took place in the office, it could not have been earlier than ten o'clock, since Miss Allen was in there at about that hour; whereas if the killing took place elsewhere, it could have been at any time within ten hours prior to the finding of the body."

Vance moved to the mantelpiece and thoughtfully tapped the envelope containing the cigarette.

"Should that cigarette prove to have been impregnated with the poison, and should it have been used as Doremus indicated such an item could be used, then we're up against an utterly implausible coincidence. To wit, we'd have two people, in separate parts of the city, murdered by the same obscure agent, on the same day. And, added to that, we have only one body."

Markham nodded slowly without enthusiasm. "Remotely specious. But——"

"I know your objections, Markham," Vance interrupted. "And they are mine, too. My whole capricious supposition may be less than gossamer—but it's mine own and, at the moment, I adore it."

Markham started to speak, but Vance ran on.

"Let me rave a moment longer ere you encase me in a strait-jacket...I behold, as in a dream, the most comforting pastures into which my quaint assumption might lead. It might even tie together the annoyin' factors that have robbed me of sweet sleep—Mirche's ready admission concerning his secret door; the hatred I glimpsed in the eyes of the Lorelei; the mystic lore of the Tofanas; and the presence of the 'Owl' at the Domdaniel Saturday night. It might explain the subtle implications in the name of the cafe. It might even justify the Sergeant's haunting hypothesis of a criminal ring. It might, conceivably, elucidate Mr. Burns' migrat'ry cigarette-case with its scent of jonquille. And there are other things now baffling me that might be assembled into a consistent whole...My word, Markham! it has the most amazin' possibilities. Let me have my hasheesh dream. A pattern is forming at last in my whirling brain; and it is the first coherent design that has invaded my en-fevered imagination since Sabbath eve. With the droll premise that the cigarette was adequately poisoned, I can force a score of hitherto recalcitrant elements into line—or, rather, they tumble into line themselves, like the tiny coloured particles in a kaleidoscope."

"Vance, for the love of Heaven! You're simply creating a new and more preposterous fantasy to explain away your first fantasy." Markham's severe tone quickly sobered Vance.

"Yes, you're quite right," he said. "I shall, of course, send the cigarette at once to Doremus for analysis. And it will probably reveal nothing. As you say. Frankly, I don't understand how the smell could have remained on the cigarette so long, unless one of the combining poisons acted as a fixator and retarded volatilization...But, Markham, I do want—I need—a dead man who was killed in Riverdale last Saturday."

Gracie Allen had been looking from one to the other in a bewildered daze. "Oh, now I bet I understand!" she exclaimed exultantly. "You really think the cigarette could have killed somebody...But I never heard of anyone dying from smoking just one cigarette."

"Not an ordin'ry cigarette, my dear," Vance explained patiently. "It is only possible if the cigarette has been dipped in some terrible poison."

"Why, that's awful, if it's really true," she mused. "And up in Riverdale, of all places! It's so pretty and quiet up there..."

Her eyes began to grow wide, and finally she exclaimed: "But I bet I know who the dead man was! I bet I know!"

"What in the world are you talking about?" Vance laughed and looked at her with puzzled eyes. "Who do you think it was?"

She looked back at him searchingly for a few moments, and then said: "Why, it was Benny the Buzzard!"

Sergeant Heath stiffened suddenly, his mouth agape.

"Where did you ever hear that name, Miss?" he almost shouted.

"Why—why——" She stammered, taken aback by his vehemence. "Mr. Vance told me all about him."

"Mr. Vance told you——?"

"Of course he did!" the girl said defiantly. "That's how I know that Benny the Buzzard was killed in Riverdale."

"Killed in Riverdale?" The Sergeant looked dazed. "And maybe you know who killed him, too?"

"I should say I do know...It was Mr. Vance himself!"

## 16. ANOTHER SHOCK

(Tuesday, May 21; 10:50 am.)

The appalling accusation came like a paralyzing shock. It was several moments before I could collect myself sufficiently to see the logic behind it. It was the natural outcome of the story which Vance had built up for the girl the afternoon he had first met her.

Markham, with only meagre details of that rustic encounter and knowing nothing of the tall tale spun by Vance, must have recalled immediately the conversation at the Bellwood Country Club, in which Vance had expressed his extravagant ideas as to how Pellinzi should be disposed of.

Heath, too, flabbergasted by the girl's announcement, must have remembered that Friday-night dinner; and it was not beyond reason to assume that he now held some hazy suspicion of Vance's guilt.

Vance himself was temporarily astounded. Weightier matters had undoubtedly crowded the entire Riverdale episode from his mind for the moment; but now he suddenly realized how Gracie Allen's accusation took on the colour of plausibility.

Markham approached the girl with an austere frown.

"That is a grave charge you have just made, Miss Allen," he said. His gruff tone indicated the intangible doubts in the recesses of his mind.

"My word, Markham!" Vance put in, not without annoyance. "Please glance about you. This is not a courtroom."

"I know exactly where I am," retorted Markham testily. "Let me handle this matter—it's full of dynamite." He turned back to the girl. "Tell me just why you say Mr. Vance killed Benny the Buzzard."

"Why, I didn't say it—that is, I didn't make it up out of my own head. I just sort of repeated it."

Although she obviously did not regard the situation as serious, it was evident that Markham's sternness had disturbed her.

"It was Mr. Vance who said it. He said it when I first met him in Riverdale beside the road that runs along a big white wall—last Saturday afternoon, when I was with—that is, I went there with——"

Markham, aware of the girl's nervousness, smiled reassuringly and spoke in an altered manner.

"There's nothing for you to worry about, Miss Allen," he said. "Just tell me the whole story, exactly as it happened."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, a brighter note returning to her voice. "Why didn't you tell me that's what you wanted?...All right, I will tell you. Well, I went up to Riverdale last Saturday afternoon—we don't have to work at the factory on Saturday afternoons, ever; Mr. Doolson is very nice about that. I went up with Mr. Puttie—he's one of our salesmen, you know; but I really don't think he's as good as some of the other In-O-Scent salesmen.—Do you, George?"

She turned momentarily to Burns, but did not wait for a reply.

"Well, anyhow, George wanted me to go somewhere else with him; but I thought maybe it might be best if I went to Riverdale with Mr. Puttie, especially as he was taking me to dinner that night. And I thought maybe he might get angry if I didn't go to Riverdale with him, and then he wouldn't take me to dinner; so I didn't go with George, but I went to Riverdale with Mr. Puttie. Don't you think maybe I was right? Anyhow, that's how I happened to be at Riverdale...Well, we got to Riverdale—I often go there—I think it's just lovely up there. But it's an awful long walk from Broadway—and then Mr. Puttie went to look for a nunnery——"

"Please, Miss Allen," interrupted Markham, with admirable composure; "tell me how you happened to meet Mr. Vance, and what he said to you."

"Oh, I was coming to that...Mr. Vance came falling over the wall. And I asked him what he'd been doing. And he said he'd been killing a man. And I said what was the man's name. And he said Benny the Buzzard."

Markham sighed with impatience. "Can you tell me a few other things, Miss Allen, about the incident?"

"All right. As I already told you, Mr. Vance came falling over the wall, just behind where I was sitting—no, excuse me, I wasn't sitting, because somebody had just thrown a cigarette at me—that cigarette up there on the mantelpiece—only it was burning—and I was standing up, shaking it off my dress, when I heard Mr. Vance fall. He seemed in an awful hurry, too. I told him about the cigarette, and he said maybe he had thrown it himself; although I thought someone had thrown it out of a big automobile that had just whizzed by. Anyhow, Mr. Vance told me to get a new dress and it wouldn't cost me anything because he was sorry. And then he sat down and smoked some more cigarettes."

She took a deep breath and hurried on.

"And then was when I asked him what he was doing on the other side of the wall, and he said that he had just killed a very bad man named Benny the Buzzard. He said he did it because this Mr. Buzzard had broken out of jail and was going to murder a friend of his—that is, I mean a friend of Mr. Vance's. Mr. Vance was all mused up, and he certainly looked like he might have just killed somebody. I was even scared of him myself for a while. But I got all over that..."

She took a moment to survey Vance up and down, as if making a sartorial comparison.

"Well now, let's see, where was I? Oh, yes...He was running away in a terrible hurry, because he said he didn't want anybody to know about his killing the man. But he told me. I guess he saw right away he could trust me. But I don't know why he was worried about it, because he said he thought he had done right to save his friend from danger. Anyhow, he asked me not to tell anybody; and I promised. But he just now asked me to tell what I meant about the dead man in Riverdale, so I guess he meant I didn't have to keep my promise any more. So that's why I'm telling you."

Markham's astonishment rose as the girl rambled on. When she completed her recital and looked round for approval, the District Attorney turned to Vance.

"Good Heavens, Vance! Is this story actually true?"

"I fear so," Vance admitted, shrugging.

"But why—how did you come to tell her such a story?"

"The balmy weather, perhaps. In the spring, y' know..."

"But," demanded the girl, "aren't you going to arrest him?"

"No—I——" Markham was left floundering.

"Why not?" the girl insisted. "I'll bet I know why! I'll bet you think that you can't arrest a detective. I thought so, too—once. But Sunday I asked a policeman; and he said of course you can arrest a detective."

"Yes; you can arrest a detective," smiled Markham, "if you know that he has broken a law. But I have very grave doubts that Mr. Vance has actually killed a man."

"But he said so himself. And how else could you know? I really didn't think he was guilty either—at first. I thought he was just telling me a romantic story because I love romantic stories! But then, Mr. Vance himself just said—right here in this very room—you heard him—he said that there was a dead man killed with the cigarette in Riverdale last Saturday. And he was very serious about it—I could tell by the way he acted and talked. It wasn't at all like he was making up a romantic story again..."

She stopped abruptly and looked at the befuddled Mr. Burns. Judging from her expression, another idea had come into her head. She turned back to Markham with renewed seriousness.

"But you really ought to arrest Mr. Vance," she said with definiteness. "Even if he isn't guilty. I guess I don't really think he is guilty myself. He's been so awfully nice to me. But still I think you ought to arrest him just the same. You see, what I mean is that you can pretend that you believe he killed this man in Riverdale. And then everything would be all right for George. And Mr. Vance wouldn't care a bit—I know he wouldn't. Would you, Mr. Vance?"

"What in Heaven's name are you driving at now?" asked Markham.

Vance smiled.

"I know exactly what she means, Markham." He turned to Miss Allen. "But really, y' know, my arrest wouldn't help Mr. Burns."

"Oh, yes it would," she insisted. "I know it would. Because there's somebody following him wherever he goes. And George says he bets it's a detective of some kind. And all the policemen around George's hotel look at him in the strangest way. There's just lots of people, I bet, who think George is guilty—like after they came to the house and took him away in a wagon to jail, and everything. George told me all about it, and it worries him terribly. He isn't at all like he used to be. He can't sleep very well; and he doesn't smell so good. So how can he work?...You don't know how awful it is, Mr. Vance. But if you got arrested, then everybody would think that you were guilty and they wouldn't bother George any more; and he could go back to work and be just like he used to be. And then, after a while, they'd find the real person, and everything would be all right for everybody."

She stopped to catch her breath; then quickly ran on with almost fiery determination.

"And that's why I think you ought to arrest Mr. Vance. And if you don't, I'm going to call up the newspapers and tell them everything he said and all about Benny the Buzzard, and how he wasn't killed at the Domdaniel at all, but somewhere else. I'll bet they'll print it, too. Especially as Mr. Puttie was standing just behind the tree when Mr. Vance was talking to me, and he heard everything. And if they don't believe me, they'll believe Mr. Puttie. And if they don't believe him, they'll have to believe the two of us together. And then I'm sure they'll print it. And everybody'll be so interested in a famous man like Mr. Vance being guilty, that they won't bother about George any more. Don't you see what I mean?"

There was the zealous resolution of the crusader in her eyes; and her disorganized phrases pulsed with an unreasoning passion to help the man she loved.

"Good God, Chief!" blurted Heath. "There sure is dynamite there. You said it!"

Vance moved lethargically in his chair and looked at Heath with a satirical smile.

"You see what you and your shadowing Mr. Tracy have got me in for, Sergeant?"

"Sure I do!" Heath took a step toward Miss Allen. His perturbation was almost comical. "See here, Miss," he blustered. "Listen to me a minute. You're all wrong. You got everything mixed up. We don't know there was a murder in Riverdale. We don't know nothing about that, see? We only know about the dead guy in the cafe. And he wasn't the Buzzard; he was your brother——"

He stopped short with a jerk, and his face went red.

"Holy Mackerel! I'm sorry as hell, Mr. Vance."

Vance rose quickly and went to the girl's side. She had her hands to her face in a spasm of uncontrollable laughter.

"My brother? My brother?" Then as quickly as she had burst into mirth, she sobered. "You can't fool me that way, Mr. Officer."

Vance stepped back.

"Tell me,"—a sudden new note came into his voice—"what do you mean by that, Miss Allen?"

"My brother's in jail!"

## 17. FINGERPRINTS

(Tuesday, May 21; 11:30 am.)

It was at this moment that Mrs. Allen, serene and self-effacing, was guided into the room by Currie.

Vance turned quickly and welcomed her with but the briefest of greetings.

"Is it true, Mrs. Allen," he asked, "that your son is not dead?"

"Yes, it is true, Mr. Vance. That's why I came over here."

Vance nodded with an understanding smile and, leading the woman to a chair, asked her to explain more fully.

"You see, sir," she began in a colorless voice, "Philip was arrested over near Hackensack that awful night, after he had given up his job at the cafe. He was with another boy in an automobile, and a policeman got in and told this other boy—it's Stanley Smith I mean, a friend of Philip's—to drive to the police station. He accused them of stealing the car; and then, when they were on the way to the jail, the policeman said that it was the same car that had just killed an old man and run off—you know, what you call a hit-and-run murder. And this frightened Philip terribly, because he didn't know what Stanley might have done before they met. And then, when the car stopped for a light, Philip jumped out and ran away. The policeman shot at him, but he wasn't caught." Vance nodded sympathetically. "Then Philip telephoned to me—I could tell how frightened he was—and said that the police were after him and that he was going somewhere to hide...Oh, I was so terribly worried, Mr. Vance, with the poor miserable boy so scared, and biding—you know, a fugitive from justice. And then when you came that night I thought you were looking for him; but when you told me my boy was dead, you can imagine——"

Heath leaped forward.

"But you said that was your son down at the morgue!" He flung the words at her.

"No, I didn't, Mr. Officer," the woman said simply.

"The hell you didn't!" bellowed Heath.

"Sergeant!" Vance held up his hand. "Mrs. Allen is quite correct...If you think back, you will remember she did not once say it was her son. I'm afraid we said it for her, because we thought it was true." He smiled wistfully.

"But she fainted, didn't she?" pursued Heath.

"I fainted from joy, Mr. Officer," explained the woman, "when I saw it wasn't really Philip."

Heath was by no means satisfied. "But—but you didn't say it wasn't your son. And you let us think——"

Again Vance checked him.

"I believe I understand exactly why Mrs. Allen let us think it was her son. She knew we represented the police, and she also knew her son was hiding from them. And when she saw that we believed her son was dead, she was very glad to let us think so, imagining that would end the hunt for Philip...Isn't that true, Mrs. Allen?"

"Yes, Mr. Vance." The woman nodded calmly. "And I naturally didn't want you to tell Gracie that Philip was dead, because then I would have to tell her that he was hiding from the police; and that would have made her very unhappy. But I thought that maybe in a few days everything would come out all right; and then I would tell you. Anyhow, I thought you would find out before long that it really wasn't Philip."

She looked up with a faint sad smile.

"And everything did come out all right, just as I hoped and prayed—and knew—it would."

"We're all very happy that it did," said Vance. "But tell us just how everything has come out all right."

"Why, this morning," resumed Mrs. Allen, "Stanley Smith came to the house to ask for Philip. And when I told him that Philip was still hiding, he said that everything had been a mistake; and how his uncle came to the jail and proved to the police that the car was not stolen, and how it was a different car that had run over the old man...So I told Gracie all about it right away, and went to take the wonderful news to my son and bring him back home..."

"How come then,"—the Sergeant's continued exasperation was evident in his manner—"if you told your daughter all about it, that she said just now her brother was in jail?"

Mrs. Allen smiled timidly.

"Oh, he is. You see, Saturday was such a warm night that Philip had his coat off in the car; and he left it there. That's how the police knew who he was, because he had his work-check in the pocket. So he went to the jail in Hackensack this morning to get his coat. And he's coming home for lunch."

Vance laughed in spite of himself, and gave Gracie Allen a mischievous look. "And I'll warrant it was a black coat."

"Oh, Mr. Vance!" the girl exclaimed ecstatically. "What a wonderful detective you are! How could you possibly tell what colour Philip's coat was way over there across the river?"

Vance chuckled and then became suddenly serious.

"And now I must ask you all to go," he said, "and prepare for Philip's home-coming."

At this point Markham intervened.

"But what about that story you were threatening to tell to the newspapers, Miss Allen? I couldn't permit anything like that."

George Burns, with a broad grin on his face, answered the District Attorney.

"Gracie won't do that, Mr. Markham. You see, I'm perfectly happy now, and I'm going back to work tomorrow morning. I really wasn't worrying about being guilty or about having anybody following me around. But I had to tell that to Gracie—and Mr. Doolson—because you made me promise that I wouldn't say a word about Philip. And it was Philip being dead and Gracie not knowing, and everything, that made me feel so terribly bad that I just couldn't get any sleep or do any work."

"Isn't that wonderful!" Miss Allen clapped her hands, and then glanced slyly at Vance. "I didn't really want you to go to jail, Mr.

Vance—except to help George. So I give you my promise I won't say one word to anybody about your confession. And you know I always keep a promise."

As Mrs. Allen was departing with her daughter and Burns, she gave Vance a look of shy apology.

"I do hope, sir," she said, "that you don't think I did wrong in deceiving you about that poor boy—downtown."

Vance took her hand in his. "I certainly think nothing of the kind. You acted as any mother would have acted, had she been as clever and as quick-witted as you."

He raised her hand to his lips, and then closed the door after the trio.

"And now, Sergeant,"—his whole manner changed—"get busy! Call Tracy up here, and then try to have that dead fellow identified by his fingerprints."

"You don't have to tell me to get busy, sir," returned Heath, hurrying to the window. He beckoned frantically to the man across the street. Then he turned back into the room, and on his way to the telephone, he halted abruptly, as if a sudden thought had left him motionless.

"Say, Mr. Vance," he asked, "what makes you think his fingerprints'll be on file?"

Vance gave him a searching, significant look.

"You may be greatly surprised, Sergeant."

"Mother o' God!" breathed Heath in an awed tone, as he dashed to the instrument in the hall.

While the Sergeant was talking with almost incoherent agitation to the Bureau, Tracy came in. Vance sent him at once to Doremus's laboratory with the sealed envelope on the mantel.

In a few minutes Heath returned to the library. "Are those babies on the job!" He rubbed his hands together energetically. "They'll sure burn up shoe-leather getting those fingerprints and checking up in the file. And if they don't call me back in an hour, I'll go down there and wring their thick necks!" He collapsed in a chair as if exhausted by the mere thought of the speed and activity he had demanded.

Vance himself now telephoned Doremus, explaining that an immediate report on the cigarette was essential.

It was nearly noon, and we chatted aimlessly for another hour. There was a tension in the atmosphere, and the conversation was like a cloak deliberately thrown over the inner thoughts of these three diverse men.

As the clock over the mantel pointed to one, the telephone rang, and Vance answered it.

"There was no difficulty with that analysis," he informed us, as he hung up the receiver. "The efficient Doremus found in the cigarette the same elusive combination of poisons that bothered him so frightfully Sunday evening...My jumbled story, Markham, is at last beginning to take form."

He had barely finished speaking when the telephone rang again, and it was Heath who now dashed into the hall. As he came back into the library after a few moments, he stumbled against a small Renaissance stand near the door and sent it sprawling.

"All right, I'm excited. So what?" The Sergeant's eyes were staring. "Who do you think the guy was? But hell! You knew it already, Mr. Vance. It's our old chum, Benny the Buzzard!...And maybe those boys down in Pittsburgh wasn't nuts! And maybe the Buzzard didn't hop straight from Nomenica to New York, just like I said he would!...Laugh that one off, Mr. Markham."

Heath's excitement was such that it temporarily overweighed even his respectful manner toward the District Attorney.

"What'll we do next, Mr. Vance?"

"I should say, Sergeant, that the first thing is for you to sit down. Calm. A most necess'ry virtue."

Heath readily complied, and Vance turned to Markham.

"I believe this is still my case, so to speak. You most magnanimously presented it to me, to rid yourself of my chatter last Saturday night. I must, therefore, now ask a further indulgence."

Markham waited in silence.

"The time has come when I must act with dispatch," Vance continued. "The whole case, Markham, has become quite clear; the various fragments have fitted themselves together into a rather amazing mosaic. But there are still one or two blank spaces. And I believe that Mirche, if properly approached, can supply the missin' pieces..."

Heath broke in. "I'm beginning to get you, sir. You think that Mirche's identification of the Buzzard was deliberately phony?"

"No—oh, no, Sergeant. Mirche was quite sincere—and with very good reason. He was genuinely stunned by the appearance of the dead body in his office that night."

"Then I don't get you, sir," said Heath, disgruntled.

"What's the indulgence you're after, Vance?" Markham asked impatiently.

"I merely wish to make an arrest."

"But I certainly do not propose to let you get the District Attorney's office into hot water. We must wait until the case is solved."

"Ah! but it is solved," Vance returned blandly. "And you may toddle along with me, to protect the sanctity of your office. In fact, I'd be charmed with your company."

"Come to the point," Markham spoke irritably. "Just what is it you want to do?"

Vance leaned forward and spoke with precision.

"I desire most fervently to go to the Domdaniel as soon as possible this afternoon. I desire to have two men—let us say Hennessy and Burke—standing guard in the passageway outside the secret door. I then desire to proceed with you and the Sergeant to the front door on the balcony, and demand entry. Then I will take action—under your vigilant and restraining eye, of course."

"But, good Heavens, Vance! Mirche may not be waiting in his office for your visit. He may have other plans for his afternoon's diversion."

"That," remarked Vance, "is a chance we must take. But I have sufficient reason to believe that Mirche's office is a beehive of secret activity today. And I would be rather astonished if the Lorelei—and Owen, too—were not there. Tonight, y' know, Owen is sailin' for the southern hemisphere, and this is his day for closin' up his mundane affairs here. You and the Sergeant have long suspected that the Domdaniel is the headquarters for all sorts of naughty goings on. You need doubt no more, my Markham."

The District Attorney pondered a moment.

"It sounds preposterous and futile," he asserted. "Unless you have some cryptic grounds for such an absurd course...However, as you say, I'll be there myself to guard against any imbecile indiscretion on your part...Very well." He capitulated.

Vance nodded with satisfaction and looked at the bewildered Heath.

"And by the by, Sergeant, we may possibly hear rumours of your friends Rosa and Tony."

"The Tofanas!" Heath sat up alertly. "I knew it. That cigarette job is right up Tony's alley..."

Vance outlined his plan to the Sergeant. Heath was to arrange with Joe Hanley, the doorman, to give a signal if Mirche should quit the dining-room by the rear exit. Hennessey and Burke were to be instructed regarding their post and duties. And Markham and Vance and Heath were to wait in the rooming-house opposite, whence they could see either Hanley's signal or Mirche himself entering his office by way of the balcony.

However, many of the elaborate and intricate preparations proved unnecessary; for Vance's theory and prognostications with reference to the situation that afternoon were entirely correct.



## 18. JONQUILLE AND ROSE

(Tuesday, May 21; 3 pm.)

At three o'clock that afternoon Joe Hanley, who had been watching for us, came to the corner of Seventh Avenue and informed us that Mirche had entered his office shortly after noon, and that neither he nor Miss Del Marr had been seen in the cafe since then.

We found the blinds at the narrow windows drawn; the door to the office was locked; nor was there any response to our insistent knocking.

"Open up, you!" Heath bawled ferociously. "Or have I gotta bust in the door?" Then he remarked to us: "I guess that'll scare 'em, if anybody's there."

Soon we could hear the sound of scuffling and angry voices inside; and a few moments later the door was unlocked for us by Hennessey.

"It's okay now, sir," he said to Markham. "They tried to sneak out the wall door, but Burke and I forced em back."

As we stepped across the threshold, a strange sight met our eyes. Burke stood with his back against the little secret door, his gun pointed significantly at the startled Mirche who was but a few steps away. Dixie Del Marr, also in line with Burke's gun, was leaning against the desk, looking at us with an expression of cold resignation. In one of the leather chairs sat Owen, smiling faintly with calm cynicism. He seemed entirely dissociated from the general tableau, like a spectator viewing a theatrical scene which offended his intellect by its absurdity. He looked neither to right nor left; and it was not until we were well within range of his somnolent gaze, that he made the slightest movement.

When he caught sight of Vance, however, he rose wearily and bowed in formal greeting.

"What futile effort," he complained. Then he sat down again with a mild sigh, like one who feels he must remain to the end of a distasteful drama.

Hennessey closed the door and stood alertly watching the occupants of the room. Burke, at a sign from Heath, let his hand fall to his side, but maintained a stolid vigilance.

"Sit down, Mr. Mirche," said Vance. "Merely a little discussion."

As the white and frightened man dropped into a chair at the desk, Vance bowed politely to Miss Del Marr.

"It isn't necessary for you to stand."

"I prefer it," the woman said in a hard tone. "I've been sitting and waiting, as it were, for three years now."

Vance accepted her cryptic remark without comment, and turned his attention back to Mirche.

"We have discussed preferences in foods and wines at some length," he said casually; "and I was wondering what private brand of cigarettes you favour."

The man seemed paralyzed with fear. But quickly he recovered himself; a semblance of his former suavity returned. He made a creaking noise intended for a laugh.

"I have no private brand," he declared. "I always smoke—"

"No, no," Vance interrupted. "I mean your very private brand—reserved for the elect."

Mirche laughed again, and gestured broadly with upturned palms to indicate the question conveyed no meaning to him.

"By the by," Vance went on; "in medieval times—when Madam Tofana and other famous poisoners flourished—there were many flowers which, romantic legend tells us, would bring death with a single whiff... Strange how these legends persist and how examples of their apparent authenticity crop up in modern times. One wonders, don't y' know, whether the old secrets of alchemy have indeed been preserved to the present day. Of course, such speculations are absurd in the light of modern science."

"I don't see your point," Mirche spoke with an attempt at injured dignity. "Nor do I understand this outrageous invasion of my privacy."

Vance ignored the man for a moment and addressed Miss Del Marr.

"You have perhaps lost an unusual cigarette-case of checkerboard design? When it was found it had the scent of jonquille and rose. A vagrant association—it recalled you, Miss Del Marr."

No change was detectable in the woman's hard expression, although she hesitated perceptibly before answering.

"It isn't mine. I believe, though, I know the case you mean. I saw it in this office last Saturday; and that evening Mr. Mirche showed it to me. He had carried it for hours in his pocket—perhaps that's how it took on the smell. Where did you find it, Mr. Vance? I was told it had been left here by one of the cafe employees...Maybe Mr. Mirche could—"

"I know nothing of such a cigarette-case," Mirche stated bluntly. There was a startled energy in his words. He threw a defiant glance at the woman, but her back was to him.

"It doesn't matter, does it?" said Vance. "Only a passing thought."

His eyes were still on Miss Del Marr; and he spoke to her again.

"You know, of course, that Benny Pellinzi is dead."

"Yes—I know." Her words carried no emotion.

"Strange coincidence about that. Or, mayhap, just a vagary of mine." Vance spoke as if he were merely making some matter-of-fact point. "Pellinzi died last Saturday afternoon, shortly after he would have had time to reach New York. At about that time I happened to be wandering in the woods in Riverdale. And as I started to retrace my steps homeward, a large car drove swiftly by. Later I learned that a lighted cigarette had been thrown from that car, almost at the very spot where I had stood. It was a most peculiar cigarette. Miss Del Marr. Only a few puffs had been taken on it. But that wasn't its only peculiarity. There was a deadly poison in it, too—the modern equivalent of the fabulous poisoned flowers that figured in medieval tragedies. And yet, it had been carelessly tossed away on a public highway..."

"A stupid act," came in soft, caustic tones from Owen.

"Fortuitous, let us say—from the finite point of view. Inevitable, really." Vance also spoke softly. "There is only one pattern in all the universe."

"Yes," said Owen with arctic vagueness. "Stupidity is one of the compositional lines."

Vance did not turn. He was still scrutinizing the woman.

"May I continue, Miss Del Marr?" he asked. "Or does my story bore you?"

She gave no indication that she had heard his query.

"The cigarette-case I mentioned," Vance went on, "was found on Pellinzi's body. But there were no cigarettes in it. And it had no pungent aroma of the bitter almond—only the sweet scent of jonquille and rose...But Pellinzi was poisoned as by the smelling of a scent. And again there crops up the deadly agent of ancient romance...Strange—is it not?—how the fancy conjures up such remote associations...Poor Pellinzi must have believed and trusted in his assassin. But all that his faith encountered was treachery and death."

Vance paused. There was a tenseness in the small room. Only Owen seemed unconcerned. He looked straight ahead, with a hopeless detached expression, a sneer distorting his cruel mouth.

When Vance spoke again, his manner had changed: there was brusque severity in his voice.

"But perhaps I am not so fanciful, after all. Whom else but you, Miss Del Marr, would Pellinzi first have told of his safe arrival in New York? And how could he have known, these past few years, that someone else had sought and found a response in a heart which had once belonged to him? You have a large enclosed car, Miss Del Marr—a secret trip to Riverdale would have been an easy matter for you. The cigarette-case, with your subtle fragrance, was found on him. Love changes, and is cruel..."

An icy chuckle came from Owen. His eyebrows went up slightly. The sneer on his lips changed to the faint semblance of a smile.

"Very clever, Mr. Vance," he muttered. "Admirable, in fact. Patterns within patterns. How easily man is deceived by fantasies!"

"The deceptive order of chaos," said Vance.

Owen nodded almost imperceptibly. His face again became a satirical mask.

"Yes," he breathed. "You, too, have a sense of esoteric humour."

"I doubt," murmured Vance, "that Miss Del Marr appreciates the humour of death."

A strangled moan burst from the woman's throat. She collapsed into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, God!" It was the first break in her metallic composure.

A long silence followed. Mirche looked for a moment at Vance and back again at the woman. His face had regained some of its colour, but a haunted fear shone in his eyes—a fear as of a malignant ghost whose shape he could not determine. I knew that questions he dared not utter were crowding to his lips. Slowly the woman raised her head; her hands dropped to her lap and lay there in an attitude of listless dejection. The venomous hardness of her nature regained control. She was about to speak; but she, too, checked the impulse, as if the gauge of her emotions had not yet reached the point of release.

Vance slowly lighted one of his Regies. After one or two puffs, he spoke again to the woman, and his words sounded lackadaisical, as if he were putting a question of no particular moment.

"There is still one thing that puzzles me. Miss Del Marr...Why did you bring the dead Pellinzi back here to this office?"

The woman sat like a marble image, while a disdainful cackle broke from Mirche.

"Are you referring, Mr. Vance," he asked, in his erstwhile pompous manner, "to the man found dead in this office? I'm beginning to understand your interest in the unfortunate episode here Saturday night. But I fear you have permitted your imagination to get the better of you. The body found here was that of one of the cafe helpers."

"Yes, I know whom you mean, Mr. Mirche. Philip Allen." Vance spoke smoothly. "As you said that night. And I have no doubt that you believed it, and still believe it. But seeming facts act strangely at times. A pattern is prone to change its design in the most incredible manner... Is it not true, Mr. Owen?"

"Always true," replied the quiet spectator in the chair. "Confusion. We are victims..."

"What are you two driving at?" asked Mirche, half rising from his chair, as a dawning fear came into his eyes.

"The truth is, Mr. Mirche," said Vance, "Philip Allen is quite alive. After you had discharged him and he accidentally left a cigarette-case here which did not belong to him, Philip Allen did not return to this office."

"Ridiculous!" Mirche had lost his suavity. "How else could he—?"

"It was Benny Pellinzi who lay dead here that night!"

At this announcement Mirche dropped suddenly back into his chair, and stared with hopeless defiance at the man before him. But the facts had not yet arranged themselves in his mind; and he began to protest anew.

"That's absurd—utterly absurd! I saw Allen's body myself. And I identified it."

"Oh, I don't question the sincerity of your identification." Vance moved closer to the dazed man. His tone was almost honeyed. "You had every reason to think that it was Philip Allen. He is the same size as Pellinzi. He has the same facial contours and colouring, and that day he was wearing the same kind of unobtrusive black clothes in which Pellinzi was sent to his death. You had just talked with Philip Allen in your office a few hours earlier, and, as you said to me yesterday, you were not surprised that he should have come back here. Moreover, death by poison changes the look in the eyes, the whole general appearance of the face. And, furthermore, wasn't Pellinzi the last person in the world you would have expected to find in your office on that particular night? Yes, the last person in the world..."

"But why—," stammered Mirche, "why should Pellinzi have been the last person I would have expected? I knew by the papers that the man had escaped. And it was wholly possible that he would have been fool enough to come to me for help."

"No—oh, no. I do not mean just that, Mr. Mirche," Vance returned quietly. "I had another and more cogent reason for knowing you would not expect to find Pellinzi here that night...You knew he was dead in Riverdale."

"How could I have known that he was dead?" shouted the frantic man, leaping to his feet. "You yourself said it was Dixie Del Marr to whom he would have appealed first, and—her car—her trip to Riverdale—Bah!...You can't intimidate me!"

"Then take it more calmly, Dan," said Owen petulantly. "There's far too much upheaval in this putrid world. Confusion wearies me."

"Again I fear you have misunderstood me, Mr. Mirche." Vance ignored Owen's complaint to his frightened henchman. "I meant merely that Miss Del Marr must have informed you. I am sure you two have no secrets from each other. Complete mutual trust, even in crime. And, knowing that Pellinzi was dead in Riverdale, and that your—shall we say, partner?—would hardly bring the body here, how could you imagine that the dead man in this office that night was Pellinzi? How natural to make a mistake in identity! Y' see: it couldn't be Pellinzi; therefore, it must be someone else. And how readily—and logically—Philip Allen came to your mind...But it was Pellinzi."

"How do you know it was Benny—?" Mirche was floundering, dazed by some inner mental vision. "You're trying to trick me." Then he almost shrieked: "I tell you, it couldn't have been the Buzzard!"

"Ah, yes. An error on your part." Vance spoke with quiet authority. "No possible doubt. Fingerprints don't lie. You may ask Sergeant Heath, or the District Attorney. Or you may phone the Police Department and satisfy yourself."

"Fool!" snapped Owen, his drowsy eyes on Mirche with a look of unutterable disgust. He turned to Vance. "After all, how futile it is—this devilish dream—this shadow across..." His voice trailed off.

Mirche was staring at some distant point beyond the confines of the room, alone with his thoughts, striving to assemble a disrupted mass of facts.

"But," he mumbled, as if protesting weakly against some inevitable shapeless nemesis, "Miss Del Marr saw the body here, and..."

He lapsed again into calculating silence; and then a deep flush slowly mounted his features, gradually intensifying in colour till it seemed the blood must suffocate him. The muscles of his neck tightened; globules of sweat suddenly appeared on his forehead.

Stiffly, and as if with effort, the man turned toward Miss Del Marr, and in a voice of seething hatred, spat out at her a foul and bestial epithet.

## 12. WINTER

### 19. THROUGH THE SHADOW

(Tuesday, May 21; 4 pm.)

Again some powerful emotion broke through Dixie Del Marr's stony calm. A violent primitive passion blazed in her. She rose and faced Mirche, and her words came like an ineluctable torrent.

"Of course, you filthy creature, I let them think that the dead man in this office—the man you had killed—was Philip Allen. A few more days of doubt and torture for you—what did it matter? I had already waited years to avenge Benny. Oh, I knew only too well your treachery had sent him to prison for twenty years. And I could say nothing to save him. There was only one way for me to square the injustice. I must wait silently, patiently—I knew the moment would come some day...You liked me—you wanted me. That thought was already in your beastly mind when you let Benny get sent up. So I played up to you—I helped you in your rotten schemes. I flattered you. I did what you told me to. And all the time I loved Benny. But I waited..."

She gave a bitter laugh.

"Three years is a long time. And the moment for which I had waited came too late. But I console myself with the thought that Benny's death was a merciful end. He couldn't hope for anything, even when he had managed to break jail. He'd always have been hounded by the police. But he went mad in his cell, mad enough to think he could find real freedom from the prison where your dirty double-crossing had put him."

Irresistible fury drove her on.

"But Benny never knew of your treachery. He thought you his friend. And he came to you for help. But, thank God, he called me too when he got back last Saturday. He told me he had phoned you before he reached the city. You had said that you would help him; and I knew it was a lie. But what could I do? I tried to warn him. But he wouldn't listen. He thought that perhaps, after all these years, I might have reason to keep you two apart. He wouldn't listen to me. He would tell me nothing of his plans, except that you were going to help him..."

"You're insane," Mirche managed to say.

"Shut up, fool," sighed Owen. "You can't change the pattern."

"So I followed you, Dan—in the car you gave me, and with the chauffeur you supplied from your own crooked gang." She laughed again, with the same bitterness. "He hates you as much as I do—but he's afraid of you, for he knows how dangerous you can be...I followed you from the time you left here Saturday afternoon. I knew you wouldn't let Benny come to you,—in spite of your vicious cruelty, you're a coward. And I followed you uptown, and saw you go to Tony's place...Too bad Rosa didn't squint in her crystal and warn you!...And then I knew what a dirty deal you planned for Benny. But I didn't think you had the guts to do it as you did. I thought that Benny was to die only when you yourself were safely back here. How could I tell that you had chosen Tony's cigarettes for the job? I thought I could still warn Benny before it was too late—I thought I could still save him. So I followed you. I saw you pick him up from where he was hiding, far up in the park; I saw you drive north through Riverdale; I saw you stop at a lonely spot around a bend, where you thought no one could see you. And then I saw you place his body quickly beside the road and drive off."

She swept us with a burning glance. "Oh, I'm not lying!" she cried. "Nothing matters any more—except the punishment of this creature."

Mirche seemed paralyzed, unable to speak. Owen, still with his cynical detached smile, had not moved. "Please continue, Miss Del Marr," Vance requested.

"I took Benny's body into my own car, and I brought him back here when I knew Mirche would be upstairs. I came into the driveway, as I always do, and stopped close to the side door at the end of that passage." She pointed toward the rear of the room. "No one could see from the street—not with the car door open. And the ivy helped, too. Then I went inside to make sure no one was in the hall beyond, and I gave the signal. My driver carried poor Benny in here, as I had instructed him, through that secret door; and placed him in the cabinet where I keep the café records locked. Yes! I brought Benny back and placed him at the very feet of his murderer!...You didn't know, did you, Owl, that a dead man was in that cabinet when you sat here talking with me that night?"

"What of it?" There was no change in Owen's expression.

"And when you went out, Owl, I moved Benny to the desk and telephoned the police."

I now realized that Vance had deliberately provoked the woman's frantic outburst. As she was speaking he had made a sign to the Sergeant; and Heath and Hennessey had surreptitiously closed in on Mirche, so that they now stood guard on either side of him.

"But how, Miss Del Marr," asked Vance, "does your story account for the fact that the jonquille-scented cigarette-case was found in Pellinzi's pocket?"

"Fear!—the conscience of this animal," she retorted, pointing defiantly at Mirche. "When he saw what he thought was Allen's body, his muddled, frightened brain remembered that in his own pocket was that man's cigarette-case; and as he knelt beside the body, I saw him slip the case into the dead man's coat. The impulsive act of a coward, by which he meant to rid himself of all association with what he thought a second death. He shrank from any possible connection with another dead man."

"A reasonable version," murmured Vance. "Yes. A rather subtle analysis...And you were content to let the truth regarding the dead man emerge through natural channels?"

"Yes! After I informed the police of Allen's address, I knew they'd find out the truth sooner or later. And in the meantime this creature would worry and suffer—and I'd have plenty of ways of torturing him."

"The ethics of woman..." Owen began; then lapsed into silence.

"Have you anything to say before we arrest you, Mirche?" Vance's tone was low, but it cut like a lash.

Mirche stared hideously, and his flabby figure seemed to shrink. Suddenly, however, he drew himself up, and shook a quivering finger at Owen. His veins stood out like cords.

Owen made a small contemptuous noise.

"Your blood-pressure, fool," he scoffed. "Don't cheat the gibbet."

I doubt if Mirche heard the biting words. Vituperation and profanity poured from him. His wrath seemed to surpass all human bounds. His venom left him a mere automaton—insensate, contorted, repulsive.

"You think I'll take the rap for you—without a word! I have knuckled under too long already to your bidding. I carried out your dirty schemes for you. I've shut my mouth whenever they tried to twist from me the filthy truth about you. I may go to the chair, Owl—but not alone! I'll take you and your poisoned, hypnotic brain along with me!"

He flashed a look at Vance, and pointed anew at Owen.

"There's the twisted mind behind it all!...I warned him of the Buzzard's arrival, and he sent me for the cigarettes. He told me what I must do. I was afraid to refuse—I was in his power..."

Owen looked at the man with calm derision: he was still aloof and scornful. The play was drawing to a close, and his contemptuous boredom had not abated.

"You're an unclean spectacle, Dan." His lips barely moved. "You think I haven't prepared myself against this moment? You are the fool—not me. I've kept every record—names, dates, places—all! For years I've kept them. I've hidden them where no one can find them. But I know where to find them! And the world will know——"

Those were the last words Mirche ever spoke.

There was a shot. A small black hole appeared on Mirche's forehead between the eyes. Blood trickled from it. The man fell forward over the desk.

Heath and the two officers, their automatics drawn, started swiftly across the room to the passive Owen who sat without moving, one hand lying limply in his lap, holding a smoking revolver.

But Vance quickly intervened. His back to the silent figure in the chair, he faced Heath with a commanding gesture. Leisurely he turned, and extended his hand. Owen glanced up at him; then, as if with instinctive courtesy, he turned the revolver round and held it out with meek indifference. Vance tossed the weapon into an empty chair and, looking down again at the man, waited.

Owen's eyes were half closed and dreamy. He no longer seemed to be aware of his surroundings or of the sprawled body of Mirche whom he had just killed. Finally he spoke, his voice seeming to come from far off.

"That would have meant ripples."

Vance nodded.

"Yes. Cleanliness of spirit...But now there's the trial, and the chair, and the scandal—indelibly written..."

A shudder shook Owen's slight frame. His voice rose to a shrill cry.

"But how can one escape the finite—how cut through the shadow—clean?"

Vance took out his cigarette-case and held it for a moment in his hand; but he did not open it.

"Would you care to smoke, Mr. Owen?" he asked.

The man's eyes contracted. Vance dropped his cigarette-case back into his pocket.

"Yes..." Owen breathed at length. "I believe I shall have a cigarette." He reached into an inner pocket and drew forth a small Florentine-leather case...

"See here, Vance!" snapped Markham. "This is no longer your affair. A murder has been committed before my eyes, and I myself order this man's arrest."

"Quite," Vance drawled. "But I fear you are too late."

Even as he spoke, Owen slumped deeper in his chair; the cigarette he had lighted slipped from his lips and fell to the floor. Vance quickly crushed it with his foot.

Owen's head fell forward on his breast—the muscles of his neck had suddenly relaxed.

## 20. HAPPY LANDING

(Wednesday, May 22; 10:30 am.)

The following morning Vance was sitting in the District Attorney's office, talking with Markham. Heath had been there earlier with his report of the arrest of the Tofanas. Sufficient evidence had been unearthed in the cellar of their house to convict them both—or so the Sergeant hoped.

Dixie Del Marr had also called, at Markham's request, to supply such details as were needed for the official records. As there was no question of pressing charges against her for the part she had played in Mirche's affairs, she was comparatively content when she left us.

"Really, y' know, Markham," Vance remarked, "in view of the woman's primitive infatuation for Benny Pellinzi, her conduct, as we know it, is quite understandable—and forgivable...As for Mirche, his end was far better than he deserved...And Owen! A diseased maniac. Fortunate for the world he chose so expeditious a way of making his exit! He knew he was dying; and the stalking dread of a vengeful hereafter inspired his act...We may well be content to call the whole matter closed. And, after all, I did give the lunatic a vague promise to guard his aftermath so there should be no 'ripples,' as he put it, to follow him."

Vance laughed dismally.

"What does it really matter? A minor gangster is found dead—a quite commonplace event; a major gangster is shot—also an ordin'ry episode; and the guiding light of a criminal band turns *felo de se*—well, perhaps a rare occurrence, but certainly not important...And anyway, the year's at the spring; the lark's on the wing; the snail's on the thorn—I say! how about some escargots Bordelaise later?"

As he spoke, the buzzer sounded, and a voice announced the presence of Mr. Amos Doolson in the outer office.

Markham looked at Vance.

"I suppose it's about that preposterous reward. But I can't see the man now—"

Vance stood up quickly.

"Keep him waiting, Markham! An idea smites me."

Then he went to the telephone and spoke to the In-O-Scent Corporation. When he hung up the receiver he smiled at Markham.

"Gracie Allen and George Burns will be here in fifteen minutes." He chuckled with genuine delight. "If anyone deserves that reward, it's the dryad. And I'm going to see that she gets it."

"Are you out of your mind!" exclaimed Markham in surprise.

"No—oh, no. Quite sane, don't y' know. And—though you may doubt it—I'm passionately devoted to justice."

Miss Allen, with Mr. Burns, arrived shortly thereafter. "Oh, what a terrible place!" she said. "I'm glad I don't have to live here, Mr. Markham." She turned troubled eyes on Vance. "Have I got to go on with my detecting? I'd much rather work at the factory—now that George is back, and everything."

"No, my dear," said Vance kindly. "You have already done ample. And the results you have achieved have been superb. In fact, I wanted you to come here this morning merely to receive your reward. A reward of five thousand dollars was offered to the person who would solve the murder of that man in the Domdaniel. It was Mr. Doolson who made the offer; and he's waiting in the other room now."

"Oh!" For once the girl was too puzzled and stunned to speak.

When Doolson was ushered in he took one amazed look at his two employees and went direct to Markham's desk.

"I want to withdraw that reward immediately, sir," he said. "Burns came back to work this morning in excellent spirits, and therefore there is no necessity—"

Markham, who had readily adjusted himself to Vance's jocular but equitable view of the situation, spoke in his most judicial manner.

"I regret extremely, Mr. Doolson, that such a withdrawal is entirely out of the question. The case was completed and shelved yesterday afternoon—well within the time limit you stipulated. I have no alternative but to pay that money to the person who earned it."

The man's gorge rose and he spluttered.

"But——!" he began to expostulate.

"We're frightfully sorry, and all that, Mr. Doolson," Vance cut in dulcetly. "But I am sure you will be quite reconciled to your impulsive generosity when I inform you that the recipient is to be Miss Gracie Allen."

"What!" Doolson burst forth apoplectically. "What has Miss Allen to do with it? Preposterous!"

"No," replied Vance. "Simple statement of fact. Miss Allen had everything to do with the solution of the case. It was she who supplied every important clue...And, after all, you did get back the services of your Mr. Burns today."

"I won't do it!" shouted the man. "It's chicanery! A farce! You can't legally hold me to it!"

"On the contrary, Mr. Doolson," said Markham, "I am forced to regard the money as the property of the young lady. The very wording of the reward—dictated here by yourself—would not leave you a leg to stand on if you decided to make a legal issue of it."

Doolson's jaw sagged.

"Oh, Mr. Doolson!" exclaimed Gracie Allen. "That's such a lovely reward! And did you really do it to get George back to work for the big rush? I never thought of that. But you do need him terribly, don't you?...And oh, that gives me another idea. You ought to raise George's salary."

"I'll be damned if I will!" For a moment I thought Doolson was on the verge of a stroke.

"But just suppose, Mr. Doolson," Miss Allen went on, "if George got worried again and couldn't do his work! What would become of the business?"

The man took hold of himself and studied Burns darkly and thoughtfully for several moments.

"You know. Burns," he said almost placatingly, "I've been thinking for some time that you deserved a raise. You've been most loyal and valuable to the corporation. You come back to your laboratory at once—and we can discuss the matter amicably." Then he turned and shook his finger wrathfully at the girl. "And you, young woman. You're fired!"

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Doolson," the girl returned with smiling nonchalance. "I bet the raise you give George will make his salary as much as his and mine put together now—if you know what I mean."

"Who gives a damn what you mean!" And Doolson stalked angrily from the room.

"I believe," said Vance musingly, "that the next remark should come from Mr. Burns himself." And he smiled at the young man significantly.

Burns, though obviously astonished by the proceedings of the past half-hour, was nevertheless sufficiently clear-headed to understand the import of Vance's words. Grasping the suggestion offered, he walked resolutely to the girl.

"How about that proposition I made to you the morning I was arrested?" Our presence, far from embarrassing him, had given him courage.

"Why, what proposition?" the girl asked archly.

"You know what I mean!" His tone was gruff and determined. "How about you and me getting married?"

The girl fell back into a chair, laughing musically.

"Oh, George! Was that what you were trying to say?"

There is little more that need be told regarding what Vance has always insisted on calling the Gracie Allen murder case.

The Domdaniel, as everyone knows, has long been closed, and a few years ago it was replaced by a modern commercial structure. Tony and Rosa Tofana found it expedient to confess, and are now serving time in prison. I do not know what became of Dixie Del Marr. She probably took a new name and left this part of the country, to live quietly far from the scenes of her former triumphs and tragedies.

Gracie Allen and George Burns were married shortly after that unexpected and amusing proposal in Markham's office.

One Saturday afternoon, months later, Vance and I met them strolling down Fifth Avenue. They seemed inordinately happy, and the girl was chatting animatedly, as usual.

We stopped for a few minutes to speak with them. We learned that Burns had been made a junior officer in the In-O-Scent Corporation; and, much to Vance's delight, the fact came out that Miss Allen had, for sentimental reasons, presented his card to Mr. Lyons of Chateau and Lyons, when selecting her wedding dress.

As we walked with them a short distance, Burns, in the midst of a sentence, suddenly stopped, and I noticed that his nostrils dilated slightly as he leaned close to Vance. "Farina's original formula of Eau de Cologne!"

Vance laughed. "Yes. I always bring back a supply from Europe...Which reminds me: this morning I saw in a French magazine the name of a perfume, which, after the indispensable work Mrs. Burns did on our case, you might most appropriately give to the delightful citron-scented mixture you made for her. It was called La Femme Triomphante."

Burns grinned proudly.

"I guess Gracie did help you a lot, Mr. Vance."

The girl looked from one to the other with a puzzled frown, and then laughed shyly.

"I don't get it."

THE END

## 1. AN APPEAL FOR HELP

(Tuesday, January 14; 11 a.m.)

"How would you like a brief vacation in ideal surroundings—winter sports, pleasing company, and a veritable mansion in which to relax? I have just such an invitation for you, Vance."

Philo Vance drew on his cigarette and smiled. We had just arrived at District Attorney Markham's office in answer to a facetious yet urgent call. Vance looked at him and sighed.

"I suspect you. Speak freely, my dear Rhadamanthus."

"Old Carrington Rexon's worried."

"Ah!" Vance drawled. "No spontaneous goodness of heart in life. Sad. So, I'm asked to enjoy myself in the Berkshires only because Carrington Rexon's worried. A detective on the premises would soothe his harassed spirits. I'm invited. Not flatterin'. No."

"Don't be cynical, Vance."

"But why should Carrington Rexon's worries concern me? *I'm* not in the least worried."

"You will be," said Markham with feigned viciousness. "Don't deny you dote on the sufferings of others, you sadist. You live for crime and suffering. And you adore worrying. You'd die of ennui if all were peaceful."

"Tut, tut," returned Vance. "Not sadistic. No. Always strivin' for peace and calm. My charitable, unselfish nature."

"As I thought! Old Rexon's worry *does* appeal to you. I detect the glint in your eye."

"Charming place, the Rexon estate," Vance observed thoughtfully. "But why, Markham, with his millions, his leisure, his two adored and adoring offspring, his gorgeous estate, his fame, and his vigor—why should he be worrying? Quite unreasonable."

"Still, he wants you up there instanter."

"As you said," Vance settled deeper into his chair. "His emeralds, I opine, are to blame for his qualms."

Markham looked across at the other shrewdly. "Don't be clairvoyant. I detest soothsayers. Especially when their guesses are so obvious. Of course, it's his damned emeralds."

"Tell me all. Leave no precious stone unturned. Could you bear it?"

Markham lighted a cigar. When he had it going he said:

"No need to tell you of Rexon's famous emerald collection. You probably know how it's safeguarded."

"Yes," said Vance. "I inspected it some years ago. Inadequately protected, I thought."

"The same today. Thank Heaven the place isn't in my jurisdiction: I'd be worrying about it constantly. I once tried to persuade Rexon to transfer the collection to some museum."

"Not nice of you, Markham. Rexon loves his gewgaws fanatically. He'd wither away if bereft of his emeralds...Oh, why are collectors?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I didn't make the world."

"Regrettable," sighed Vance. "What is toward?"

"An unpredictable situation at the Rexon estate. The old boy's apprehensive. Hence his desire for your presence."

"More light, please."

"Rexon Manor," continued Markham, "is at present filled with guests as a result of young Richard Rexon's furlough: the chap has just returned from Europe where he has been studying medicine intensively in the last-word European colleges and hospitals. The old man's giving a kind of celebration in the boy's honor—"

"I know. And hoping for an announcement of Richard's betrothal to the blue-blooded Carlotta Naesmith. Still, why his anxiety?"

"Rexon being a widower, with an invalid daughter, asked Miss Naesmith to arrange a house party and celebration. She did—with a vengeance. Mostly café society: weird birds, quite objectionable to old Rexon's staid tastes. He doesn't understand this new set; is inclined to distrust them. He doesn't suspect them, exactly, but their proximity to his precious emeralds gives him the jitters."

"Old-fashioned chap. The new generation is full of incredible possibilities. Not a lovable and comfortable lot. Does Rexon point specifically?"

"Only at a fellow named Bassett. And, strangely enough, he's not of Miss Naesmith's doing. Acquaintance of Richard's, in fact. Friendship started abroad—in Switzerland, I believe. Came over on the boat with him this last trip. But the old gentleman admits he has no grounds for his uneasiness. He's just nervous, in a vague way, about the whole situation. Wants perspicacious companionship. So he phoned me and asked for help, indicating you."

"Yes. Collectors are like that. Where can he turn in his hour of uncertainty? Ah, his old friend Markham! Equipped with all the proper gadgets for just such delicate observation. Gadget Number One: Mr. Philo Vance. Looks presentable in a dinner coat. Won't drink from his finger-bowl. Could mingle and observe, without rousing suspicion. Discretion guaranteed. Excellent way of detecting a lurking shadow—if any," Vance smiled resignedly. "Is that the gist of the worried Rexon's runes by long-distance phone?"

"Substantially, yes," admitted Markham. "But expressed more charitably. You know damned well that old Rexon likes you, and that if he thought you'd care for the house party, you'd have been more than welcome."

"You shame me, Markham," Vance returned with contrition. "I'm fond of Rexon, just as you are. A lovable man...So, he craves my comfortin' presence. Very well, I shall strive to smooth his furrowed brow."



## 2. GLAMOR IN THE MOONLIGHT

(Wednesday, January 15; 9 p.m.)

Markham notified Carrington Raxon, and we left New York the following afternoon in Vance's Hispano-Suiza.

It was a cold, clear day, and fresh snow had fallen during the night. The drive to Winewood in the Berkshires would ordinarily have taken about five hours, but the roads north of the city were deep in snow, and we were late in arriving at the Raxon estate. Darkness had settled early, but the night was white with stars, and the moon was luminous.

It was nearly nine o'clock when we turned in through a wide stone gateway that marked the outer limits of the vast estate. There was no one to direct us, and when we had reached the crest of a high rocky hill, Vance was confused as to which turning to take. There were half-hidden tracks in one of the forks of the narrow road, and we turned to the right to follow them.

A mile or so farther on, the road sloped gently downward into a narrow snowclad valley at the far end of which precipitous cliffs rose to a tree-crested plateau. Vance let the car coast noiselessly into the still white fairyland.

As we reached the base of the long incline the sound of faint music came to us through the trees on our left. There was no habitation visible, and the music intensified the fantasy of the setting which spread before us.

Applying the brakes, Vance stopped the car and, stepping out, moved towards the source of the lilting notes.

We had gone scarcely a hundred yards when, through the trees which hid us from view, we spied a small frozen pond on which a girl was skating. The music came from a small portable phonograph placed on a rustic bench at the edge of the pond.

The girl, in a simple white skating costume, seemed unreal in the light of the moon and stars. She was going through one difficult skating figure after another with serious repetition, as if trying to perfect their intricacies. Vance suddenly became attentive.

"My word!" he whispered. "Magnificent skating!"

He stood fascinated by the girl's proficiency as she executed various school figures and complicated free routines.

The phonograph ran down and, as the girl completed an involved jump and spiral spin, Vance approached her with a cheerful greeting. At first she was startled; then she smiled shyly.

"You must be new guests at the Manor," she remarked in a timid voice. "I'm so sorry you caught me skating. It's sort of a secret, you see...Maybe you won't tell anyone," she added with a note of appeal in her voice.

"Of course, we shan't," Vance studied the girl critically. "I believe I remember you—I was at the Manor some years ago. Weren't you the friend and companion of Miss Joan?"

She nodded. "I was. And I still am. I'm Ella Gunthar. But I don't remember you. It must have been when I was a little girl."

"My name is Philo Vance," Vance told her. "I was just driving to the Manor, and lost my way. When I heard your music I came over in the hope of finding my bearings."

"You're not seriously lost," she said. "This is the Green Glen and if you go back up the hill and take the narrow road to the right for about a mile, you'll see the Manor just ahead."

Vance thanked her, but lingered a moment. "Tell me, Miss Gunthar: if you are Joan's companion at the Manor, why do you skate on this little pond so far away from the main house?"

The girl's lovely face seemed to cloud for a moment.

"I—I don't want to hurt Joan's feelings," she answered cryptically. "I always come to the Green Glen at night when my duties are over at the Manor, to do my skating."

"But the phonograph," said Vance; "isn't it frightfully heavy to carry all this way?"

"Oh, I don't keep it at the Manor." She laughed. "I keep it in Jed's hut, just around the curve in the road, by that big cypress tree. And I keep my skates and skating clothes there, too. It's all a secret between Jed and me."

Vance smiled at her reassuringly.

"Well, I promise the secret will go no farther. But it's really a magnificent secret. You know, don't you, that you skate beautifully? You're one of the most talented performers I have ever seen."

The girl blushed with pleasure.

"I love skating," she replied simply.

A few minutes later we had turned into the driveway to the brilliantly lighted Raxon Manor.

As a bald elderly butler led us through the lower hall we could hear the boisterous hilarity of many guests in the drawing room—snatches of popular music, laughter, raised voices: a gay and youthful clamor.

Carrington Raxon, alone in his den, greeted us with old-world dignity. It was the first time I had met him, but I was not unfamiliar with his features, as pictures of him had frequently appeared in the Metropolitan press. He was a tall, slender, impressive man in his sixties; aloof and stern, and with an imperious air of feudalism. He vaguely suggested Sargent's famous portrait of Lord Ribblesdale.

"Ah, Vance! It was generous of you to come. Perhaps you think I am unduly apprehensive..."

The door opened and a dark, serious young man of athletic build stood on the threshold.

Raxon turned without surprise.

"My son Richard," he informed us with undisguised pride. Then: "But why are you deserting our guests?"

"I'm a bit fed up." Then the young man shrugged his shoulders apologetically and smiled. "I guess I'm not used to it. It's such a change—"

A girl of about twenty-five appeared in the doorway and looked about.

The elder Raxon somewhat relaxed his stern manner and presented us. Her likeness, too, I had seen many times in the New York papers. Carlotta Naesmith had been a vivid and gifted debutante a few years before. She was a colorful auburn-haired young woman, animated and vital, with sagacious eyes and an air of self-assurance. She nodded to us casually, and turned to young Raxon.

"Completely overcome, Dick? Has the gaiety got you down? Come, don't desert the ship just when the sea's getting stormy."

"I think Carlotta is quite right, Richard," Carrington Rexon commented. "You came home for relaxation. Forget your scalpels and microbes for a while. Go on back with Carlotta, and take Mr. Vance with you. He'll want to meet your friends."

### 3. THE BOURBON GLASS

(Wednesday, January 15; 10:30 p.m.)

An unusually gay and colorful sight confronted us in the great drawing room. Groups of young people stood about joking and laughing; others danced. A spirit of carefree revelry animated the scene.

Carlotta Naesmith was a capable hostess. She led us through the boisterous throng, introducing us haphazardly.

"This is Dahlia Dunham," she said, snaring a wiry and tense young woman of perhaps thirty. "Dahlia's a political spellbinder, full of incredible phrases, and death to hecklers. She'll stump for any cause from Socialism to Fletcherism—"

"But not for prohibition, dear," the other retorted in a raucous unsteady voice, as she withdrew her arm from Miss Naesmith's and hurried toward the miniature bar.

Another girl came up, complaining.

"A hell of a place! No landing field! When you snare the Rexon millions, Carlotta, see to it that Dick builds one."

She was blonde and frail, with liquid eyes that dominated her pointed face. I recognized the much publicized Beatrice Maddox before Carlotta Naesmith presented us. She had recently won fame as an airplane pilot, and only a governmental veto had stayed her proposed solo flight across the Atlantic.

"What's up, Bee?" came a rumbling voice behind me, and a young Irish giant threw his arms about Miss Maddox. "You look glum. Out of gas? So am I." He whisked her away to the bar.

"That was Pat McOrsay," Miss Naesmith told us. "He drives 'em fast. Won last year's auto grind at Cincinnati. He's sweet on Bee, but she holds mere auto racers in contempt. Maybe they'll compromise. I did want you to meet Pat—he's such a beast...But wait. There's another speed demon of a kind over there...Hi there, Chuck," she called across the room. "Stop trying to tout Sally and come over here a moment—if you can make it."

Chuck Throme, the internationally famous gentleman jockey who had won the last Steeplechase at Aintree, staggered stiffly up. His eyes wouldn't focus, but his manner was impeccable.

"Sit down, darling, and meet Mr. Vance," Miss Naesmith exhorted. "Don't try it standing up. Your stirrups'll bend."

Throme drew himself up indignantly to his five-feet-five and bowed with a Chestertonian flourish. But the supreme gesture was not completed. He continued his obeisance to the rug and lay there.

"That's one race Chuck didn't win," laughed our *cicerone*. "Let's move on. Some assistant starter will put him back in the saddle...Isn't it positively disgusting, Mr. Vance? Liquor is a frightful curse. Saps the brain, undermines the morals, and all that...Which reminds me: let's take an intermission in our round of social duties and have a drink."

She led us to the bar.

"I'm very demure—for Richard's sake. I drink only Dubonnet in public. But don't let my girlish restraint affect your batting average. Everything's available, including trinitrotoluene."

Vance drank brandy. As we stood chatting a tall, rugged, sunburnt man came up and put his arms possessively about Miss Naesmith.

"I'm still yearning to know your answer, Carlotta," he blustered good-naturedly. "For the next-to-the-last time: Are you, or are you not, coming with me to Cocos Island when Dick returns to his bone-sawing?"

"Ha!" Carlotta Naesmith swung about and pushed him away playfully. "Still crooning your Once-Aboard-the-Lugger ditty. You're inelegant, Stan. And right under Dick's nose."

Richard Rexon showed no annoyance. He came forward and, putting one hand on the other man's arm, introduced him to us. It was Stanley Sydes, a young society man with too much money, who spent his time on expeditions in quest of buried treasure.

Vance knew of his exploits, and a brief discussion took place.

"A playboy bulging with good money who spends it hunting dirty doubloons!" Carlotta Naesmith laughed. "There's a paradox—or is the whole world crazy except me?"

"Not a paradox, Miss Naesmith," Vance put in pleasantly. "I understand Mr. Sydes' urge perfectly. It's really not the treasure, y' know. It's the quest."

"Right!" boomed Sydes. "The joy of outwitting others, of solving riddles; and the acquisition of the unique...Hell, I'm talking like a collector.—Forgive me, Richard. No offense to your eminent sire." A noisy group opposite attracted his attention, and he joined them.

His place at the bar was taken almost immediately by the girl who had been bantering with Throme.

"My God, Sally!" Miss Naesmith greeted her. "Really alone? Hasn't your gentleman jockey regained his mount?...Gentlemen,"—she turned to us—"we have here none other than Sally Alexander, the inimitable—pride of the Purple Room, off-color raconteuse and pianist extraordinary. A one-woman slum. She carried the Blue Book to the masses—and made 'em like it. A feat, egad!"

"I'm being maligned, gents," Sally Alexander protested. "I'm elegant, no end."

"I quite agree," Vance defended her. "I've heard Miss Alexander sing, and never once have I blushed."

"That must have been when she sang in the village choir, in her sub-deb days."

"Just for that," retorted Miss Alexander, "I'm going to take Dick away from you." And, slipping her arm through Richard Rexon's, she led him to the dance floor.

Miss Naesmith shrugged. She looked at Vance.

"Had enough of this, Sir Galahad? There are other exhibits in the zoo. Nothing really special, however. Am I not an honest guide?"

"Honest and charming." Vance set down his glass. "But isn't there a Mr. Bassett?"

"Oh, Jacques..." She looked round the room. "He's Richard's friend, you know. A more or less imported specimen, I believe. Anyway, he came over on the boat with Dick and is always comparing our ski runs with those of Switzerland—to the detriment of ours, of course. Maybe he does yodel and live on goat's milk. I wouldn't know. Though I do know he speaks American with a prairie

accent—if my ears don't lie."

She caught sight of Bassett.

"There's your man, in the far corner, drinking lustily by himself. Come along. You can have him gladly. Then go and rescue Dick. Sally'll be at the risqué-story stage by now."

Jacques Bassett sat at a small table, drinking Bourbon. He was tall, dark, aggressively athletic. His heavy eyebrows met over a broad flat nose.

He talked about Europe. Vance showed interest. Swiss winter resorts came up. Vance asked questions. Bassett expatiated. He was eloquent about the toboggan runs and the ski trails at Oberlachen in the Tyrol. Vance mentioned Amsterdam. But the subject had no interest for Bassett. He wandered away.

Vance turned his back. Then he threw his handkerchief over the glass from which Bassett had been drinking. Slipping it into his pocket, he left the room abruptly.

A little later I found Vance with Carrington Raxon in the den. Another man was seated with them before the log fire. He was in his late forties, with steel-grey hair, and a soft voice which seemed to cover a tension: obviously a man of the world, with a highly professional manner which was rigid, but not without ingratiation. I was not surprised to find that he was Doctor Loomis Quayne, the Raxon physician.

"Doctor Quayne," Raxon explained, "dropped by to see my daughter Joan. But the excitement of so many guests has wearied her and she retired long ago." His voice was wistful.

(Vance had told me during our drive to Winewood something of Joan Raxon's tragedy: how she had fallen and injured her spine while skating, when she was only ten years old.)

"Joan's fatigue need not worry you, my dear Raxon," the doctor assured him. "It's natural in the circumstances. This little excitement may do her good, in fact—stimulate her interest, lead her mind along new lines. Psychological therapy is our chief recourse just now...I'll drop in again tomorrow. I hope I'll see Richard then, too. I've hardly talked with him since he came. But I'm glad to find him looking as well as when I saw him on my trip abroad two years ago."

"Dick's in the drawing room now," Raxon suggested with a twinkle.

The doctor smiled. "No, not this evening. I must be going soon. I left the motor of my car running so I won't have to bother priming it. These cold days the starter doesn't work so well...And I think I prefer the quiet of your den, if I may sit and finish my highball."

"Can't say that I blame you, doctor...This new generation..." Raxon shook his head disapprovingly.

As we talked on, largely in generalities, but with an occasional allusion to Richard Raxon's future in medicine, it became evident that there was something deeper than the mere professional relationship between Raxon and Quayne; a touch of intimacy, perhaps, due to long and tragic association.

At length the doctor rose and bade us good night. Vance and I left Carrington Raxon shortly after.

"A strange and dizzy household." Vance sprawled in an easy chair in his room. "No wonder old Raxon's jittery. Probably feels lost in the midst of the unknown. Obviously determined on Carlotta as a daughter-in-law, though; he's just the type to crave a dynastic marriage for his son. And the girl's not deficient in gifts. Nice; but too vivid for my aging tastes. And Richard. An admirable chap. Too serious for this outfit. Strange, too, his attitude toward Carlotta. Not all it should be. Seemed quite indifferent to the treasure hunter's poaching. That rather irked the lady. I wonder...Interesting creature, Sydes. Has a mental quirk. He put his finger on it, too. A collector! Just that...But Bassett. Not a nice person. Worries old Raxon. Carlotta feels it, too. Something familiar about those cold eyes. Queer. And why should he pretend about Oberlachen? No ski runs or toboggan slides there. Only a lake and a castle and a few peasants. Probably never been there. He met Richard at Saint Moritz. He would. And when I mentioned Amsterdam, Jacques wasn't having any. Well, well...No, Van. As I said. A dizzy lot. Social life at its gaudiest. Too much mental makeup."

He brought out his *Régie* cigarettes, lighted one, and stretched his legs.

"And all through the evening I kept thinking of little Ella Gunther. Natural and fresh. Lovely. However..."

#### 4. THE FIRST MURDER

(Thursday, January 16; 8 a.m.)

The next morning at eight there was excited knocking at our door.

"Mr. Vance! Mr. Vance!" I recognized the old butler's voice. "Mr. Rexon says will you please come to the den at once, sir."

Vance jumped up. "What's wrong, Higgins?"

"I—I don't know."

"Right!"

He dressed speedily, and we went into the hall. A woman, in the black livery of a housekeeper, was bent over the railing of the stairs. She heard us and backed against the wall, eyes staring, body rigid. Vance halted, looked at her sharply. She was tall, well built, about forty. She had green eyes, black hair, a cryptic face. A superior woman, but over-taut.

"Could you hear?" Vance's tone was cold.

"There's tragedy!" she said, in a tense, contralto voice.

"Common commodity of life. Relax."

We hurried downstairs.

"The Manor's strangest creature so far," Vance remarked to me. "Inhibited. Menacing. Knows too much. Volcanic. But only smouldering. *She's* tragedy. God help her..."

Carrington Rexon was in a house gown. With him in the den was a huge middle-aged man in a lumberjacket, corduroy trousers, and laced leather boots. He was pale and nervous. There was sweat on his hands as he steadied himself against the mantel.

"Eric Gunthar here, my overseer," Rexon told us, "just found the body of Lief Wallen in Tor Gulch near here. He's evidently fallen from the ledge on top. Gunthar came in to report to me and get aid. Would you go with him, Vance? I've already phoned for the doctor...Wallen was the guard of the Manor's west wing, where the Gem Room is."

"An indication perhaps. Quite. I understand. Gladly."

"Lief must have slipped," Gunthar put in thickly,

"Be sure you have someone replace him tonight," ordered Rexon. "Better take a couple of men to bring him up," he added.

"Darrup's down at the lower rink. I'll find another." Gunthar's hand brushed his forehead, "Wallen was a bad sight, Squire...Can I have another drink—?"

"You've had too much already," snapped Vance. "Move!"

Gunthar led the way sullenly. As we crossed the main road just before the house, a strange shabby figure appeared. A straggly white beard accentuated his stooped shoulders. He shuffled as he walked, but there was wiry energy in his movements. He turned quickly toward a clump of trees, as if to avoid us. Gunthar hailed him peremptorily.

"Come here, Jed. We need you." The old man shuffled up obediently. "Lief's gone over the crags at Tor Gulch. We'll be bringing him up."

The old man grinned childishly. For some reason the tragedy seemed to amuse him. "Maybe you're drinking too much, Eric. Ella said you struck her last week. You shouldn't do that. The Gulch'll hold more'n one."

We picked up Guy Darrup, the estate carpenter. Gunthar explained. Darrup's eyes clouded. There was unfriendliness in them. As we headed westward down the path he said: "I guess that'll make your job safe for a while now, Mr. Gunthar."

Gunthar snarled. "Get on. Mind your own business. Maybe *you'd* like to be overseer?"

"I'd do everyone fair." There was bitterness in the remark.

We took a circuitous route to the base of the rocky crags, passed through a cluster of trees over which the mist hung. We went north across a frozen stream, then turned in the general direction from which we came.

"You're Miss Ella's father, aren't you, Gunthar?" Vance spoke for the first time.

Gunthar gave an affirmative grunt.

"Who's *he*?" With a move of the head Vance indicated the old man shuffling briskly far ahead.

A sudden decision prompted ingratiating on Gunthar's part. "Old Jed. He was overseer here before me. Pensioned off now. He's cracked. Lives alone down in the Green Glen—named it himself. Doesn't mingle. We call him the Green Hermit...Nasty business about Lief, with the house full of guests—"

"That remark of Darrup's. Is there talk of a new overseer?"

"Hell! They're always talking. I make 'em work. They don't like it."

Old Jed turned abruptly to the right past an eruption of shrubs.

"Hey," bawled Gunthar, "How do *you* know where to go?"

"I reckon I know where Lief is," Jed cackled. He disappeared behind a projecting rock.

"He's cracked," Gunthar repeated.

"Thanks for the information." As Vance spoke a shout came from Old Jed.

"Here's Lief, Eric."

We came up. A crumpled body, hideously twisted, lay at the foot of a stone cliff. The face was torn and clotted, and the bare head was violently misshapen. There was a dark pool of coagulated blood.

Vance leaned over the figure, examined it closely; then he stood up. "No doctor can help. We'll leave him here. Darrup'll watch. I'll phone Winewood." He looked up at the cliffside and then through the trees at the Manor towers beyond.

Gunthar waved Old Jed away.

"You really oughtn't strike Ella, Eric," the old man admonished with a faint grin as he moved off round the cliffs to the flat meadow.

"Can we get to the top of the cliff on our way back to the Manor?" asked Vance.

Gunthar hesitated. "There's a steep short cut back a ways. But it's a dangerous climb—"

"We'll take it. Get going."

When we had struggled up the slippery, treacherous incline, Gunthar indicated the approximate spot where Lief Wallen must have gone over. There were shrub oaks near the edge of the cliff and Vance moved among them, gazing down at the thin layer of crusted snow. Suddenly he knelt beside a sturdy tree bole. "Blood, Gunthar." He pointed to an irregular dark patch a few inches from the tree trunk.

Gunthar sucked in his breath. "Holy God—up here!"

"Oh, quite." Vance rose. "No. No accident. Too bad the wind last night obliterated the tale of footprints. However...We'll be going. Work to do."

Gunthar halted abruptly. "Old Jed knew just where the body was!"

"Thanks awfully." Vance hastened down the long slope toward the Manor.

## 5. THE CURSE OF THE EMERALDS

(Thursday, January 16; 9:30 a.m.)

Carrington Rexon was drinking his coffee in the den when we returned.

"Up to the police," Vance announced. Then he explained..."I'll phone Winewood." He went to the telephone and conversed briefly.

Rexon rang. Higgins entered.

"Oh! Ah!" Vance sat down. "Many thanks. Just coffee, Higgins." He lighted a cigarette with unusual deliberation and stretched his legs before him.

Rexon was silent, coldly calm. He studied Vance over his coffee cup.

"Sorry you should be bothered," he murmured. "I was hoping my anxiety was unwarranted."

"One never knows, does one, old friend? We do our best."

Lieutenant O'Leary, of the Winewood police, a tall, shrewd and capable man, far superior to the ordinary country constable, arrived simultaneously with Doctor Quayne.

"Sorry, doctor. No need for you." Vance gave the details. "Fellow's been dead for hours, I'd say. It's the Lieutenant's problem."

"Doctor Quayne is our official physician," said O'Leary.

"Ah!" Vance threw his cigarette in the grate. "That facilitates matters. We'll go down at once. Darrup's watching the body. I ordered it left where Gunthar found it. Forgive my intrusion, Lieutenant. Sole interest Mr. Rexon."

"Quite correct, sir," O'Leary returned. "We'll see how the land lies."

"It lies exceeding black despite the snow."

Ten minutes later Doctor Quayne was examining Lief Wallen's body.

"A long fall," he commented. "Battered badly by the impact. Been dead all of eight hours. Poor Wallen. An honest, conscientious chap."

"That linear depression and laceration above the right ear," Vance suggested.

Quayne leaned over the body again for several moments. "I see what you mean." He looked up at Vance significantly. "I'll know more after the autopsy." He rose, frowning. "That's all now, Lieutenant. I'll be getting along—I've several calls to make."

"Thank you, doctor." O'Leary spoke courteously. "I'll attend to the routine."

Quayne bowed and departed.

O'Leary looked at Vance shrewdly. "What about that depression and laceration, sir?"

"Come with me a moment, Lieutenant." And Vance led the way to the cliff above. He pointed to the dark stain by the shrub-oak bole.

O'Leary inspected it and nodded slowly. Then he gave Vance a steady look. "What's your theory, sir?"

"Must I? But it's only a vague idea, Lieutenant. Highly illusory. That bash on Wallen's head might be from an instrument. Doesn't fit with a tumble. The poor johnnie could have been hit elsewhere and shoved over the cliff to cover up. There are faint indications in the snow hereabouts, despite last night's wind. Remote speculation at best. But there could have been three people here last night. Marks not clear. No. Proof lackin'...My theory? Wallen was struck near the Manor. Struck over the ear with an instrument shaped—let us say—like the blunt end of a spanner. His skull was fractured. Then he was dragged here. Two faint lines up the slope. Heels, perhaps. The body was dropped to the ground here so the other could hold to this tree while shoving Wallen over the cliff. Hemorrhage from the nose and ears intervened. Hence the blood here."

"I don't like it, sir." O'Leary frowned glumly.

"Neither do I. You asked for it."

O'Leary looked down at the telltale stain, then back at Vance. "You'll help us, sir? I'd be flattered. No need pretending I don't know of you."

"Disregardin' the compliment, I'd be happy to." Vance took out a cigarette. "My sole interest Mr. Rexon. As I said."

"I understand. My thanks. I'll get the machinery going." O'Leary strode off briskly.

When we returned to the Manor the sun was streaming into the spacious glass-enclosed veranda which stretched across the entire east side of the house. At the foot of a short terrace leading from the veranda was a large artificially controlled skating rink, lined on three sides with slender trees and landscaped gardens. Immediately below, to the south, was a pleasant pavilion.

Joan Rexon reclined on the veranda in a tufted wheel-chair built like a *chaise longue*; and beside her in a small wicker porch chair sat Ella Gunthar. Vance joined them with a smile of greeting. Joan Rexon was frail and wistful, but she gave little impression of invalidism. Only the blue veins in her slender hands indicated the long illness which had sapped her strength since childhood.

"Isn't it terrible, Mr. Vance!" Ella Gunthar said in a quavering voice. He looked at her a moment questioningly. "My father has just told us about poor Lief Wallen. You know, don't you?"

Vance nodded. "Yes. But we mustn't let that cast a shadow over us here." He smiled to Joan.

"It's very difficult to avoid it," Miss Rexon said. "Lief was so kind and thoughtful..."

"The more reason not to think of such things," Vance declared.

Ella Gunthar nodded seriously. "The sunshine and the snow—there *are* happy things in the world to think about." She placed her hand tenderly over Joan's. But the thought of the tragedy remained with her as well. "Poor Lief must have fallen on his way home this morning."

Vance looked at her meditatively. "No. Not this morning," he said. "It was last night—around midnight."

Ella gripped her chair, and a frightened look came into her eyes. "Midnight," she breathed. "How terrible!"

"Why do you say that, Miss Ella?" The girl's manner puzzled Vance.

"I—I—At midnight..." Her voice trailed off.

Vance quickly turned the conversation, but failed to alter the girl's strange mood. At length he excused himself and went into the house. He had barely reached the foot of the main stairs when a hand was placed on his arm. Ella Gunthar had followed him.

"Are you sure it was—midnight?" Her whisper was tense and pleading.

"Somewhere thereabouts." Vance spoke lightly. "But why are you so upset, my dear?"

Her lips trembled. "I saw Lieutenant O'Leary come in with you and go toward Mr. Raxon's den. Tell me, Mr. Vance, why is he here? Is anything—wrong? Will we all have to go to Winewood—to answer questions maybe?"

Vance laughed reassuringly. "Please don't trouble your lovely little head. There'll be an inquest, of course—it's the law, y' know. Just formality. But they'll certainly not ask you to go."

Her eyes opened very wide. "An inquest?" she repeated softly. "But I want to go. I want to hear—everything."

Vance was nonplused. "Aren't you being foolish, child? Run back and read to Joan and forget all about—"

"But you don't understand." She caught her breath sharply. "I've *got* to go to the inquest. Maybe—" She turned suddenly and hurried back to the veranda.

"My word!" murmured Vance. "What can possibly be in that child's mind?"

On the upper landing, as we turned toward our rooms, the housekeeper stepped out unexpectedly from a small corridor. She drew herself up mysteriously.

"He's dead, isn't he?" Her tone was sepulchral. "And perhaps it wasn't an accident."

"How could one know?" Vance was evasive.

"Normal things don't happen here," she ran on tensely. "Those emeralds have put a curse on this house—"

"You've been reading the wrong novels."

She ignored the implication. "Those green stones—they create an atmosphere. They attract. They send forth temptation. They radiate fire."

Vance smiled. "What do you find abnormal here?"

"Everything. Darling Joan is an invalid. Old Jed's a fanatical mystic. Miss Naesmith brings strange people here. There's intrigue and deep jealousies everywhere. Mr. Raxon wants to choose his son's wife." She smiled inscrutably. "He doesn't know he's building on sand. It all started years ago."

"You hear much, what?" Vance spoke satirically.

"And I see much. The Raxon dynasty is falling. Young Mr. Richard pretends much; but the first night he got back from Europe a girl was waiting for him in the rear hall back of the stairs. He took her in his arms without a word and he held her close and long." She came nearer and lowered her voice. "It was Ella Gunthar!"

"Really, now." Vance laughed indifferently. "Young love. Any objection?"

The woman turned angrily and went down the hail.



## 6. A WOMAN'S BARB

(Thursday, January 16; 4:30 p.m.)

Vance deserted the Manor an hour later, just as the noonday siren shrilled overhead, the surrounding hills catching the note and throwing the echo back and forth much longer than the original blast warranted. Carrington Raxon had long taken a boyish delight in retaining this outmoded signal for his workmen. He admitted it served no purpose, but it amused him to continue to use it.

The early winter dusk had begun to fall when Vance returned.

"Been snoopin' and talkin' round the estate," he told Carrington Raxon, settling himself comfortably before the fire. "Much needed activity. Hope you don't mind."

Raxon's laugh was mirthless. "I only hope your time wasn't wasted."

"No. Not wasted. I'll be frank. You want it, I know."

Raxon nodded stiffly.

"Things not happy," summarized Vance. "Meanness at work. And jealousies. Nothing overt. Just undercurrents. They could erupt, however. Gunthar's hard on the men. That doesn't help...Hear you've been planning to replace him as overseer. Wallen mentioned. Any truth in that?"

"Frankly, yes. But I was in no hurry."

"Lief Wallen wanted to marry Ella. Both father and daughter protested. Friction—scenes. Not nice. Much bitterness. Source of general resentment of estate workers toward Miss Ella. Think she considers herself superior to the rest of them because she's Miss Joan's companion. Only Old Jed defends her. They answer he has delusions and a soft spot for the color green. Implication bein' the presence of the emeralds has affected him. Everyone adding fuel to a smoulderin' fire and waiting for a flareup."

Raxon chuckled. "And perhaps you think, Vance, that I, too, am affected with the rest."

Vance made a deprecating motion. "By the by, yours is the only key to the Gem Room, what?"

"Good Heavens, yes! Special key and special lock. And a steel door."

"Been in the room today?"

"Oh, yes. Everything's quite in order."

Vance changed the subject. "Tell me about your housekeeper."

"Marcia Bruce? Solid as rock."

"Yes. I believe you. Honest, but hysterical."

Raxon chuckled again. "You've noticed much...But she adores Joan—cares for her like a mother when Ella Gunthar is off duty. Basically, Bruce is a fine woman. Quayne agrees. There's a fellow-feeling between those two. She was superintendent of nurses in a hospital once. Quayne's a worthy man, too. I'm glad to see that friendship developing."

"Ah!" Vance smiled. "I perceive Squire Raxon is sentimental."

"The human heart desires happiness for others as well as for oneself." Raxon was serious now. "What else did you learn, Vance? Anything pertaining to Lief Wallen's death?"

Vance shook his head. "Solution may come through irrelevancies. Later. I've only begun." Then he went out to the drawing room.

Bassett sat at the table near the veranda door where we first met him. He had just reached up and caught Ella Gunthar's arm as she passed. He was smirking up at her unpleasantly. She drew away from him. Bassett let her go. "Haughty, aren't we?" His eyes followed her with a sardonic leer as she returned to Miss Joan.

Vance strolled up. "Not skiing today, Mr. Bassett? Thought the whole jolly crowd was up on the Winewood trails."

"I slept too late and missed the party...Pretty blond thing, that Ella Gunthar." His eyes drifted back to the veranda. "Unusually attractive for a servant."

Vance's eyes narrowed, hard as steel, and drew Bassett's gaze. "We're all servants. Some to our fellow men. Some to our vices. Think that over." He went out to the veranda.

Lieutenant O'Leary was just coming up the steps at the side entrance.

"Doctor Quayne's doing the autopsy now," he announced. "Inquest tomorrow at noon. You'll have to attend, I'm afraid, sir. I'll pick you up."

"Any complications ahead?" asked Vance.

"No. I've soft-pedaled everything. John Brander, our coroner, is a good man. He likes Raxon. And I've explained the situation. He won't ask embarrassing questions."

"Accident verdict, maybe?"

"I hope so, sir. Brander understands. It'll give us time."

"A pleasure to work with you, Lieutenant."

O'Leary went inside to see Raxon, and Vance strode to where Joan and Ella Gunthar were sitting.

A noisy group of guests, returning from their skiing expedition, came clattering up the terrace, passed us with cheery greetings, and continued upstairs. Carlotta Naesmith and Stanley Sydes remained on the veranda and joined us. Ella Gunthar was looking about anxiously. "It's really no use, Ella," Miss Naesmith told her satirically. "Dick's gone daffy over Sally Alexander."

"I don't believe it!"

Miss Naesmith's mouth twisted in a cruel smile. "Does it hurt, Ella?"

"Carlotta! Cat!" There was no mirth in Sydes' reprimand.

"How do you feel today, Joan?" Miss Naesmith's mood changed as the girl smiled up sweetly. "And you, too, Mr. Vance. Why didn't you join the skiing party? It was glorious. At least ten inches of powder over a deep base."

"Isn't there enough snow already in these locks of mine?"

"And most becoming, Sir Galahad!" She turned and stroked Sydes' temple. "Wonder if Stan'll be handsome when he gets grey."

"I promise you, Goddess," declared Sydes, "I'll be unutterably fascinating." He leaned over her. "And now, for the last time:—"

"I always get seasick. I'll seek my treasure nearer home."

"Maybe I will too, if you spurn my invitation." Sydes' tone was fretful and aggressive.

"What do you think this wild man wants, Joan?" Miss Naesmith explained banteringly. "He insists I sail with him to Cocos Island and go diving for the treasure of the *Mary Dear* in Wafer Bay."

"Oh, that would be wonderful!" There pathetic longing in Joan Raxon's voice.

"You dear, sweet child." The older girl's tone softened. Then she went upstairs, and Sydes followed.

A while later Marcia Bruce came out. "You may run along home, Ella. I'll take our darling in charge."

Vance rose.

"And I'll see Miss Ella home."

I knew he had great compassion for the girl who had no part in the gay sophisticated life about her. And I knew why he wished to walk with her to her father's cottage. He would strive to cheer and amuse her, so that the sting of Miss Naesmith's words might be forgot.

## 7. THE INQUEST

(Friday, January 17; noon.)

The coroner's inquest increased the tension of the situation. Ella Gunthar had spoken urgently to Vance as soon as she arrived at the Manor that morning. She was fully cognizant of the time and place of the inquest and determined to be there. Vance sought to dissuade her, but finally abandoned the effort. He realized there was some deeper reason than mere curiosity, and arranged to take her with us in O'Leary's car.

At the bend in the roadway where it joined the main highway O'Leary signaled sharply on his horn. The sound found a prolonged echo in the archaic midday siren reverberating over the estate and weirdly following us like a mechanical nemesis as we drove on. The Lieutenant offered assurances to Vance's unvoiced concern.

"It won't take us more than ten minutes to get there. Brander'll wait for us."

The small room in the Town Hall at Winewood was well filled with townspeople and workers from the Rexon estate; but there were no guests from the Manor itself.

At one end of the room on a low platform was a long table at which a heavy-set, red-faced man with blinking eyes presided.

"That's John Brander," whispered O'Leary. "A reasonable man. Local real-estate lawyer."

At the left of the table, partitioned off by a railing, sat the jury, simple and honest men of the conventional type one would expect to find in a country town. A constable, with an ineffectual air of importance, stood beside the witness stand.

Eric Gunthar was called first. He explained briefly how he had come upon Lief Wallen's body on his way to work, and had returned to the Gulch with Old Jed, Darrup and Vance. Under adroit questioning, his trip to the summit of the cliff with Vance was brought out; but when Gunthar became too voluble regarding the blood spot, he was somewhat abruptly dismissed, and Darrup was called. He appeared cowed and had little to add to Gunthar's testimony. Old Jed proved a somewhat pathetic figure on the witness stand, and Brander wasted no time on him.

Vance was called next. Brander's questions elicited largely repetitions of the testimony already given; and despite the coroner's obvious attempt at caution, the blood stain by the scrub oak on the cliff was necessarily gone into at considerable length. Brander seemed to attach no particular importance to it and contrived a subtle suggestion that the blood might have been other than human blood. I myself was conscious of a fleeting mental image of some boy or amateur huntsman shooting a rabbit scurrying over the snow.

"Were there footprints anywhere near the spot?" Brander asked.

"No. No footprints," Vance answered. "There were, however, vague impressions in the snow."

"Anything definite?"

"No." And Vance was permitted to step down.

Doctor Quayne was then sworn in. His dignity and soft manner were impressive. The jury listened with patent respect. The doctor's testimony was perfunctory and technical. He told of the condition of the body when he first saw it; estimated the time of death; and hastened over the findings of the autopsy. He emphasized, however, the peculiar skull wound over Wallen's right ear.

"Now, this skull wound, doctor," the coroner interposed. "Just what was peculiar about it?"

"It was somewhat sharply outlined and depressed, running from the right ear for about four inches toward the temple—not exactly what one would expect from even violent contact with a flat surface."

"There was snow where Wallen struck?"

"About an inch, I should say."

"Did you examine the ground under the snow for a possible projection?"

"No. It would have been visible had it been there."

"But there are projecting rocks on the cliff between the upper ledge and the ground, aren't there?"

"Slight ones. Yes."

"Is it not possible, then, Wallen's head glanced one of these rocks in falling?"

Doctor Quayne pursed his lips. He expressed considerable doubt.

"However," persisted Brander, "you couldn't say definitely—could you, doctor—that this particular injury was wholly incompatible with the fall?"

"No. I couldn't say that definitely. I merely state that the injury seemed strange in the circumstances; one hardly to be expected."

"But still,"—Brander leaned forward with marked courtesy—"you'll pardon me, doctor, if I insist on the point. Such an injury would have been *possible* in an accidental fall from the cliff?"

"Yes,"—Doctor Quayne's tone showed annoyance—"it would have been possible."

"That will be all, doctor. Thank you for your clarity and help."

O'Leary was then called. His testimony, brief and businesslike, served merely to corroborate that of preceding witnesses. As he stepped down there came an unexpected and dramatic interlude. Guy Darrup suddenly leaped to his feet.

"You ain't doin' fair to Lief Wallen, Mr. Brander," he shouted righteously. "You ain't askin' for the things where truth lies. I could tell you—"

Brander struck the table with his gavel. "If you have evidence to give," he said with acerbity, "you should have stated it when you were on the stand."

"You didn't ask me the right questions, you didn't, Mr. Brander. I know plenty about poor Lief."

"Swear him in again, Constable."

"Not comfortin' for us," whispered Vance to O'Leary.

"Brander has no choice." O'Leary, too, was apprehensive.

Darrup took the oath a second time.

"Now give us your withheld evidence, Darrup." Brander's biting tone was wasted.

"Maybe you don't know, Mr. Brander, the queer wrong things that goes on over there at the Squire's." Darrup spoke like a zealot aroused. "Mr. Gunthar's always a-bullyin'. An' he drinks too much to suit the Squire. He's been warned, he has. An' it was Lief Wallen that was gonna step in his boots—just like he stepped in Old Jed's boots. An' Lief wanted to marry that pretty girl of his—the one down there who looks after Miss Joan." Ella Gunthar drew back as he pointed. "Lief had a right. He'da made her a good honest husband. But Mr. Gunthar didn't want it. I guess he's got his own ideas." Darrup contorted his lips into a shrewd smile. "An' the girl didn't want it neither. She thinks she's better than us. An' there's been plenty o' trouble about it all—Lief wasn't a boy who'd give up easy..."

Darrup breathed noisily, and hurried on.

"But that ain't all, Mr. Brander—not by a long ways. Nothing's right up there at the Squire's. There's funny things goin' on. Deep, dark things—things you ain't taught about in the Bible. What's the girl doin' down in the Green Glen at night times, I'd like to know? I've seen her sneakin' to Old Jed's hut. There's plottin'. Everybody's lyin'. Everybody's hatin'. An' Old Jed's queer. He don't talk to nobody. But he's up to something, always lookin' up at the trees, an' lettin' the stream water run through his fingers, like a kid. An' then, just when young Lief's about to step into Mr. Gunthar's job, he goes an' falls off the cliff. Lief knew his way about the grounds better'n to do that. Anyway, what's he doin' up there that time o' night when he's supposed to be watchin' round the Manor?"

Brander's patience gave out. His gavel smashed down.

"Did you come here to vent your hates, man? That's not evidence. That's old women's talk."

"*Not evidence!*" shrieked Darrup. "Then ask Mr. Gunthar's girl why she was runnin' down the slope from the cliff at twelve o'clock that night when Lief *fell over!*"

"What's that?"

"You heard me, you did, Mr. Brander. I was workin' late in the pavilion, fixin' things for the Squire's party. An' here she comes runnin' down the slope an' turned right by the pavilion. An' she was cryin', too."

I looked at Ella Gunthar. Her face was white, her lips trembled. There was a subdued commotion in the room. Brander hesitated, looked uneasy. He rustled through some papers before him. Then he looked angrily at Darrup.

"Your statements are irrelevant." He paused. "Unless, perhaps,"—there was jocularly in his tone—"you're accusing a mere girl of hurling a big fellow like Wallen over the cliff. Is that what you mean?"

"No, Mr. Brander." Darrup lapsed again into sullenness. "It wasn't her as could've done it. I'm only tellin' you—"

Again the gavel descended. "That's enough! This inquest is not for the purpose of injuring a young woman's reputation. It is merely to establish by what means Wallen came to his death, and, if by criminal means, at whose hand. Your speculations are, therefore, not helpful to this investigation. Step down, Darrup." Darrup obeyed, and Brander turned quickly to O'Leary. "Any more witnesses; Lieutenant?"

O'Leary shook his head.

"That's all then." Brander spoke briefly to the jury. They filed out. In less than half an hour their verdict was announced:

"We find that Lief Walton met his death by an accidental fall, under suspicious circumstances."

Brander was startled. He opened his mouth, was about to speak, but said nothing. The inquest was over.

"There's a verdict!" O'Leary scoffed to Vance as we drove back to the Manor. "No sense whatever. But Brander did his best."

"Yes—oh, yes. Not strictly legal, perhaps. Could have been worse. However..."

Ella Gunthar sat in the corner of the back seat beside me, a handkerchief pressed to her mouth, staring, unseeing, over the quiet winter landscape.

Vance took her gently in hand when we arrived. "Was Darrup telling the truth, my dear?" he asked.

"I don't know what you mean..."

"Were you running down the slope that night?"

"I—No. Of course not." She raised her chin defiantly. "I was at home at midnight. I didn't hear anything..."

"Why are you fibbing?" he asked sternly. She compressed her lips and said nothing. Vance went on with tenderness. "Maybe I know. You're a brave little soldier. But very foolish. Nothing's going to hurt you. I want you to trust me." He held out his hand.

Her eyes searched his face a moment. A faint smile showed on her lips. Then she placed her hand confidently in his.

"Now run along to Joan—and let that smile come all the way out."

## 8. SECRET PLANS

(Friday, January 17; evening.)

That evening, shortly after dinner, I stood with Vance on the veranda, looking out over the shadows on the skating rink. Echoes of music and gaiety drifted out to this secluded corner from the drawing room. Vance was in a serious, contemplative mood and smoked a *Régie* in silence, with a faraway expression.

Before long, however, there was the sound of approaching footsteps behind us, and Vance turned to greet Carlotta Naesmith.

"Brooding over your sins, Sir Knight?" the girl asked as she came up, "It really doesn't help. I've tried it...I sought you out to ask a most important question—tu-whit, tu-who: Do you skate gracefully?"

"At my time of life!" Vance pretended dejection. "But your query's flatterin'. I'm duly grateful."

"I was hoping you did skate. We do so need a Master of Ceremonies." She prodded him playfully. "You are hereby elected."

"It sounds interestin'. Explanat'ry instructions in order."

"It's like this," Miss Naesmith readily complied. "All the inmates of the zoo, barring the decrepit, are throwing a party for Richard tomorrow night. A sort of farewell celebration. It's to be on the rink out there...I'm hostess *pro tem*, you know. Originality expected from one so brilliant. Hence skates—that being the best idea the brain could conjure up."

"Sounds jolly," said Vance. "And my duties?"

"Oh, just to keep things going. Be officious—you can. Announce the animals. I'm sure you get it: every animal act has a ringmaster."

"Must I supply liniment?"

"You wrong us, sir!" she chirped indignantly. "We all skate amazingly well. I understand the bar will be temporarily padlocked."

"That could help, y' know." Vance smiled. "We're planning it quite seriously," she ran on. "We're even going to practice on the lower rink tomorrow. And we're going to Winewood in the morning to scout for costumes...Sounds a bit horrible, doesn't it?"

"Oh, no!" Vance protested. "Sounds jolly. As I said." He looked at the girl searchingly. "Tell me, Miss Naesmith, why did you try to hurt Ella Gunthar yesterday?"

Miss Naesmith's mood changed. Her eyes narrowed. She shrugged noncommittally.

"It doesn't take both my eyes to see that she and Dick are attracted to each other. They always were as kids."

"And Sally Alexander?"

She laughed without mirth. "Dick didn't speak to her all day. But let Ella worry."

"And it doesn't take both my eyes"—Vance did not shift his gaze—"to see that you will never pine away if Richard is diverted."

She pondered that a moment. "Dick's a nice boy. It's Papa Rexon's idea, you know. And who am *I* to upset his fondest dream?"

"Is it nice to be bitter?" Vance brought out his cigarettes. Miss Naesmith accepted one, and he lighted one himself.

"Oh, it's done in the best circles," the girl said facetiously. "And anyway, it's not the man's place to walk out. That's *my* prerogative."

"I see. Mere technique of etiquette at fault. Well, well."

The girl blew Vance a kiss and went back to the noisy drawing room.

"As I thought," he murmured, as if to himself. "Neither wants it. Richard makes the fact evident. *Ergo*, pique. Evincing by a display of cruelty. Ancient feminine sequence. However, nice girl at heart. It'll all arrange itself. Poor papa. Yes, the Raxon dynasty is crumblin'. Same like Bruce predicts." He looked out over the shadowy rink, drawing deeply on his *Régie*. "Come, I've a wishful idea." He spoke irrelevantly as he turned suddenly and went inside.

We found Joan Raxon in her own sitting room across the hall. She was on a divan by the window, and Marcia Bruce was reading to her.

"Why aren't you in the drawing room, young lady?" Vance asked pleasantly.

"I'm resting tonight," the girl replied. "Carlotta told me there's to be a big party for Dick tomorrow night, and I want to feel well, so I won't miss any of it."

Vance sat down. "Would it tire you too much if I talked to you a few minutes?"

"Why, no. I'd love it."

Vance turned to Miss Bruce. "Mind if I speak with Miss Joan alone?"

The housekeeper rose in resentful dignity and went to the door. "More mystery." Her tone was hollow. Her green eyes flashed.

"Oh, quite," laughed Vance. "A dark plot, in fact. But I can complete my dire machinations in ten minutes. Come back then, what? There's an angel."

The woman went without a word.

"I want to talk a moment about Ella." Vance drew up his chair beside the slight reclining figure of Joan Raxon.

"Dear Ella," the girl said sweetly.

"She is a dear, isn't she?...I've wondered since I've been here why I never see her on the rink. Doesn't she skate?"

Joan Raxon smiled sadly. "Oh, she used to love skating. But I guess she's lost her interest—since I fell."

"But I know you love to see others skating and being happy."

She nodded. "I do. I do. I've never forgot what fun I used to have myself. That's why Dad kept up the rinks and the pavilion. So I can sit on the veranda and watch the others. He often brings famous skaters up here just to perform for me."

"He'd do anything he thought would make you happy," said Vance.

She nodded again, emphatically. "And so would Ella...You know, Mr. Vance, I'm really a very lucky girl. And I do have wonderful times just watching others do the things I'd love to do."

"That's why I thought Miss Ella might be doing your skating for you, so to speak."

The girl turned her head slowly toward the window. "Maybe I'm to blame, Mr. Vance. I've often thought that."

"Tell me about it," Vance urged softly.

"Well, you see, when I was a little girl, just after my accident, Ella went out on the rink and skated—she was a beautiful skater. I watched her and I was very selfish, I think. Just the sight of her skating seemed to hurt me. I don't exactly understand it. I was such a baby. It—it—"

"I understand, my dear."

"And when Ella came back to the veranda I was crying...After that, for several years, I saw Ella only at intervals. She was at school, you know. And we never spoke again about her skating."

Vance took her hand gently. "She was probably too busy with other things to keep up her skating. Or perhaps she lost interest because you couldn't join her. You needn't feel guilty...But it wouldn't hurt you any more, would it?"

"Oh, no." She forced a smile. "I wish she *would* skate again. I was just terribly foolish."

"We're all foolish when we're young." Vance laughed.

The girl nodded seriously. "I'm not foolish—that way—any more. Now when I see some wonderful skater I wish it were Ella. I know she could have done it."

"I know just how you feel." As he rose the door opened and Marcia Bruce entered.

"The plot's concocted," said Vance. "And I'm sure I haven't tired the young lady. She's quite ready to hear the ending of the story you were reading to her."

As we came out again into the hail and approached the stairway two figures stood conversing earnestly in a secluded nook at the rear. They were Carlotta Naesmith and Stanley Sydes. Vance merely glanced toward them and proceeded to the drawing room.

## 9. AN ABRUPT SUMMONS

(Saturday, January 18; forenoon.)

The next morning Vance rose in good season and, after a hasty cup of coffee, left the house, alone, disappearing down the wide path which led past the pavilion to Gunthar's cottage. Shortly after his departure the other guests straggled down to the breakfast room and then assembled before the spacious gabled garage. One by one the cars were brought out and the cavalcade swung gaily up the hill to the main road and toward Winewood. Half an hour or so later the housekeeper piloted Joan Rexon tenderly to the now deserted veranda and with motherly attentions installed her on the specially built *chaise longue* near the windows overlooking the skating rink.

Barely was the girl settled when Vance and Ella Gunthar turned the corner of the path by the pavilion and came toward the house.

"You see, Miss Joan," Vance said as they entered, "not only do I see your charming companion home in the evening, but I escort her to you in the morning."

Ella Gunthar smiled. She seemed particularly happy. There was a new sparkle in her eyes. Marcia Bruce, apparently sensing something unusual, looked from Ella to Vance and back again. Then she rose, patted Joan Rexon fondly, and went indoors.

Vance remained on the veranda a while, chatting in his most trivial manner, and finally went inside to seek the comfort of the easy chair in his room. He seemed preoccupied and lay back, smoking listlessly for some time. His meditations, whatever they were, were interrupted by a knock on the door. Lieutenant O'Leary came in and sat down. There was an added sternness in his aquiline face.

"I wanted to see you alone, Mr. Vance. The butler said you were here, so I took the liberty..."

"Delighted, Lieutenant." Vance rearranged himself in his chair and lighted another *Régie*. "I trust you haven't brought disconsolate tidin's."

O'Leary fumbled with his pipe a moment without replying. When he got it going he looked up.

"I wonder, sir, if, by any chance, you have the same idea I have?"

"It could be." Vance's eyebrows went up questioningly. "What is your thought?"

"I'm convinced I know who killed Wallen."

Vance lay back lethargically and studied the strong set face of the man opposite.

"Amazin'!" he murmured. Then he shook his head. "No. No such thoughts here. Mind a blank as to that. Anyway, thanks for your confidence. Could you stretch it further?"

O'Leary, hesitant at first, now seemed eager to talk.

"I figure it this way, sir: I don't think Guy Darrup was lying at the inquest yesterday."

"No. Not lying. Merely impulsive and ingenuous. A simple honest mind ruled by zealous emotions. Indignations churned up in him, and boiled over."

"Then you believe him?"

"Oh, yes. Quite. No alternative. Fact is, I'd done a spot of spyin' around myself and already knew most of what he poured forth. Not a pleasant situation here and abouts. But where's it criminal? I need more guidance. Do you have it?"

"Here's how I've put it all together: Gunthar drinks too much and is about to be discharged. Wallen's slated for the promotion. That in itself is a good enough motive with rugged straightforward natures. Gunthar has just such a nature. He's not subtle, and apt to be cruel in his cups: he'd take the straight line—strong and forthright—when perplexed with a problem. Now, add to this motive the friction between him and Wallen regarding his daughter's future. Wouldn't you say that would set the stage?"

"Granted." Vance nodded. "Opportunity even simpler. But continue, Lieutenant."

"Exactly, sir. A fine opportunity. Gunthar knows the lay of the land. He knows Wallen's habits and knows his weaknesses. What could be easier for him than to inveigle Wallen to the cliff on some pretext, bash him over the head, and throw him over into the Gulch?...Miss Gunthar probably suspected her father's intent, followed him secretly up the cliff, and, when the thing was done, came running down, crying."

"And what could Gunthar hope to gain?" asked Vance indifferently. "He would still be discharged."

"Oh, I know Wallen wasn't the only available man for the job. Rexon can get a dozen others, given a little time. But I gather Gunthar intended to give up his tipling—which is only of recent origin—and insinuate himself again into Rexon's good graces."

"But Gunthar was still drinking too much yesterday, I saw him both before and after the inquest."

"That substantiates my theory," O'Leary declared. "He needed it to buck him up—the experience is enough to undo a stronger man."

"True," conceded Vance. "The point fits snugly. What else, Lieutenant?"

"Gunthar threatened Wallen twice."

"Gossip?"

"Necessarily, of course. But I believe it's authentic enough. It'll be sworn to by reliable witnesses."

"A clever analysis, Lieutenant," drawled Vance. "But not a defense-proof case."

O'Leary showed resentment. "That's not all, sir." He pulled himself forward in his chair. "Gunthar can't prove a satisfactory alibi for the supposed time of the killing. He came into Murphy's tavern at Winewood at ten o'clock that night. He was nervous and drank more than usual. He left at about half-past eleven. It takes nearly half an hour to walk here from Winewood. An hour later Sokol, the druggist in Winewood, was driving home from a late party and saw Gunthar crossing the meadow on the far side of Tor Gulch. The man thought nothing of it at the time; but after the inquest he figured the information might have some bearing, and told me about it. True enough, Gunthar was headed for his cottage. But that isn't the short cut from Winewood.—And it is the route he would have taken if he'd first been to the cliff...Does that strengthen my case against Gunthar?" finished O'Leary doggedly.

"Oh, markedly," Vance readily agreed. "All rather circumstantial, however, isn't it, Lieutenant?"

"That may be." There was a touch of bravado in his voice: a satisfying sense of triumph over Vance. "But sufficient grounds for

arresting the man."

"Oh, tut, tut. I wouldn't do that." Vance was all mildness. "So far you've done exceeding well, Lieutenant. You put things together deuced cleverly. Why spoil it all by moving too precipitately? Tie a few more ends."

"I don't intend to act speedily. I could do with a few more facts."

"Exactly. A common need of mankind. I'll bear your theory in mind. Maybe I'll be able to supply the missing facts. Credit all yours."

O'Leary knocked out his pipe and rose. "I've several lines I'm following quietly. But I thought I'd tell you which way they're leading. I was hoping you might see things from my point of view."

"I do," Vance assured him. "You've done well. Thanks again for your confidence."

When O'Leary had shaken hands and gone, Vance crushed out his cigarette and walked to the window.

"Deuce take it, Van," he said, "the man's too specious. Speciousness. Curse of our modern age. He thinks straight, though. Competent chap. All for the best. Not a nice theory. I hope he's wrong."

An hour later Vance went below. The party that had driven off to Winewood earlier had returned. We saw some of them in the lower hall. From the drawing room came sounds indicating others there.

Doctor Quayne was sitting with Joan Rexon and Ella Gunthar on the veranda. He got up when he saw us and smiled.

"You come just in time, Mr. Vance," his pleasant voice greeted us. "Now you can entertain the young ladies. I'll have to run away in a few minutes to see some of my patients who need me much more than Joan does. I dropped by to make sure she was strong enough for the party tonight, and she doesn't need me at all. With the rest last night and this beautiful mild weather, she's all in readiness for the festivities."

"Anyway," Miss Rexon said, "I managed to keep you here an hour, doctor."

"That was purely social, my dear Joan." He turned back to Vance. "If all my patients were as charming as these two young ladies I'd never complete my rounds. The temptation to remain and visit would be greater than I could resist."

"Mr. Vance, is flattery supposed to be a cure?" Joan Rexon seemed very happy.

"There can be no flattery where you are concerned," Vance returned. "I know that Doctor Quayne means every word he says to you."

Several of the guests came out, joined us a moment to make a fuss over Joan Rexon, and then returned indoors. The midday siren sounded. Bassett, too, I noticed, strolled out; but he merely nodded and remained at the other end of the veranda. He sat down at a small table and began a game of solitaire.

The doctor glanced at his watch. "Good Heavens! That was the noon signal!" He gave the two girls a cordial bow. "You're both a corrupting influence." He went quickly through the drawing-room door. A few minutes later we saw him drive away.

We remained on the veranda for another half hour, relaxing in the warm sunshine, and Vance entertained the girls with tales of his travels in Japan. In the midst of his engaging narrative he glanced toward the French doors just behind us. Excusing himself suddenly, he hastened toward the door. As he stepped inside he turned and beckoned me to follow.

Higgins was standing just by the entrance, his face like chalk, his watery old eyes bulging. Fear and horror pervaded his entire being as he clasped and unclasped his hands against his breast.

"Thank God you were here, Mr. Vance!" His voice quavered and the words were barely audible. "I couldn't find Mr. Richard. Come quickly, sir. Something terrible—" He moved swiftly toward the rear of the main stairs and led us to Carrington Rexon's den.

There, on the floor before the grate, lay the owner of Rexon Manor.



## 10. THE MISSING KEY

(Saturday, January 18; 12:30 p.m.)

Vance, down on one knee in a moment, cursorily examined the coagulating trickle of blood behind Carrington Raxon's right ear. He listened a moment to the labored breathing, then sought the pulse. He turned the man's face toward the light, found it ashen pale. He raised the upper eyelid of one eye; the eyeball was firm, the pupil contracted. He touched the cornea with his fingertip. The lids immediately compressed tightly.

"Not serious," Vance announced. "He's reacting now from unconsciousness...I say, Higgins, summon the doctor immediately." He loosened Raxon's collar and stock.

Higgins coughed.

"I phoned Doctor Quayne before I came out to you, sir. Fortunately, he was at home, sir. He should be here directly."

"Stout fella, Higgins. Now, if you'll call Lieutenant O'Leary—tell him to come here at once. Urgent. Explain, if necessary."

"Yes, sir." Higgins picked up the telephone, put through the call, and returned the receiver. "The Lieutenant says he'll be here in ten minutes, sir."

Vance stepped to the window and opened it. Then he went to the fireplace and added a fresh log. The crackling flames seemed to dissipate the gloom that hung over the room. A knock on the door was followed by the entry of Doctor Quayne, bag in hand.

"Good God! What's this!" He rushed to Raxon.

"Not too serious, doctor. No. Bad rap on the head." Vance moved away a step. "He should be coming to. Every indication of return of muscular tone. I found his pulse weak but regular. There was a definite corneal reflex when I opened his eye. Unmistakable resistance when I moved his head."

Quayne nodded and fussed with the wound. A low moan came from Raxon. His eyes opened, glazed, unseeing. At an order from Quayne, Higgins brought brandy. The doctor forced a stiff dose gently between Raxon's lips. The prostrate man moaned again and closed his eyes.

"Lucky I went home for lunch before continuing on my rounds..." The doctor chatted casually as he proceeded to examine Raxon. Finally he rose. "Everything quite in order," he finished cheerfully.

Raxon's eyes opened again, almost clear now. He recognized Vance and Quayne, attempted a smile, winced, and raised a hand to the back of his head.

"We'll take care of that in a moment." Quayne was kindly reassuring. Then, with Higgins' help, he placed Raxon on the sofa. With deft fingers he dressed the wound, continuing his assurances to the man.

While the doctor was thus busied, Lieutenant O'Leary came in. Vance, in a low tone, gave him the details.

"May we put a query or two now?" Vance asked as the doctor stepped away from the sofa.

"Certainly, certainly," Quayne told him. "Mr. Raxon'll be quite all right now."

Vance motioned Higgins from the room, and stepped to the sofa with O'Leary.

"Now, what can you tell us, old friend?" he asked.

"I doubt if I can tell you anything, Vance." Raxon's voice was low and husky, but it gained in volume as he continued. "I'd just risen from my desk to ring for Higgins...I must have been struck from behind." His hand moved to his head again. "The next thing I knew, you and Quayne were with me."

"Any idea how long ago that was?"

"Only a vague one, I'm afraid." Raxon thought a moment..."But wait! I think I heard the first notes of the siren before I lost consciousness...Yes. I'm positive. I recall being annoyed because it was so near twelve and my breakfast tray hadn't been removed. It's usually taken out of my way by eleven. That's why I was going to call Higgins."

"Had you been here in the den since you came down this morning, sir?" O'Leary put in.

"More or less, yes, Lieutenant. But I was out of the room for a few minutes once or twice."

"Had any one been here with you?" asked Vance.

"Yes. Bruce came in for instructions, as she usually does when there are guests. And my son spent about a half hour with me. Doctor Quayne here stepped in to say hello before he went out to Joan. Sydes and Carlotta came in for a minute. Some of the other guests did, too. I'll try to think back, if you want to know who else."

"No—oh, no. Really doesn't matter." Vance stepped back.

"Do you recall any feeling of giddiness when you first rose to call Higgins?" the doctor asked. "Judging from the wound, I'd say it was highly possible you hit one of the fire irons as you fell."

"I don't see how," answered Raxon a bit nettled. "I wasn't dizzy. The sensation was I was struck from behind."

"All! I see," said Quayne thoughtfully.

Raxon suddenly started forward, his eyes averted frantically. A bunch of keys on a long chain dangled from his trousers pocket over the edge of the divan. He caught the keys and sank back fumbling with them hysterically.

"The key!" he gasped after a moment. "The Gem-Room key! God in Heaven! It's *gone*!"

"Easy now, Raxon," admonished the doctor. "It can't be gone. Look again—calmly."

Raxon ran his hands hopelessly through his pockets. O'Leary searched vainly on the floor. Vance stepped from the room, returning instantly to report that the Gem-Room door was safely locked.

"Proves nothing!" exploded Raxon. "We must get in there at once. I'll get the duplicate key."

He rose feebly as he spoke, and moved unsteadily across the room. Snatching a priceless Rembrandt etching from the opposite wall, he threw it carelessly aside. Then he pressed a small wooden medallion, and a narrow panel shifted, revealing an oval steel plate with a

dial and knob. His nervous fingers managed a sequence of turns—left and right and left again. Finally he pulled the plate open and reached inside the hidden wall safe. He brought out a key with a long slender shaft. Taking it from him, Vance led the way through the hall.

He had a little difficulty fitting the key into the lock, but finally succeeded and pushed the heavy steel door inward. Rexon brushed past him excitedly and came to a sudden stop in the middle of the famous Gem Room.

"They're gone?" His voice was little more than a hoarse whisper. "The most precious part of my collection. *And Istar's*—" His voice broke as he pointed spasmodically and began to sway.

Quayne stepped to him immediately, and took his arm. "My dear friend," he cautioned. He turned to us. "I'll take him back to the den, gentlemen." He led Rexon from the room.

Vance closed the door after the two men, and locked it. Lighting a cigarette, he moved leisurely through that interesting room, with O'Leary following him in silence. The room was completely void of furnishings except for the ebony carpet and the numerous metal-bound glass cases along the walls. Emeralds of various shapes and sizes, in exquisite and unique settings, were displayed against white velvet backgrounds. In the corner to which Rexon had pointed a case larger than the others had its front pane shattered. A smaller case beside the large one was similarly broken. Both were empty. But none of the other cases in the room seemed to have been disturbed.

"Very mystifyin'," Vance murmured. "Only two cases broken."

"Probably didn't have time; hurried job," suggested O'Leary.

"Quite, Lieutenant. All indications pointin' thus...Wonder what Istar has to do with it."

He stepped to the side window and forced the catch open. O'Leary looked on as he examined the heavy criss-cross iron bars that enclosed the entire window frame. Then they made a similar inspection of the other window.

"My word! Here's something interestin', Lieutenant. Bit of tamperin', what?" He directed O'Leary's attention to some peculiar ragged scratches across three of the bars.

O'Leary's brows went up. "Whoever it was must've tried this means of entry first and found it too cumbersome an undertaking. No patience."

"Or," returned Vance, "an interruption occurred. Aborted attempt. Could be. Let's toddle."

They reclosed the windows. Vance took another look about the room before unlocking the unwieldy door.

In the den Doctor Quayne was attempting futilely to console Rexon. "It's not as if they'd all been taken." Platitudes like that. "Only a few pieces..."

"*Only a few pieces!*" repeated Rexon despairingly. "The very pieces that matter! If they'd taken all the others and left me those—" He did not complete the sentence.

Vance handed Rexon the key. "I've relocked the door, of course. Now tell us just what is missing. And how is Istar mixed up in it?"

Rexon jerked himself up in his chair; leaned wearily against the desk. "Every unset stone I owned. Spent a lifetime collecting 'em."

"Those would be the easiest to dispose of, I take it," observed O'Leary respectfully.

"Yes. Exactly. A fortune for any one into whose hands they came. All but the Istar..."

"Again, wherefore Istar?" persisted Vance.

"Queen Istar's necklace," groaned Rexon. "The rarest piece in my collection. From Egypt—eighteenth dynasty. It can never be replaced. Six high cabochon emeralds of flawless cut on a chain of smaller stones set in silver and pearls...You must remember it, Vance."

"Ah, yes. Of course," said Vance sympathetically. "Naughty queen—Istar. Always poppin' in and out to annoy folks."

O'Leary was making notes in a small book. "When were you last in the room?" asked Vance.

"This morning, early. I go in every morning. Had Bruce there with me to do a little dusting. For the display to my guests this evening."

"Ah, yes. Very sad. Now, of course, there'll be no display."

"No." Rexon shook his head in keen disappointment.

"But the youngsters must have their party tonight as though nothing had happened. You agree, Rexon?" Vance's tone was significantly imperative.

"Yes, by all means," complied Rexon. "No need to upset everybody."

The doctor rose presently, picked up his bag. "You don't need my services any more just now, Rexon. Wish I could be more helpful. But I'll be back this evening to keep an eye on Joan for you."

"Thank you, Quayne. That's very good of you."

The doctor bowed himself out.

O'Leary closed his notebook. "Tell me, Mr. Rexon, was your overseer in to see you this morning?"

"Gunthar? No," replied Rexon. "He's probably been working on the rink and the pavilion all morning. But it's strange you should ask that. Higgins told me when I came down this morning that Gunthar had been here about half an hour earlier asking if he could see me. Higgins told him I wasn't down yet, and the man went away grumbling to himself. I don't understand it, for he never comes here unless I send for him."

O'Leary nodded with satisfaction. He stepped to the open window, lowered it and raised it again. Then he leaned out for a moment as if inspecting the flagging below. There was a speculative look in his eyes as he rejoined us.

In the hall Vance drew the Lieutenant aside. "What about Gunthar?" he asked in a low tone. "Any secrets to unbosom?"

"It's a clearer-cut case now than it was yesterday." The Lieutenant was solemn. "You admitted I had a good case then, sir. But add this to it: I tried to see Gunthar this morning. One of the workmen told me he had gone to the Manor to speak to the Squire. Seemed natural. So I waited around a while. But Gunthar didn't come back."

O'Leary cocked a triumphant eye at Vance.

"You see, sir, how easy it would have been for the man to have entered the den through the window, either then or later when Mr. Rexon was out of the room. He had only to wait back of the screen till the time was ripe. When he had struck the blow it would have

been a moment's work for him to snatch the key and get to the Gem Room."

Vance nodded. "Deuced clever, Lieutenant. Logical from many points of view."

"Yes. And what's more," persisted O'Leary, "I'm not at all convinced his daughter Ella wasn't mixed up in it—you know, sir, like giving him the tip-off—"

"Oh, my dear fellow! You startle me no end. I say, aren't you carrying this prejudice against Gunthar a bit too far?"

O'Leary looked surprised that Vance apparently could not appreciate the circumstantial possibilities of the situation.

"No, I wouldn't say so," he retorted with the calmness of conviction. "I've got enough to arrest the girl along with her father."

"But on what grounds, Lieutenant?" Vance was concerned.

"As a material witness, if nothing else," was O'Leary's confident rejoinder.

Vance lighted a cigarette and blew a long ribbon of smoke. "Not attemptin' to try your case, Lieutenant. No. It's far too logical. Merely making an urgent request. Neither the girl nor papa is likely to run off tonight, what? Surely, tomorrow will serve your purpose quite as well. You'll wait, Lieutenant? I'm beggin'."

O'Leary studied Vance several moments. There was no denying the look of admiration beneath his perturbation and doubt. Finally he nodded. "I'll wait, sir. Though it goes against my best judgment." And he strode off across the veranda and disappeared down the side steps.

Vance, too, stepped out on the veranda a moment later. Joan Raxon still sat where we had left her, but Ella Gunthar was no longer there. In her place sat Carlotta Naesmith.

"My word!" murmured Vance. "No use hopin' the doughty Lieutenant didn't note Miss Ella's absence. No. Observin' fellow, O'Leary."

Bassett was still hunched over the table where he had started his game of Canfield. Stanley Sydes had joined him and sat in a chair opposite, acting as banker. A decanter of Bourbon stood between them.

## 11. FAREWELL SOIRÉE

(Saturday, January 18; 9 p.m.)

The afternoon had passed uneventfully. After lunch Carlotta Naesmith and Stanley Sydes invited Vance to go with the others and watch their practice routine on the ice. He had politely declined. Richard Raxon, who likewise remained at the Manor, had talked briefly with Vance regarding the stolen emeralds and spent the rest of the afternoon brooding about the matter. Miss Joan retired to her sitting room for a rest. The house was unusually quiet.

At dinner there was excited talk about the party. Especially were there mysterious hints of a surprise performer whom Mr. Raxon had invited for the occasion. No one seemed to have any specific information, however.

Dinner over, the older guests assembled on the veranda, grouping themselves on either side of Miss Joan's *chaise longue* at the center window. The night was clear and not too cold.

Shortly before nine Marcia Bruce brought Miss Joan out to her place.

"Please pull up a chair for Ella beside me," the girl requested. "She should be here any minute now."

Miss Bruce complied.

Doctor Quayne came up. After a word of encouragement to Miss Joan and a greeting to Richard, he seated himself beside Carrington Raxon behind the young people. Jacques Bassett stood against the closed doors at the rear. Lieutenant O'Leary unobtrusively found a place for himself.

A high, old-fashioned phonograph was wheeled out to the rink by Higgins and another servant. A box of records was carried down.

Vance, on skates, in immaculate evening attire, with a white muffler at his throat, appeared on the rink. Additional lights were turned on as he came forward.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began in mock ceremonious style. His voice was clear and resonant. "I have been honored with the privilege of conducting this memorable event. I confidently promise you an evening of most unusual regalement."

General applause greeted his statement.

"We have with us tonight," he proceeded with exaggerated formality, "performers of wide renown. I might even say, of world-wide renown. Most of you, I am sure, will recognize each name as it is announced..."

Another round of applause drowned out his next words.

"The first of our guest stars," he resumed, "is Miss Sally Alexander. She will entertain you in her own incomparable manner."

Miss Alexander came up from the pavilion, a smiling urchin in colorful tatters, skating gracefully into the spotlight thrown from an upper window of the Manor. She sang a gay Parisian chansonette of dubious significance, and was rewarded with much laughter and cheering. Her next number was a monologue depicting an intoxicated celebrity attempting to thread his way through a bevy of admiring debutantes. Skates made the task none too easy. The small audience was genuinely amused, their approval long and loud.

Vance assisted the young woman back to the pavilion and returned with Dahlia Dunham and Chuck Throme, both in trunks and jerseys. They skated into the spotlight and made a deep bow. Vance raised the young woman's hand.

"On my right, wearing red trunks," he announced, "is Miss Dahlia Dunham—a most charmin' battler, with many a vict'ry to her credit. On my left, in white trunks, is Jocky Throme, with a list of wins quite as impressive. The two will now go through three rounds for the skate-weight championship."

The gloves were put on, the seconds waved away; the referee came forward, and the bout started. The two contenders sparred lightly for a few seconds. They went into a clinch and were separated by the referee. The slippery ice under their skates sent many of the punches far afield. Those that connected did little damage. When Vance blew his whistle at the end of the third round Miss Dunham was declared the winner by popular acclaim. Chuck Throme, taking his defeat gallantly, essayed another bow. As on an earlier occasion, he carried the obeisance too far. His skates slid out from under him. He lay prone on the ice. Vance and Miss Dunham assisted him to his feet and helped him from the rink.

Joan Raxon sat up and looked about. "I wish Ella would come," I heard her say. "She's missing all the fun. Have you seen her, Dick?"

Richard Raxon shook his head glumly. "Maybe she's outside somewhere." He went to investigate.

Next Miss Maddox and Pat McOrsay presented a skit with a homemade miniature plane on runners. This was followed by Vance's announcement of Miss Naesmith's number with Stanley Sydes. In Spanish costume they creditably performed a series of dances to the accompaniment of the records Vance placed on the phonograph. The other performers joined them for the final tango. Richard Raxon had returned to the disconsolate Joan.

"And now," came Vance's voice again, "We have a surprise for you. I can't give you the name of this performer because she is practically unknown. We call her the Masked Marvel...But one moment! I must whisper in our maestro's ear what melody he is to play." He pantomimed comically to the phonograph as he put on a new record. The lovely strains of *Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald* came floating over the still night. And then...

A petite figure came tripping out on the ice with unbelievable ease and rhythm. Her costume of velvet and sequins shimmered gaily in the lights. A silk mask covered most of her face. Her spaced routine was exquisitely performed. With incredible grace she combined the most difficult school figures with spirals, spins, and jumps of daring originality.

Everyone gasped with delight. There was a remark that it must be Linda Höffler, the newest skating sensation. Some of the guests questioned Miss Joan and young Raxon. They disclaimed all knowledge. Carrington Raxon, when asked what famous importation he had bagged for the event, would give no information.

Each time the girl left the rink the applause was so loud and continuous that Vance had to bring her back.

Finally one voice called out, "Remove the mask!" The cry was taken up in unison. Vance whispered to the girl at his side. She

permitted him to take the mask from her face. Smiling happily, Ella Gunthar stood before us.

Joan Raxon arose in triumphant delight. "I knew it was Ella!" She was almost in tears. "I always knew Ella could do it. Isn't she marvelous, Richard?"

But young Raxon was already on the terrace steps, making his way to the rink. Carrington Raxon and the doctor stepped to Miss Joan's side.

"Oh, Dad!" the girl exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"It's as much a surprise to me as it is to you, my dear. Mr. Vance told me merely he had arranged something for you. I had no idea it was a surprise like this."

"All right, now. All right," Quayne put in admonishingly. "I think that's enough for this evening, Joan." The two men helped the girl indoors.

A noisy circle surrounded Ella Gunthar on the rink. The workmen, having been permitted to witness the performance, now moved off. The guests withdrew indoors.

Later they gathered in the drawing room. The performers came up from the pavilion, still in their costumes. Vance, showered with congratulations, disclaimed all credit.

"It's all Miss Naesmith's doing, I assure you," he told everyone.

Ella Gunthar came in, escorted by Richard Raxon. She was enthusiastically greeted on all sides. She seemed upset and nervous and remained only long enough to embrace Miss Joan and say a few words to her. Young Raxon's and Vance's offers to see her home were refused with polite determination. She hurried away alone.

The phonograph was brought back from the rink. Someone wound it up and started a record. Soon dancing began. Quayne brought the housekeeper in and directed her to get Miss Joan off to bed. The woman had a new look of pride about her and was almost cheerful as she took charge of the girl and led her from the room.

The gaiety of the party increased. Only Jacques Bassett sat morosely by himself. Quayne was about to approach him, but was buttonholed by Miss Naesmith with a request for the best antidote to seasickness. Richard Raxon joined Bassett at his table.

Vance had had enough. He bade his host good night. O'Leary came up with a questioning look. But Vance put him off.

"Let's sleep on it, Lieutenant," he said. "Come round before noon...Jolly party, what?...Cheeri-o."

O'Leary watched sullenly as Vance mounted the stairs.

## 12. QUEEN ISTAR'S NECKLACE

(Sunday, January 19; 9:30 a.m.)

Vance rose early again Sunday. After strong coffee he invited me to stroll with him in the clear winter sunshine. Snow had fallen in the early hours of the morning; the world about us was covered with a fresh white blanket. We took a footpath that led down to the small pond in the Green Glen where we had first come upon Ella Gunthar. As we skirted a high bush at one end of the pond a small cabin came into view.

"The Green Hermit's cottage, I'll warrant," commented Vance. "Sabbath morn visit to the druid in order."

The door was slightly ajar. Vance rapped. There was no response. He pushed the door wide open. At a small table near a window sat Old Jed. He looked up without surprise.

"Good morning," Vance said pleasantly from the threshold. "May we come in?"

The old man nodded indifferently. His attention was focused on some object between his fingers. As we approached him he raised his hands. The sun fell full on a dazzling necklace of emeralds.

"Six cabochons on a chain of smaller stones," said Vance half to himself. Then admiringly to the old man: "Lovely, isn't it?"

Old Jed smiled with childish delight as he let the green stones slide between his fingers.

Vance sat down beside him. "What else have you?"

Old Jed shook his head.

"What did you do with the others?"

"No others. Only this." He spread the necklace on the table, inviting Vance to share his ecstasy. "Like the green meadows in springtime," he said mystically. "Like running streams of water—like God's trees in summer:—green, all beauty in nature is green." His eyes shone fanatically.

"Yes," said Vance, falling in with his mood. "Spring...the green of nature all about:

'And all the meadows, wide unrolled,

Were green and silver, green and gold."

He looked up kindly.

"Find it, Jed?"

A shake of the head from the old man. "Where did you get it?"

Another shake of the head. "You're a friend of Miss Ella?" the hermit asked as if eager to change the subject.

"Yes. Of course. And you are too."

The grey head bobbed enthusiastically up and down. "But that fellow Mr. Richard brought home with him. Are you a friend of his?"

"Mr. Bassett? No. No friend of his. Far from it...What about him?"

"No good," declared Old Jed with strict economy of words.

Vance raised his brows slightly. "Did he give you that green necklace?"

"No!" The old man was petulant. "He came here to make trouble for Miss Ella."

"Really, now! When was that?"

"He came here last night. Before the swell doin's up at the big house. He thought Miss Ella was alone. But I saw him." Old Jed cackled. "Now he won't come here no more."

"No? Why not?"

"He won't come no more," repeated the other vaguely... "But up at the big house, Mister: you'll take care of Ella?"

"Certainly," promised Vance. "She'll be all right...But tell me, Jed; how did you get that trinket?"

The old man looked back at him in blank silence.

Vance tried strategy. "It's for Miss Ella's sake I must know."

"Miss Ella, she doesn't do anything bad."

"Then tell me where you got that necklace," persisted Vance.

The old man looked about him in perplexity. His eyes came to rest on the small phonograph we had seen Ella Gunthar using. He looked up at Vance triumphantly. "There!" He pointed to the instrument.

Vance rose and brought it to the table. He opened it up and shook it, but without disclosing anything untoward. The old man picked up the necklace, placed it on the green felt base.

"So," he said simply. "It was hidden there when I found it."

Just then the door was pushed wide open again. Ella Gunthar stood there, a smile fading from her lips as she saw us. Old Jed stood up to greet her. Vance stepped across the room, took the girl gently by the hand, and led her to the table. Her glance fell on the open phonograph with the string of gems sparkling inside. Abruptly she turned away, her face white.

"How much do you know about this, Miss Gunthar?" Vance asked indulgently.

"I don't know—anything about it." Her answer was low and hesitant.

"But you've seen it before?"

"I—think so. In the Gem Room."

"How did it happen to be hidden in your little music box? Jed says he found it there."

"I—I don't know. Maybe it's not real."

"Oh, it's real enough, my dear."

"I don't know anything about it," she repeated stubbornly.

"Now. I think you're fibbing again. Do you know that just such a necklace, and many other costly stones, are missing from the Gem

Room?"

She nodded. "Richard told me last night."

"Did Richard give you this?"

"No!" She glared at Vance indignantly. "And Jed doesn't know anything about it either. And neither does my father! Oh, you're all trying to pin lies on father—don't you think I know why that police officer from Winewood is always hanging around the estate?" Her words came in a passionate rush.

Vance watched the unhappy girl appraisingly. "Who, then, my dear, do you think took the emeralds?" he asked calmly.

"Who?—who?" she echoed. She bit her lips. She thought for several moments. Then, as if on sudden impulse, she blurted defiantly:

"I took them—I took them, of course!"

"You took them!" Vance repeated skeptically. "What else did you take besides the Istar necklace, Miss Ella?"

"I don't know just what—some loose stones."

"How did you get into the Gem Room?"

"I found the door unlocked."

"Oh, come now, Miss Ella. Mr. Rexon's not in the habit of leaving the Gem-Room door unlocked."

"I found it unlocked," she insisted.

"And once inside the room, what did you do?" "I opened two of the cases."

Vance laughed softly. "You found those unlocked, too?"

She drew up with a start. Tears formed in her eyes.

"Then I—I—broke them," she stammered.

"I see, Miss Ella. Then you won't mind coming with me to the Manor to tell Mr. Rexon all about it?"

"No." She swallowed hard. "I won't mind."

Old Jed looked from Vance to the girl and back to Vance. He furrowed his brow in an attempt to concentrate.

"Mr. Vance," the girl asked timidly, "will Miss Joan have to know about it? And—and—Richard?"

"I'm afraid so," said Vance. "But perhaps not at once, my dear. Are you ready to go?"

Vance pocketed the necklace and accompanied the girl from the cabin. Again he took the footpath by which we had come. He made no further mention of the missing gems. Instead he asked: "Bassett been making himself objectionable again?"

She kept her eyes straight ahead. "It was nothing...Did Jed tell you?...I never saw Jed so angry. I think Mr. Bassett was really frightened."

The rest of the walk was in silence.

Carrington Rexon was alone in the den. Ella Gunthar entered the room as Vance held the door for her. She stepped to one side and stood shyly with her back against the wall. Vance indicated a chair. The girl looked from him to Rexon and came forward.

"Now, my dear," prompted Vance as she sat down.

She lowered her eyes, gripped the sides of the chair.

"Mr. Rexon, I—" She raised her head and then spoke very quickly. "I took the emeralds."

"You *what*?" Rexon asked in astonishment.

"I took the emeralds," she repeated more slowly.

Rexon laughed bitterly in spite of himself.

"I can prove it!" she declared recklessly. She extended her hand to Vance for the necklace. He brought it out, gave it to her. She placed it diffidently on the desk beside her.

Rexon took it up eagerly, looked at it carefully. "The Istar necklace! Ah!" Then shrewdly: "Where are the rest?"

The girl shook her head. "I won't tell you. I won't!" Her compressed lips indicated unmistakably that she would say no more.

Rexon leaned back in his chair and studied the girl critically. Then crisply: "And you're the girl my son wants to marry!"

Ella Gunthar's face suddenly flushed. Rexon's words had startled her.

"Oh, yes, my dear young lady," Rexon continued coldly. "You didn't think I knew of the affair that's been going on between you and Richard. Miss Naesmith told me about it only last night—Miss Naesmith, the girl I hoped would be his wife...Bah! After all I've done for you! You're not content to steal the love of my only son. You must take my emeralds too." He half rose in his anger. "I'm almost glad this thing has happened. It will be well worth the loss of the emeralds if I can save Richard..."

Vance stepped swiftly round the desk and put his hand on the older man's shoulder. "My dear old friend, please! Don't turn a disappointment into a tragedy."

Rexon relaxed under the persuasive pressure of Vance's hand.

Tears flooded Ella Gunthar's eyes. Vance came to her side.

"Poor child," he said soothingly, "don't you think this tragic farce has gone far enough? It's time for the truth now—all the truth you know. We're in the dark. We want your help. Some terrible forces are at work in the Manor here. Some dangerous criminal perhaps. You can help those you love only by telling us the truth. Will you?"

She took a deep breath, dried her eyes. "Yes, I will," she said with unexpected determination.

Vance sat down beside her. "Then tell me first: Whom are you trying to shield with this foolish tale of theft?"

"I—I don't know exactly. But it seemed that everyone I love had suddenly been caught in an awful trap. Poor Jed, whom you caught with the necklace; my father, whom I knew that police officer suspected of all sorts of things; and, somehow, Richard...And it was all mixed up in some horrible way with that night on the cliff when poor Lief was killed. I—I—it was all confusion. And it seemed that only I could help."

She buried her face in her hands, but when she looked up again her eyes were still dry.

"And I had to try to help them without knowing how to go about it; for I *really* didn't know...Only little things, here and there, that didn't seem to fit together."

"You poor child," murmured Vance again. "But please tell us what you do know—all the little things—anything that may come to

your mind. Maybe it will help us all—especially those you love most."

"Oh, I'll try! I'll try!" She spoke eagerly and braced herself. "Perhaps you think, Mr. Vance, that I insisted on going to the inquest Friday merely as an overcurious child."

"No," returned Vance. "Naturally, I've pondered the point. But no opinion."

"Well, anyway, you know all that I heard there. I think that jury was just anxious to get a bad job off their hands." (I could see that Vance was amazed at the sagacity indicated by her remark.) "And I've heard other things, too, Mr. Vance. I've heard the workmen saying it's strange that my father should have been the one to find Lief Wallen's body. ...Guy Darrup is still saying I should have married Lief.—Can a girl help it if she doesn't love a man?—Then I've heard my father say it's strange that Jed should have known just which way to go that morning. Jed, who wouldn't harm a fly!...I've heard that my father wasn't home at midnight on the night Lief died, and that it made things look pretty dark for him...Well, *I* wasn't at home at midnight either! Does that mean *I* killed Lief Wallen?..."

She broke off.

"I'm sorry if I sound all mixed up," she resumed. "But it's because I feel all mixed up...A little before twelve that night I came here. Richard asked me to. We hadn't had a chance to speak alone together all day. We were to meet at a favorite tree we have up behind the pavilion. I waited and waited. But Richard didn't come. And then I heard him talking to somebody.—He was angry, I think. But he must have gone back inside. That's when I went running down past the pavilion crying. Just as Guy Darrup said I did. But he didn't know the reason."

She paused and looked at Vance, then at Rixon.

"Anything more?" Vance gave her a searching glance.

"Haven't I said enough?" Her voice sounded weary.

"You haven't told us where you got the necklace."

"Must I?"

"It might help to clear up a deucedly involved situation, don't y' know."

"All right. But my father didn't take it!" She looked defiantly at Rixon. "I found it lying on the floor near the window in the dressing room reserved for me at the pavilion last night. I was going to return it to Mr. Rixon. But then Richard told me what had happened. I was afraid I'd be asked questions. I knew father was in the pavilion yesterday. Jed brought my costume up there for me. Father locked the room—to keep the surprise—and gave me the key. I was afraid to do anything with the necklace until I had time to think what would be best. And that's why I took it to Jed's cabin and hid it in my little music box...But my father didn't take it! And Old Jed didn't take it either!..."

Carrington Rixon looked profoundly disturbed and perplexed. Vance placed his hands on Ella Gunthar's shoulders and was about to raise her from the chair.

A knock on the door was followed by Higgins ushering in Lieutenant O'Leary with a plainclothes man in his wake.



### 13. THE SECOND MURDER

(Sunday, January 19; 11 a.m.)

O'Leary looked from Vance to the girl in the chair and then at the necklace spread on the desk before Rexon.

"Where did that come from, sir?" he inquired bluntly.

Vance briefly repeated the girl's account of the finding of the necklace.

"A likely story." O'Leary's tone was sarcastic...

The telephone rang. Rexon answered. Then: "It's from New York, Vance—for you. Private line, this. Perfectly safe. Go ahead." He pushed the instrument across the desk.

O'Leary drew his officer aside and spoke earnestly to him while Vance was at the telephone.

"...What caused the delay, Sergeant?"

Vance was saying. "Ah, records in Washington...I see...take it word for word..." He reached for paper and pencil. He wrote out a dictated message. I recognized the excitement under his calm demeanor as he worked quickly. "Thorough as always, Sergeant." He spoke with satisfaction as he threw down the pencil. "That gives me just what I need...No. Not necessary for you to come. Many thanks..."

He pushed the phone back and stood up. He sighed. He folded the message he had written out, and placed it in his pocket. He sat down again and lighted a *Régie*. "Well, Lieutenant?"

O'Leary came back to Ella Gunthar's chair. "I've kept my promise to you, sir." He was calm, unofficial. "I've waited, as you asked me to. Now I have no choice but to arrest this girl and her father. I think you will agree, sir. I brought this man for the purpose." He hesitated. "Unless you have additional information that will alter my decision."

"I think I have, Lieutenant." Vance turned to the girl in the chair. "Would you join Miss Joan on the veranda, Miss Ella?"

"I'm sorry, sir." O'Leary held up his hand peremptorily. "I don't believe I can allow that."

"Oh, I say! Then send your man with her. Perfectly safe, Lieutenant."

O'Leary scowled, but complied. The girl walked slowly from the room, followed by the husky Winewood constable.

"Thanks no end." Vance tossed his cigarette into the grate. "Lieutenant, I promised you additional information. Here it is." He brought forth the folded paper from his pocket, and passed it to O'Leary.

The Lieutenant unfolded it, glanced at it with quickly moving eyes, then read it aloud: "Whisky glass submitted shows clear prints of Jasper Biset. Description also corresponds. Biset reputed head of international organization of high-pressure jewel thieves. Generally keeps in background. No cause for criminal action against him available. Better known abroad, but would be recognized here. Last tabbed in Saint Moritz, Switzerland."

O'Leary looked up blankly.

"Let me explain further." Vance spoke. "On my first evening here I saw a face. Strangely familiar. Vague association. With Amsterdam. There were eyebrows meeting above the nose. Like a black shaft. But the face wasn't right. No. Something missin'. Should have been a mustache. Bristly. However...Mustaches come and go. On impulse, I took the glass from which the gentleman had been imbibing too much Bourbon. Sent it, with note and general description, to New York police. Hopin'...That's the verbatim report. Just received."

"Who is Jasper Biset?" O'Leary's voice was tinged with exasperation.

"Gent known to police as Jasper Biset is here under preferable name of Jacques Bassett. Guest of the Manor. More specifically of Mr. Richard Rexon."

Carrington Rexon gave a start but said nothing.

"Then you think he's the one—" began O'Leary.

"Don't know, Lieutenant. Those are all the facts I have. Bein' honest. Keepin' an open mind. Like yourself. But a chat with Biset—Bassett is clearly indicated—eh, what? Shall we do it here?"

O'Leary, somewhat dazed and uncertain, nodded.

Vance turned to Rexon. "Will you have the gentleman summoned, sir?"

Rexon, frowning deeply, rang. Higgins appeared and was given instructions. Vance paced up and down the room. He lighted a fresh *Régie*. The Lieutenant stood stoically at the window. He fumbled with his pipe.

Higgins returned. "Sorry, sir. Mr. Bassett is not in his room."

"Well, can't you find him, man?" Rexon showed impatience.

"It would seem, sir, the gentleman hasn't been in his room all night."

"Oh, my word!" Vance stood perfectly still, his cigarette halfway to his lips. "Are you sure, Higgins?"

"I knocked on the door, sir. No one answered. The door was unlocked, and I looked in, sir. The bed hasn't been slept in all night. I checked with the chambermaid, sir."

A groan escaped from Rexon.

O'Leary stood up, aggressively indignant. "I felt we should have acted sooner, Mr. Vance."

Vance ignored the implied reprimand. "Higgins, call the garage."

The butler dialed three numbers, handed the instrument to Vance.

"Any car been taken out this morning?" Vance waited a moment. "And last night?"...He put the telephone down. "Every car cozily in its place. Curious. Suppose we toddle up to the gentleman's boudoir."

The room showed no sign of disorder. One closet held a number of suits neatly arranged on their hangers. The other disclosed a grey topcoat, a tan one, two or three robes, and several pairs of shoes. Three hats rested on an upper shelf. From the closets Vance went to

the bureau, inspected the drawers. These were neatly filled with the customary accessories of a man of taste. A trunk stood in one corner of the room with a matching bag beside it. Vance opened these, found them empty.

"Can't see that we'll learn anything here." He took in every detail of the room. "Suggest we go down to Winewood. Confab with the station master might prove illuminatin'."

The Lieutenant's small car was parked outside the veranda. O'Leary turned toward it as we came down the steps.

"Oh, I say!" Vance checked him. "Please! Mind functions more efficiently at lesser speed. Let's go on foot. If you don't mind."

O'Leary shrugged. We continued to the end of the pathway, swung into the vehicle road leading through the estate to the county highway. The fresh layer of snow was unmarred but for a single set of tire tracks marking the Lieutenant's arrival an hour or two earlier.

Vance lighted a cigarette. We trudged along.

"Not every day one has the opportunity to lay his hands on a murderer." O'Leary spoke glumly. "Too bad if he's got away."

"Oh, yes. Quite. Very sad. But I'm not convinced the man is a murderer. My own observations contraindicative. No. Not the type that deals in murder. Too suave. Wouldn't bloody his hands."

"Then you don't think he killed Wallen in an earlier attempt to get at the emeralds?" O'Leary seemed surprised.

"No—oh, no. As I said. Not the type. However..."

"But you admit he's gone off now with the gems?"

"My dear Lieutenant! I admit nothing. Just lookin' round at present. Strivin' to learn."

"That throws us back on Eric Gunthar. Has he been asked to account for himself during yesterday's incident?"

"No. Not yet. Good thought, however. I'll speak with him later. 'Where were you on the night?' And all that sort of thing. Might help. Might not..." Vance flung the end of his cigarette aside.

We had just passed through the large gates and taken perhaps a hundred paces on the highway toward Winewood.

O'Leary brought out his pipe. "The car would have been quicker—"

"Quicker. Yes." Vance stopped abruptly. "But not as productive of results...Look yonder, Lieutenant."

He directed our gaze into a clump of trees at one side of the roadway, just beneath the towering wall of the Raxon estate. An irregular mound of snow, with patches of black here and there, ended in a pair of patent leather shoes.

"Might have driven right past that, don't y' know." Vance stepped through the undergrowth. O'Leary followed in abashed silence.

As we came nearer, the mass resolved itself into the outlines of a hunched human form, one arm twisted crazily under the torso; the other extended straight from the shoulder.

"That, I opine, is our missing jewel expert." Vance spoke solemnly. He approached the figure, turned the face upward.

It was Jacques Bassett, in the evening attire in which I had last seen him the previous night. Now he wore a black Chesterfield as well. Vance bent down, examined the body more closely. A streak of sticky, darkened snow above the right ear caught his attention.

"Same like Wallen, Lieutenant. Not a nice business. Not at all a nice business. No."

"You're right, sir. Too much like Wallen. Same kind of wound. I don't like it either, sir...Been dead long, would you say?" O'Leary asked as Vance rose.

"Eight or ten hours. But, my word, Lieutenant! I'm not the Medical Examiner. Should have Quayne here. Shall I stagger back to the Manor and phone your Aesculapius, or would you prefer to do the chore while I wait here?"

"No need for you to stay here, sir." O'Leary was respectful. "I'll remain. If you'll be good enough to phone Doctor Quayne."

"Gladly, Lieutenant...By the by..." Vance hesitated. "Could you tell me if the emeralds are in the gentleman's attire?"

"Really shouldn't do it, sir. Against regulations." O'Leary knelt down as he spoke and made a swift examination of Bassett's pockets. He rose. "No emeralds, sir. Just the usual." Then he added quickly, "You see what this means, sir?"

Vance looked at the other from the corner of his eye. "You're far too clever for this bailiwick, Lieutenant."

"I like it here...It does throw the case back on Eric Gunthar harder than ever—doesn't it, sir?"

Vance nodded. "I'm afraid it does—theoretically. But surely, Lieutenant, you don't believe—"

"I'm not paid to believe things, sir. I'm paid to follow facts." O'Leary drew on his pipe. "And I'm afraid I'll have to go through with the arrest of Gunthar and his daughter. I'm telling you now, sir. I want to be fair."

"I understand, Lieutenant." Turning away, Vance retraced his steps to the Manor.

On the veranda a few of the guests were talking animatedly. Joan Raxon had gone indoors. Ella Gunthar sat apart from the others, looking listlessly toward the rink. She was still guarded rather ludicrously by the Winewood constable. Vance approached her.

"Listen carefully, my dear. There's real danger for you and your father. I need your help. You and I must work together. We'll get rid of the nightmare: Here's what I want you to do. Get your skates and skating costume. Tell your father Mr. Raxon would like to see him in his den. And Old Jed too, if you can find him. This gentleman will accompany you."—Vance indicated the constable.—"Then you are to come back here to the rink and skate as if everything you ever wanted depended on it. Keep all the guests interested. Keep them away from the house at any cost. Skate until I give you the signal to stop. In the meantime, I'll be working hard for you and your father. Understand?"

The girl's lips quivered. Then she raised her chin and looked Vance straight in the eye. "I'll do everything you ask." There was determination, submission, heroism, in her voice. She turned toward the pavilion, the burly officer close behind her.

Vance started for the den. Carlotta Naesmith ran up inquisitively, as if to ask a question.

Vance held up his hand. "Not now, please. I have an urgent favor to ask of you. All the guests must be kept out here. Away from the house. Ella Gunthar is going to skate for them. You've hurt her much. She's suffering now. Be kind."

Before Miss Naesmith could answer, Vance continued to the den.

He found Carrington Raxon still alone there and briefly told him of the new developments.

The man sank dejectedly into a chair. "Another death!" he groaned miserably. "And the emeralds?"

"Not on him. May still be recovered."

Vance reached for the telephone. He called Quayne, apprised him of the situation, and informed him just where he would find

Lieutenant O'Leary waiting by Bassett's body.

"What do you make of it all, Vance?" asked Rexon as the other sat down opposite.

"Nothing yet, old friend. Tryin' to add things up. Must make a simple sum eventually...Would you ask your housekeeper to come here, please? A few queries I'd like to put to her."

Rexon telephoned the request.

Vance rose with suppressed nervousness and went to the window. He lighted a cigarette. At length he turned and faced his host.

"I've a feeling that somewhere this morning I've missed something. Of no importance. Bothers me no end, though. Something unconsciously waited for. Hasn't happened..."

## 14. SKATING FOR TIME

(Sunday, January 19; 1:15 p.m.)

Marcia Bruce came in, dignified and composed. Vance drew up a chair for her.

"We have a few questions to put to you, Miss Bruce," he began tentatively.

"Nothing here surprises me any more," the housekeeper returned philosophically. "I'll do my best to answer."

"You know, of course, that several of the emeralds have been stolen from the Gem Room?"

"Mr. Rexon has informed me of it. That surprises me less than anything else. I'll be glad to be free of the atmosphere surrounding those stones."

"What do you mean, Bruce?" interposed Rexon.

"I might as well tell you, sir. You'll have to know sooner or later. I'm resigning immediately, sir. And leaving here for good in about a week—maybe sooner."

"Resigning! Leaving! But why, Bruce?"

The woman blushed. "Doctor Quayne has done me the honor of asking me to marry him."

Vance smiled pleasantly. "Well, well! That would have been last evening—eh, what, Miss Bruce? Just before you came for Miss Joan."

The woman seemed startled. "How could you know that?"

"Lovelight in a woman's eyes. I saw the signs. May I be the first to congratulate you."

"And I too, am delighted to hear it, Bruce..." Rexon's voice trailed off. Then, "But couldn't you stay on? Joan would miss you..."

"And I'll be sorry to leave Miss Joan, sir. But Loomis—that is, the doctor—wants to leave Winewood. He finds it increasingly difficult to manage here—what with two younger men making such inroads on his practice."

"Where does he plan to go?"

"I'm not quite sure yet, sir. He mentioned the possibility of going abroad."

Rexon nodded resignedly. "I understand. I understand. I imagine it *is* getting a hard row for Quayne to hoe. But, Gad! I'll miss him. And you too, Bruce."

"To get back to less pleasant matters, Miss Bruce." Vance seated himself on the arm of a chair. "You must have been down on the lower floor here yesterday about noon."

"I was. I was down most of the morning, seeing about meals, and—"

"Did you see Eric Gunthar here?"

"I noticed him hovering outside the rear entrance. But I don't know whether he came into the house."

"Did you see Old Jed?"

"That hermit! He never comes near the house, sir."

"Well, can you remember any one you did specifically see? Out in the hall there, or near the Gem Room?"

"So many of the guests were up and down." She hesitated a moment, as if to collect her thoughts. "Mr. Richard dashed through the hall once or twice. I think I saw his foreign-looking friend, too. And that treasure-hunting gentleman was hovering around. I don't know whether he was waiting for Miss Naesmith, or what. And I saw Doctor Quayne, though I didn't have a chance to speak to him." She seemed avid for any excuse to mention the man's name.

"Was that when he arrived in the morning?" Vance asked.

"No. It was when he was leaving. He had stayed longer than usual and he was late. I remember the noon siren had blown a few minutes earlier—"

Vance sprang to his feet and held up his hand for silence. A far-away look came into his eyes. He paced back and forth nervously several times. Then he came to a sudden stop before Rexon's desk.

"That insignificant something," he remarked slowly, as he sank into a chair. "I think I have it. The siren. Haven't heard it today."

"It's not sounded on Sundays," Rexon told him.

"No. Of course not. But yesterday."

"What can the siren have to do with it all, Vance?"

"Everything. Needs a little thought." He brought out his case and selected a cigarette with marked deliberation. He walked to the window, stood gazing out for a moment. As he turned back, a soft knock on the door was followed by the timid entry of Eric Gunthar, twisting his hat nervously in his hands.

"You wanted to see me, Squire?" he asked, looking down at the floor.

It was Vance who answered his query. "You might as well know the worst, Gunthar. Lieutenant O'Leary is determined to arrest you and Miss Ella on what he calls suspicion. You must have noted he has a constable watching Miss Ella now...She came back with you?"

"Yes, sir. She did. She's down at the pavilion, changing her clothes. She said she was going to skate on the rink."

"Good," said Vance. "We must all go out and watch her anon."

"She asked me to tell you, sir, that she couldn't find Old Jed anywhere."

"Thank you. It doesn't matter...But to get back to what I was saying. I see no reason why you shouldn't be here too. No use trying to run away. The Lieutenant will arrive any minute. You're to sit there. Trust to me. Just as Ella is doing. I'll do my best. May fail. But can't be helped. Sit tight and wait. Understand?"

Nodding dejectedly, the man moved with awkward steps to the chair Vance had indicated. He continued the twirling motion of the hat in his hands for a moment. Then he placed the hat behind him and rested his head docilely on the palms of his hands. He was abashed, frightened.

Vance had scarcely resumed his own seat before Raxon's desk when another tap on the door announced the arrival of the Lieutenant and Doctor Quayne. A faint odor of gasoline accompanied them.

"I see your chariot has had another intramuscular injection, doctor," Vance said pleasantly. Quayne merely nodded.

"Greetings and congratulations, doctor," said Raxon. "Bruce has just told us of the betrothal..."

Quayne smiled and looked admiringly at Marcia Bruce. He seated himself on the long leather divan, and Miss Bruce rose from her chair and joined him.

"I felt somehow you'd be pleased, Raxon," Quayne said with some show of pride.

"Naturally. But I'll miss you both. So will Joan."

O'Leary mumbled felicitations, his gaze on the downcast figure of Gunthar perched uneasily on the edge of his chair. Then he furrowed his brow in a puzzled frown and sought Vance's eyes.

"Yes. Quite, Lieutenant. Doing the bighearted. Knew you'd be poppin' in anon. Thought I'd have Gunthar handy for you. Trying to do my share. Always appreciative of favors."

"And the girl?"

"Waiting for you, too. After a manner of speaking. If she isn't already out on the rink she'll be there in a minute or two. Skating for the guests. Under the eagle eye of your doughty constable, of course."

O'Leary suddenly stepped back, narrowed his eyes and looked at Vance shrewdly. "What's the meaning of all this, sir? There's something underneath."

Vance smiled wearily and nodded. "Right you are, Lieutenant! Something underneath. But what? I think it's the siren—the Raxon noonday siren, Lieutenant, which echoes through the hills and—"

O'Leary broke in impatiently. "Just where is this leading, sir?"

"To a mere bit of chatting. Puttin' things together. Askin' a few questions. Searchin' our souls. Good for the soul now and then. When all that's done, you may lead Gunthar and his daughter forth. If that should still be your desire, Lieutenant."

"Sounds like hocus-pocus to me, sir."

"More or less true of all life—eh, what?"

"How long is this to take, sir?" O'Leary's restlessness was apparent. "I've gone pretty far with you already. For my part, I'm ready to take them now..."

"You shall call the time yourself, Lieutenant."

O'Leary packed his pipe. "That's fair."

"Yes—oh, yes. Always fair. May be futile at times. But fair."

## 15. QUERIES AND ANSWERS

(Sunday, January 19; 1:45 p.m.)

Doctor Quayne moved uneasily in his place on the divan. "It's a bad business," he remarked. "A bad business. Bassett's been dead at least ten hours. We had the body removed to the morgue. Another autopsy to do. From what I've seen offhand, I can only say that he met his death very much as Wallen did. But this time there is no cliff from which he might have fallen."

"You, too, noticed the similarity of the wounds, did you, doctor?" O'Leary put in.

"It could hardly be overlooked," returned Quayne. "I've never seen such a strange coincidence. If I weren't so confused by other factors I'd be willing to state under oath that both deaths were caused in the same manner."

O'Leary compressed his lips with great satisfaction and nodded energetically. "The same thought occurred to me," he said.

"I understand, Mr. Vance," the doctor went on, "that you had an official report on the man this morning that throws a rather sinister light on the matter. From what Lieutenant O'Leary has told me, I've formed a theory that I'd like to put before you."

"Pray do," said Vance eagerly.

"It is this: Obviously Bassett came here with the sole purpose of getting his hands on at least some of Mr. Raxon's emeralds. If we assume that his first attempt was made from outside and that he was surprised in his effort by the guard, Wallen, we can conclude that he had then but one course left to him. Namely, to do away with Wallen. Let us further assume that he took this course; that he was *seen* taking it, by a friend of Wallen who was, in the circumstances, helpless to prevent the murder. This second man, you may be sure, would carry the grudge, and take his revenge at the very first opportunity. These men are a very simple folk, Mr. Vance. They believe whole-heartedly in the Mosaic law 'An eye for an eye'. They wouldn't hesitate to take matters into their own hands and mete out what they consider retributive justice."

"Very plausible theory, doctor," said Vance. "Worthy of consideration." Quayne nodded in acknowledgment of the compliment. Then Vance looked abruptly at Miss Bruce, sitting beside her fiancé. "You say you saw Mr. Sydes flittin' round down here about noontime?"

She nodded.

Vance now spoke to Raxon. "Will you send for the gentleman? And your son as well. Immediately, please. Speed, old friend. The leaves are turning. The bird is on the wing. Time is running out."

Raxon rang for the butler, relayed the request to him.

In a very few minutes a knock on the door was followed by the swaggering entrance of Stanley Sydes, with Richard Raxon close behind him. The younger man walked to the window behind his father's desk and sat down on the broad sill. Sydes remained standing, resting his arms on the back of an empty chair.

"Quite a conclave here," he commented casually. "I do hope we're not all going to pass up Miss Gunthar's performance. I've never seen anyone who can claim to be her equal on ice."

"You're not alone in that opinion, Mr. Sydes," Vance remarked. "We'll try not to detain you too long...Could you possibly recall just where you were yesterday when the noonday whistle sounded? Miss Bruce here thinks she saw you about that time, wanderin' in the lower hall."

Sides laughed boisterously. "I can't say the lady is wrong. Probably was heading for the bar to soothe my jangled nerves."

"Hope the antidote was effective." Vance smiled. "Looking tip-top today...Irrelevantly speakin', Mr. Sydes, does your interest run only to *buried* treasure?" Vance looked at the man keenly.

"I don't think I understand you, sir. As I said once before, it's the thrill of the search that lures me on. But I don't suppose any man would turn up his nose at a treasure right under his nose—if I may make a quip."

"Did you know of Mr. Raxon's collection of emeralds?"

"Strangely enough, not until I'd been here a day or two. It was other game that brought me here. However, I might add that I was genuinely disappointed when I learned we were not to see the stones, after all."

"Do you happen to know why Mr. Raxon hasn't opened the Gem Room to his guests?"

"I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea. And I haven't been presumptuous enough to inquire."

"Admirable restraint," murmured Vance. "Deservin' of appeasement. I'll answer the unasked question for you. The fact is, a number of the Raxon emeralds have disappeared from the Gem Room—undoubtedly stolen. And one of the guests—Mr. Bassett—has been murdered."

Richard Raxon rose with a bound from his place at the window.

Sydes straightened up and drew in his breath. "Incredible!" he mumbled. "Why, I saw the man only—" He broke off.

"Yes?" prompted Vance. "When *did* you see Bassett last?"

"Now that I think of it," Sydes returned lamely, "I haven't seen him today at all...Is there anything I can do?"

"Thank you. Only to rejoin the others and help Miss Gunthar keep them entertained and out of our way."

Sydes bowed himself out with a look of concern mingled with relief.

Young Raxon was conversing in an undertone with his father. He looked bewildered as he stepped back to the window. Vance turned to him.

"How much did you know about your friend Bassett, Mr. Richard?"

The young man did not answer immediately. Vance lighted a cigarette while he waited. Finally young Raxon spoke.

"Not too much, I'm afraid. Only that he seemed a likable enough chap. And he was a pleasant traveling companion."

"Hardly sufficient recommendation," grumbled the elder Raxon bitterly. "The man was a scoundrel!"

"Did you know," Vance asked carelessly, "that during his brief stay here he was annoying Miss Ella?" Richard Raxon only shook his head. Vance continued. "Old Jed found it necessary to reprimand him severely. Perhaps Jed did more than that."

Eric Gunthar jumped from his chair. "You can't say that, sir! The hermit may be a queer one, but he didn't murder nobody!" The man seemed surprised at his own outburst. He sank back to his chair.

Quayne looked across at Vance with significance. "Bearing out my earlier contention, Mr. Vance."

Vance nodded abstractedly. He found an ash tray and broke the ashes from his cigarette. "Tell me, Gunthar: was this hermit of yours friendly with Lief Wallen?"

"The hermit ain't friendly with nobody. Except, maybe, my Ella."

"Had Wallen *any* friend on the estate who would want to avenge him if he thought there had been foul play?"

"I don't know about friends. But any man of us would do that if we had cause."

"Very interestin'. And most commendable...But I think Lieutenant O'Leary has a query or two to put to you." Vance made a broad gesture with his hand, as if turning over a witness to the opposition.

"Mr. Gunthar," the Lieutenant began, "you were at Murphy's tavern the night Wallen died?"

Gunthar thought back. "Yes, I was."

"And did you go directly to your cottage from there?"

"You might say I did, sir. I only stopped outside the house here, just to see what was doin'."

"Did you see Wallen?"

"No—I don't think so," said Gunthar hesitantly. Then he amended his statement. "Or if I did, I wouldn't have noticed specially."

"Did you come up to the Manor yesterday, Gunthar?" The Lieutenant was becoming more belligerent.

"Well, I did—and I didn't. I mean, I didn't come into the house exactly."

"What did you come for?"

"To talk with the Squire." He looked uneasily at Rexon. "You see, Mr. Richard wanted I should come up here and promise the Squire I wouldn't drink no more if he'd let me keep my job. So I come up here first thing in the morning. But the Squire wasn't down yet. Later Mr. Richard come down to me where I was busy at the pavilion an' told me to go up again. I didn't want to, but Mr. Richard he wouldn't let me off. So I come up. I had a bottle with me, an' I took another drink on my way. Just to buck me up, you know. An' when I come up to the house I stopped to make up what I would say. Then I thought the Squire wouldn't like it if he could smell the liquor on me. I was outside for a bit, changing my mind this way an' that. But I didn't come in. I went back to the pavilion. After lunch Mr. Richard come down again to ask me—"

"That's enough." O'Leary interrupted the recital impatiently.

"I think, Lieutenant," Vance interposed mildly, "the doctor's theory is more plausible. However, I have known medical men who, when they did not like a diagnosis which could not be proven all the way, would substitute a more acceptable alternative based on the same principal factors."

"A discerning observation," commented Quayne dryly.

"We start then, with the admissible assumption that the guard, having frustrated an attempt to enter the Gem Room from outside, is deliberately murdered. That there is an eye witness to this murder seems not too preposterous. We know definitely that access to the room is later effected by means of Mr. Rexon's key. We likewise know, beyond a doubt, that one Bassett, with sufficient and understandable reason to be interested in the emeralds, falls victim to a second murder."

Vance paused to light a fresh *Régie*.

"We find, ourselves confronted," he resumed, "with more unknown quantities than I care to cope with in a single problem: Who witnessed that first hypothetical murder? Who managed to procure the key to the Gem Room and appropriate the emeralds? Finally, who finished Bassett, and why?"

He puffed thoughtfully on his cigarette and looked about.

"Offhand," he continued, "Bassett seems the logical choice for the second factor of the puzzle." The others nodded in agreement. "If only we had found the emeralds on him—or in his room..."

"Has a thorough search been made?" asked Carrington Rexon hopefully.

Before Vance could answer, the doctor spoke again. "My dear Rexon," he said, almost as if to a child. "The man was not so simple as to have left them carelessly about. He might have wrapped them securely in a packet and mailed them off somewhere."

"A reasonable suggestion," agreed Vance. "On the other hand, I am compellingly driven to the conclusion that Bassett could not have taken the emeralds at all."

There was a murmur of surprised dissent.

"Why not, Mr. Vance?" It was O'Leary who asked the question.

"For the simple reason, Lieutenant, that he wouldn't have had the time. Mr. Rexon has told us that he heard the beginning of the noon siren just as he was struck and lost consciousness. Is that correct, old friend?"

"Absolutely, Vance. I am positive of it."

"But," interposed the doctor, "I wasn't called till after half-past twelve. I presume that no one knew of Mr. Rexon's predicament until then."

"Quite right, doctor," Vance told him. "And yet, I persist in the opinion that Bassett could not have managed it...Habit dulls our awareness of the repetitious act or sound. How many of us are conscious of the striking of a clock unless we are waiting for it? We let time glide past us unnoticed. But let a man have a train to catch or a timed appointment to keep, and the tick of his watch acquires significance for him...Is that psychologically correct, Doctor Quayne?"

"Undoubtedly," agreed Quayne. He placed a hand on the shoulder of the woman beside him; but she seemed lost in her own thoughts.

"Very well, then...Bassett joined us on the veranda almost before the echo of the siren died away. You may have noticed him."

"Can't say that I did." The doctor coughed negligently.

"Possibly not. Aloof sort of johnnie. Remained at one end of the veranda—alone. Queer thing is that I wouldn't have noticed the siren. Hadn't noticed it on other days. Habit, as I say, dulls our senses, don't y' know. But though I was unconscious of the fact at the

moment, the sound was forcibly called to my attention. By yourself, doctor. Do you recall?"

"It's quite possible. I remember I was in a hurry. I'd stayed longer than I intended."

"Exactly. But the important thing is—you couldn't know, doctor, because you left us immediately—that *Bassett remained on the veranda for the next half hour at least*....Does that establish my contention?"

Again there was a subdued murmuring among the others.

"Of necessity eliminating Bassett from that phase of our little problem play, whom can we enter in his stead?...Sydes was undoubtedly speaking the truth here."

"That may be, Mr. Vance," O'Leary conceded. "But what of Eric Gunthar? I'm about ready to call time, sir."

Gunthar squirmed in his chair. Young Raxon came forward.

"If you will permit me, sir, I think I can bear out Gunthar's statements. You can depend on it, he's told you the truth."

"Yes, Lieutenant," supplemented Vance. "Let me say this for Gunthar: He's been weak. He's been foolish. He's let his normal ego and competency run to aggressiveness. Hence his enemies. Then he began drinking too much. To bolster his confidence. Not wise. No. Result: both he and his daughter are in devilish hot water. However, I'm not believin' he's guilty. And I think you will agree with me shortly, Lieutenant. A few more short minutes, please..."

He looked at O'Leary, got a grudging nod from him. Then he faced young Raxon.

"What about yourself, Mr. Richard? Could you have taken your father's emeralds and wrapped them securely in a packet—?"

He was interrupted by a half-smothered shriek from Marcia Bruce. She suddenly rose from her place on the sofa.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned as she ran from the room.

Quayne looked after her in astonishment.

Vance's question had left us all equally stunned. Young Raxon stood white and speechless facing his accuser.

"From what I've observed and heard," Vance went on relentlessly, "and leaving the question of motive aside for the moment, you seem to have had every opportunity—"

Carrington Raxon leaped from his chair and pounded the desk with his fist.

"See here, Vance!" he thundered. "This has gone far enough! If you're going to make a farce of it, I prefer to say be damned to the emeralds, and drop the matter right now."

"Raxon's quite right," put in Quayne impressively. "Think of the scandal..."

"I am thinking of it." Vance's manner remained cool. "But it is no longer a question of just the emeralds. We have certainly one murder on our hands. Possibly two. Surely, you wouldn't say 'be damned' to that."

The elder Raxon shook his head despondently. He sank back into his chair. The son, at a gesture of dismissal from Vance, resumed his former place on the window sill.



## 16. FINAL CURTAIN

(Sunday, January 19; 2:45 p.m.)

Vance took a few paces across the room. His attention was caught by a pair of eyes peering in at the window behind Richard Raxon. It was the Green Hermit. He made no move as Vance approached the window and raised it.

"Might as well join us in here, Jed," Vance suggested casually. "You'll see much better, don't y' know. And hear. More satisfact'ry, what?" He closed the window as the old man moved away.

Vance came back to a chair, crossed his knees as he sat down.

Higgins opened the door with a surprised look on his face. "It's Old Jed, sir," he mumbled awkwardly.

"Yes—oh, yes. Let him come in." It was Vance who spoke.

The white-haired old man came shuffling into the room, looking from side to side as if to find a place where he might hide. He finally chose a chair in the corner nearest Vance and sat down without a word.

"Where do we stand now?" Vance began anew. "Ah, yes. We still have to determine the identity of the persons involved in a dramatic piece of mayhem and thievery."

He rose from the chair and stood leaning against it.

"Mr. Raxon tells me, Doctor Quayne, that you are planning to leave Winewood." Vance looked at the man lazily.

The doctor seemed taken aback. "Frankly, yes," he returned. "Though I don't recall having mentioned it. At any rate, I don't see what my future plans can have to do with this matter."

"You will in a moment, doctor." Vance brought out a visiting card and a pencil. He wrote a few words hastily, toyed with the card for a moment. "Our problem is falling nicely into line," he announced, looking up. "I said Bassett could not have obtained the jewels. But he could—and probably *did*—assault Mr. Raxon and secure the key to the Gem Room...Yes. He would have had just enough time for that...This assumption assigns to him half of the second rôle. But our cast is still woefully incomplete...Permit me one more question, Doctor Quayne. Just why were you determined to let me know it was after twelve yesterday?"

"I resent the imputation, sir. I was simply in a hurry."

"As you said. In a hurry to get to the Gem Room and out again, doctor?"

Quayne made no reply. Merely smiled, as at a precocious child.

The door opened suddenly. Marcia Bruce came rushing back into the room. Her face was flushed. Her hands were tearing frenziedly at the paper wrappings of a small parcel. She shot a look of disgust at the man on the divan.

In the momentary confusion Vance passed the card in his hand to Lieutenant O'Leary. The latter stepped from the room, returning almost immediately. He moved leisurely to the divan, sat down beside Quayne.

Marcia Bruce had removed the last bit of paper and now held in her trembling hands a small, crudely sewn chamois bag, tied with a bit of dental floss. She turned fiery green eyes on Quayne.

"You charlatan! You thief!" she flung at him. "Did you think I could be so easily deceived? Did you think that because of your honeyed words you could count on me to aid you and shield you in your hour of need?...Your hour of need!" she repeated disdainfully. "Hour of shame! Hour of perfidy!"

She turned from him and held the bag out to Vance. He took it from her, tossed it lightly to the desk.

Carrington Raxon, with shaking fingers, managed to get the bag opened. He emptied its contents. The brilliant gems formed a shimmering green pattern on the blotter before him. His son was again at his side. Together they examined the stones.

"I think they are all here, Vance." The elder Raxon brought out a pocket handkerchief and placed the stones, one by one, in its folds.

On the divan Quayne sat deathly pale. He seemed to have aged years in a few minutes. O'Leary moved a little closer to him.

Vance turned to the housekeeper. "May I ask how that little pouch came into your possession, madam?"

"He brought it to me." She pointed scornfully. "Last night. For safekeeping. It was all wrapped up. It was to be a surprise. A surprise I was to share with him when we were married and—" She broke off abruptly.

Vance bowed to the woman. "Thank you, madam. It was the tangible proof I needed...Fortunate for Mr. Raxon the banks were already closed yesterday—eh, what, doctor?"

Quayne shrugged helplessly.

"Your theory wasn't far wrong, doctor...Now, if we assign to Doctor Quayne the role of obtaining the gems, as circumstances so irresistibly suggest, the problem is no longer a problem."

"But how in the world, Vance—" Carrington Raxon was at a loss for words.

"If the good doctor will help me elucidate further...Bassett's appearance on the veranda yesterday was your cue that he had carried out his half of the plan.—Am I right, doctor?"

Quayne gave no sign that he had heard.

"And, having established for yourself an iron-clad alibi through that perilous hour of noon, you had only to enter the house, take the key from where you knew he had left it for you, and the rest was simplicity itself. Your presence anywhere on the lower floor here would excite no suspicion...But won't you tell us, doctor, what form of blackmail Bassett employed to induce you to enter this scheme with him?"

Still Quayne sat in stony silence.

"Then I must resort again to our limited cast," continued Vance. "You were most helpful a little earlier, doctor. No doubt thought you were helping yourself. You suggested an eye witness to the murder of Wallen. Now, whom could we place in that rôle more appropriately than Mr. Bassett?...Of course, it would be only guess-work. But he would seem to meet every requirement..."

There was an unexpected interruption from the Green Hermit. "You're not guessing, Mister; if you mean the night Lief Wallen died I

was there. I was there because I came to look for Miss Ella. Miss Ella oughtn't to come by herself...I saw the doctor walk a ways with Lief. And I saw your Mr. Bassett walk after them. All very quiet and peaceful. I didn't know they meant harm..."

Vance suddenly turned to O'Leary with a questioning look. The Lieutenant arose, making a jerky motion of his arm, much as a magician does when he is about to produce a surprise. Gradually dropping from his sleeve, came a heavy straight wrench, about twelve inches in length, with varied square openings at each end. He passed it to Vance.

"By Jove!" said Vance evenly. "A spanner! Usually part of the tool equipment of an automobile—eh, what, doctor?"

Quayne stiffened; his eyes bulged, fastened on the telltale wrench in Vance's hand.

"Too bad your first attempt to enter the Gem Room was not more successful, doctor." Vance looked coolly at the man on the divan. "So Bassett was the eye witness. He must have driven a hard bargain."

Quayne now spoke for the first time. His voice was strained and bitter. "Half of what I might get. And he ran only the minimum of risk."

"And did you take the additional precaution of leaving the necklace at the pavilion in the hope of further involving Gunthar who already seemed to be seriously under suspicion?"

The doctor spread his hands in a gesture of hopelessness.

"But in the end you felt you could not trust your partner? You deemed it safer—and more profitable—to put him out of your way permanently?"

Quayne leaned forward rigidly.

"I might as well tell you everything," he said wearily. "When I was abroad two years ago, Richard introduced me to Jacques Bassett. It was an unfortunate acquaintance for me. From the first I disliked the man, though I tried to give no indication of it. Brief as our association was, I felt his evil influence. In a weak moment I was persuaded to undertake smuggling a packet of gems into this country for him. I was fairly successful. Though I was under suspicion for some time, the federal investigation was finally dropped. When I sent the rascal his share of the transaction, I thought I had put him out of my life forever...Then Richard came home and brought Bassett with him. I was distressed to see that their friendship had continued. But I could say nothing...As I have already suggested, Bassett's trip here was motivated solely by his desire to acquire the Rexon emeralds. He lost no time in re-establishing contact with me. He made it plain to me that he was fortunate to find an unwilling ally who was necessarily under his thumb. He gave me the choice of doing as he said or being exposed in the smuggling matter. He painted rosy pictures for me if I would follow his bidding...For years I've been hoping to marry Marcia Bruce..."

He sent a look of appeal across the room to the woman. She had regained her poise and looked back at him coldly.

"But I never had sufficient income to take care of her," Quayne continued. "My practice had dwindled to a point where the Rexon fee was all I could count on. In the many years of my association here, stealing the emeralds never occurred to me. The scheme was Bassett's. But I was an easy prey to his designing chicanery...Wallen interrupted our first attempt, and it became necessary to get rid of him. I had the spanner with me and used it to fracture Wallen's skull. Then we dragged him to the cliff and threw him over. It looked as if we were safe; and I wanted to quit then. But Bassett held this second crime over my head more ominously than the first. I had no choice but to go on..."

He paused briefly, then resumed.

"You've shrewdly guessed, Mr. Vance, how Bassett obtained the key for me...Late last night I met him just outside the grounds to divide the gems. Distrusting him as I did, I took the spanner along as a precaution. There was a violent dispute. He threatened me, and I used the spanner again...The rest you know..."

Quayne rose suddenly. O'Leary did likewise, a pair of manacles in one hand. Vance made a negative gesture. The doctor looked about him with clouded eyes. One hand moved slowly from his vest pocket to his mouth...

He was immediately catapulted back to the divan, in horrible convulsions. In a few seconds he was still.

"Odor of bitter almonds," Vance commented calmly. "Cyanide...Wiser than I thought. Leaves us without any problem. Eliminates the second actor in the dual performance."

A hush fell over the room. Two or three minutes passed.

O'Leary broke the silence. "But, Mr. Vance, how did you get a line on that wrench?"

"It wasn't over difficult," drawled Vance. "There were two factors missin' in the pattern. The time element, and the lethal instrument. The first was cleared up when I realized their clever ruse built round the siren. The second dawned on me when Quayne returned with you this afternoon from viewing Bassett's body. He brought a noticeable aroma of gasoline with him. And I was reminded of an evening earlier in the week when he spoke of priming the engine of his car instead of using the starter. There are two tools with which to remove the spark plugs for this process: a socket wrench, or a spanner...You will recall the nature of the injuries on Wallen's skull and on Bassett's. A linear depressed fracture over the thin temporal bone. A crushing blow with a stout steel wrench would do the trick. I mentioned just such a weapon as a possibility on the morning Wallen was found."

Vance paused to light a cigarette.

"Ordinarily, of course, the murderous weapon is disposed of as quickly as possible. But in this case it must of necessity be kept on hand to loosen the spark plugs. I was convinced it would be found within easy reach—on the floor of his car, perhaps...Is that correct, Lieutenant?"

O'Leary nodded admiringly. "But, Mr. Vance," he said somewhat sheepishly, "suppose you hadn't been on the veranda when that siren sounded? Quayne couldn't count on your presence at the right moment."

"Obviously not. That wouldn't have mattered. He counted on Miss Joan and Miss Ella. Served his purpose admirably. Perhaps better, in fact. And yet...I don't know. He would have insisted on bringing the point up. He considered it his irrefutable 'out,' don't y' know..."

"And how," asked, Carrington Rexon, "did Bassett manage to come in here without my seeing him?"

"Didn't you say you were out of the room, old friend?" Vance drew deeply on his *Régie*. "The man was patient. He was playing for big odds..."

Carlotta Naesmith burst into the room. "The poor kid's all tired out, Sir Galahad. But she says you told her to keep on skating."

Vance quickly stepped before the limp figure of Quayne on the divan. "Thank you, Miss Naesmith. I'll tell her in a moment that it's all right now. We'll all be joining you."

"Please, Sir Galahad, let me tell her." Miss Naesmith whisked from the room before Vance could reply.

\* \* \* \* \*

The guests left Raxon Manor the next morning. Richard Raxon, too, was to drive to New York with Vance and me later in the day. Carlotta Naesmith and Stanley Sydes were the last to take their departure. We formed a somewhat subdued group on the veranda as Higgins carried their bags out.

Miss Naesmith stopped on the terrace. "You'll mail me your new address, Dick?" she called back. "I'll be sending you picture post-cards from Cocos Island. I hope you'll like that, Dick."

A smile of understanding passed between the two as Carrington Raxon knit his brows.

Sydes, still on the veranda, called out: "You mean that, Goddess?"

"Nothing else but," she replied as she ran to the car. "When do we start?"

"As soon as we can get to the yacht, darling." And Sydes went after her.

A little later Vance was in Carrington Raxon's den bidding him adieu.

"The ingratitude of our young folks," Raxon complained bitterly. "I don't know what the world is coming to."

"Really, now, it isn't that bad," Vance said sympathetically. "And wasn't it you, Squire Raxon, who said something about the human heart desiring happiness for others?"

Raxon looked up at him, and a new light came slowly into his eyes.

Richard came in. "You'll see that Higgins gets my trunks off, Dad?"

"Certainly, my boy. Take care of yourself...And—before you go, son, will you bring Ella in here to me."

Walking out with a smile on his lips, Vance left the two together.

THE END